

“What’s up doc?” Working on the relationships

In the latter part of his two-part article, *Ian Hendra*, QNewZ columnist, writes about **Avoiding the ‘Solutions First’ Syndrome by working on the relationships.**

In my latest quest to offer an alternative to the dreaded ‘Solutions-First’ syndrome, I introduced you last time to the Affinity Diagram as a really effective tool that creates an ideal team environment for breaking down an issue into its constituent parts.



Figure 1 is a photo of a real Affinity Diagram exercise produced by a team of seven participants who came up with 47 issues in response to the question “What do you see as the current issues in our financial management system?” They summarised these into 10 groups as per the ‘header’ sticky notes at the top of each column.

The Interrelationship Digraph

The next stage in the problem definition process is to sort out the interrelationships between the issues raised from the Affinity Diagram. The tool is called the Interrelationship Digraph (ID) and its overall aim is to highlight the key drivers and outcomes. It can be extended, though, to lay out all the issues on a continuum from Driver to Outcome. See the procedure on page 12.

In Figure 2 the Interrelationship Digraph was completed by the same team who developed the AD shown in Figure 1. The whole process was done within 90 minutes.

In due course the whole exercise was summarised in the diagram at Figure 3. Note that the row of issues is the output of the Affinity Diagram but their position on the continuum is the output of the Interrelationship Diagram. Having said that, it’s important not to read too much into the scoring because it’s not based on anything ‘scientific’; it’s just a method of ranking. On the other hand, the usual response to the final diagram, as per Figure 3, is a nod from the wise, although often with some surprise about the main drivers. In itself this highlights the risks exposed by the ‘Solutions-First’ syndrome because dealing with the main drivers would have been a country mile from where the effort would have been applied.

So there you have it, a ranked set of informed answers that define a set of issues related to a vague problem. All team members agreed with the result, all were content that they had contributed fully and none felt anything had been missed. Now they’re in a position to come up with solutions, or are they? I don’t think so, not yet, not until they or others have been through ADs and IDs for each of the ranked issues or at least those at each end.

And I still don’t know what a diagram is...

For further information contact ian.hendra@clearlineservices.co.nz

Reference: The Memory Jogger 2; Second Edition 2010, GOAL/QPC, www.goalqpc.com

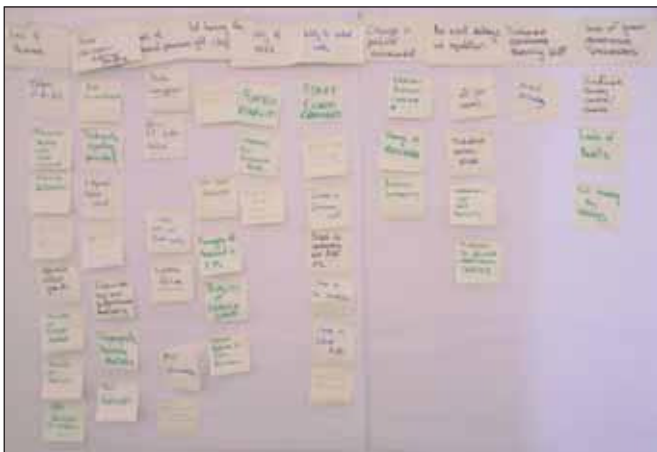


Figure 1: An Affinity Diagram.

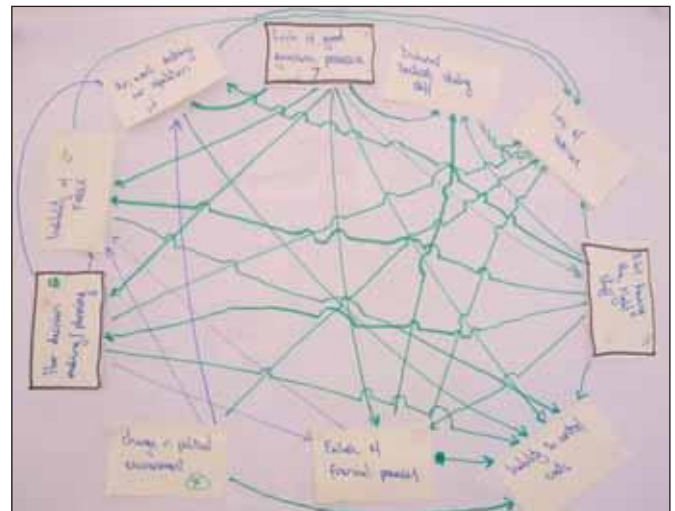


Figure 2: An interrelationship digraph.

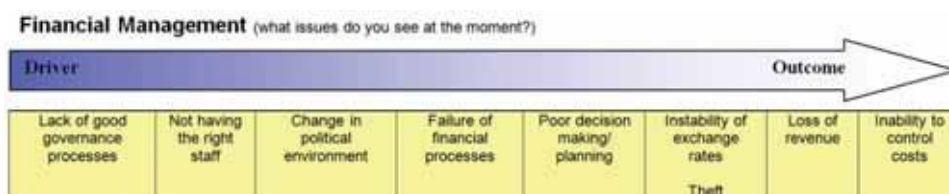


Figure 3: Summary diagram – combined AD & ID.

Step	Objective	Method
1. Assemble the team.	To have access to a body of knowledge and experience pertinent to the issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ID is a team tool similar to the AD, so it follows that the ideal is to use the same team who produced the Affinity Diagram. And it's helpful too, to run the ID immediately after completing the AD so that topics are still fresh in the minds of the participants.
2. Set up.	To establish the forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As before, appoint a facilitator happy to run the ID process. If possible, it's better if this person is not an active participant in the team. You'll need the same facilities as for the AD. Set up the completed AD so it can be seen by all participants (best to leave it until after AD session). Make the ID answer-space by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sticking a single flip chart sheet on the wall at shoulder height; number the header stickies on the AD then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> remove them one at a time from the AD, but: write the number of each in the vacant space (so you can track them back if necessary); place them in clock-face order on the single flip chart sheet with a decent amount of space around each.
3. Agree on the ID question.	To achieve agreement on the question to be answered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since we're dealing with interrelationships here the question is usually "Does this issue cause or effect the next?"
4. Draw arrows between the stickies that reflect the answers for each relationship until you're back to the beginning.	To show the number of outgoing and incoming arrows for each issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start at the first issue sticky note. Ask the question with respect to the second issue sticky note. If the answer is "yes" draw an arrow from the first to the second. If the answer is "no" do not draw an arrow (this is essential to avoid confusion, and note that you'll get to the reverse relationship in due course anyway). Keep going around the clock-face until you come back to the first issue sticky. Now start again at the second issue sticky, asking the same question of the third and so on. Notes about arrows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take care to show clearly where arrows start and stop because you're going to count them. Use tidy arrow heads! It doesn't matter which route an arrow takes but it does help traceability in due course to show where they cross by using a 'hump'. When you've been full circle, start on the third sticky and so on until you have been right round the whole lot.
5. Count the ends of the arrows at each sticky.	To identify the main issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count the incoming arrowheads, write the score on the sticky as I = 4 (for example). Count the outgoing arrows as O = 9 (for example). Hence, each sticky will have two scores. The main 'outcome' issue is the sticky with the highest number of incoming arrows. The main 'driver' is the sticky with the highest number of outgoing arrows.
6. Total the scores.	To rank the issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subtract the outgoing count from the incoming count to provide a single number where the highest negative is a drive and the highest positive is an outcome. Write the score on each sticky.
7. Lay the issues out in a continuum.	To provide a ranked display.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove the stickies from the ID in score order from negative to positive, but write the identifier number in the vacant space (for traceability afterwards). Lay them in a row from left to right (negative to positive) to show the ranking from driver to outcome.
8. Produce a good copy	For presentation purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a diagram that shows the results of the Affinity Diagram and Interrelationship Digraph combined.

continued from page 11

university sees are its value-adding processes and what they are made up of. Underlying this is a collection of the supporting or enabling processes that make the university function.

However, in our world of processes, or what we might expect to see in an ISO9001 system, it is not very detailed – but then it doesn't need to be, due to the level this value chain is targeted at. Underneath this we may, but not necessarily, build our ISO9001 management

system.

Next time I will expand on how we get from this value chain to the detail that we need to make things happen, because I don't think it is as straightforward as we might think.

PS: I am keen to get some feedback from you about my column, so please send me your thoughts or ideas for future columns – Russell.

For further information contact rveitch@optusnet.com.au