

## Figure 11.2. Affinity Diagram Process

This process can be used to categorize and prioritize the data from usability testing, or in any other situation where there is need to understand the patterns in qualitative data.

1. Observers go through their notes and identify the unsolved issues that they believe are most important to the success of the next release. They write those issues, *one per card*, onto index cards (or sticky notes). You may want to have a rule that the number of tests affects the number of cards from each person—perhaps about 5 per test.
2. Tape all the cards to one wall, in random order.
3. Everyone reads all the cards. Don't worry about duplicates or issues that were solved by subsequent prototype changes—keep those issues in the process. (Variation: A person who discovers a card that covers the same issue as one of their own is allowed to remove *his or her own* card, but not someone else's.) If people think of additional issues they're allowed to add cards.
4. Sort the cards into groups, *without discussion*. (Discussion doesn't necessarily improve the quality of the end result but it's almost guaranteed to make the process take longer.) Keep the groups far enough apart that it's clear what is grouped with what. If someone disagrees with the way a group has been set up, he or she should simply move the cards. In particular, look for large groups that could be subdivided and small groups that have the same theme. This step ends when all the cards have been placed in a group (a solo card or two is okay) and no one is making further changes to the groups.
5. Using sticky notes (I'll assume yellow ones), name each group. The name should reflect the theme of the group. Each participant has the opportunity to name each group, and each group can have arbitrarily many yellow stickies. But if you get to a group and it already has a name that you agree with, there is no need to create a duplicate.
6. Everyone reads all the group names. On a piece of scratch paper, everyone writes down the three groups that they believe have *the greatest impact on the success of the next release*. Ask yourself, "If we had time to address only three of the groups, which three would I pick?" Choose your top three regardless of whether the work must be done by you or others—these priorities are for the project, not individual to-do lists.
7. Voting: Look at your three choices and rank them in order, with 1 being most important. On the yellow stickies, put an X to indicate your third choice, XX for second, and XXX for most important.
8. Find all the yellow stickies containing X's. The number of X's indicates the group's consensus about the priority of that category of issues. If you find duplicate categories, combine them. (If there is disagreement that two categories should be combined—as when one group is a subset of another—it may be more useful to keep them separate.)
9. Reality-check the results by asking, "Does everyone agree that these priorities make sense?" Discuss any dissenting views.
10. Start at the top of the priority list. Discuss each category in turn: the observations it contains, the insights you learned, and (if appropriate given those present) how to solve remaining issues.