

The Problem-Solving Power of Stickies (also known as Post-it® Notes)

simple tools that deliver great results

UX Week 2007



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I am a
sticky
ninja



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Simple tools
+ skilled practitioners
—————
powerful weapons

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Sticky notes
are the **currency**
of **ideas.**

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Why Stickies?

- They stick on a variety of surfaces
- The right size to hold 1 idea or problem
- Easy to rearrange and move around
- Ubiquitous
- Familiar and approachable
- Cheap
- Simple

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I call this...

Lightness

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF

STICKIES

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Why do they work so well in groups?

Enable people to externalize their thoughts & ideas

Help a group focus on one thing at a time

Allow a group to visualize patterns

Engage the whole group in the process

Clearly show relationships & agreements

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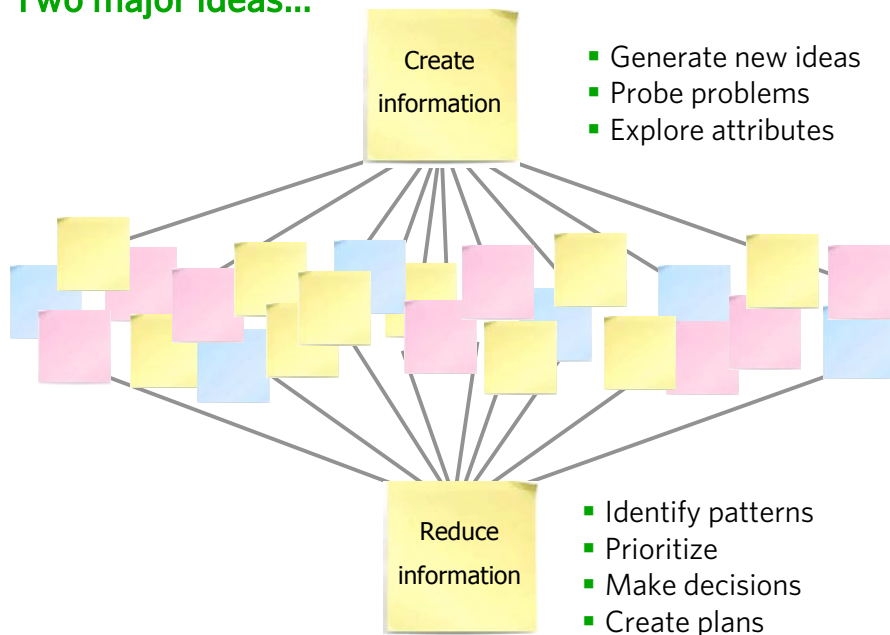


Ninjas don't talk
about what they do...
they just do it.

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techniques

Two major ideas...

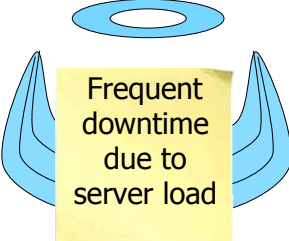



What goes on a sticky?

- 1 thought or idea per sticky
- Make them as clear as possible
- Keep the corners clear in case you need space for additional notes
- Be specific for example...

Super Ninja Tip

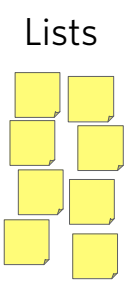
I am one idea



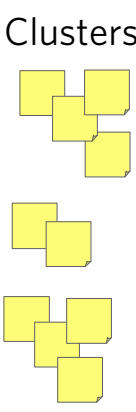
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4 Types of Layouts

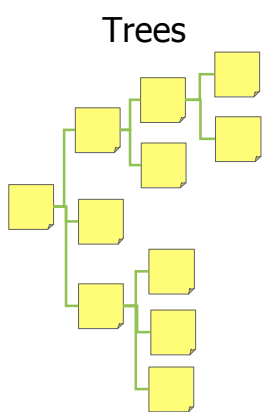
Lists



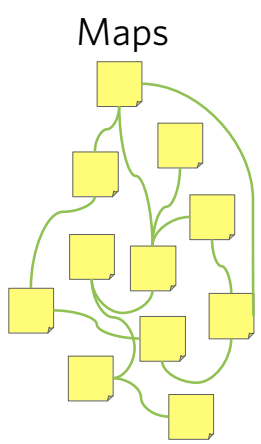
Clusters



Trees



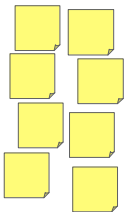
Maps



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The Joy of Lists

Lists

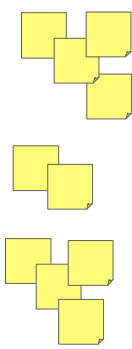


Name	Use it to...
Freelisting	Collect information about a topic
Swap-Sort	Order items by priority
Dot-Voting	Identify top choices

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Lovin' the Clusters

Clusters

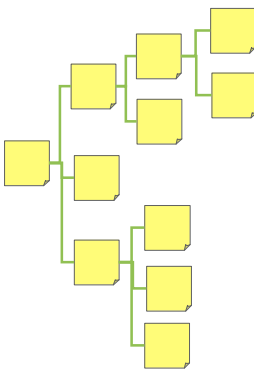


Name	Use it to...
Loose Cluster	Identify patterns in information

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Cultivating the Trees

Trees

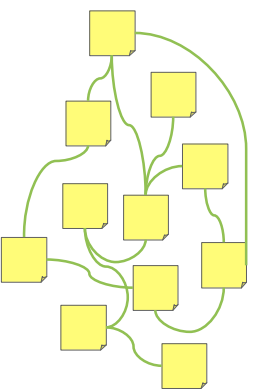


Name	Use it to...
Top-Down Tree	Examine a topic thoroughly
Bottom-Up Tree	Identify the fundamental nature of a topic

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Charting the Maps

Maps



Name	Use it to...
Information Map	Understand complex relationships
Action Plan	Define what's needed to meet a goal

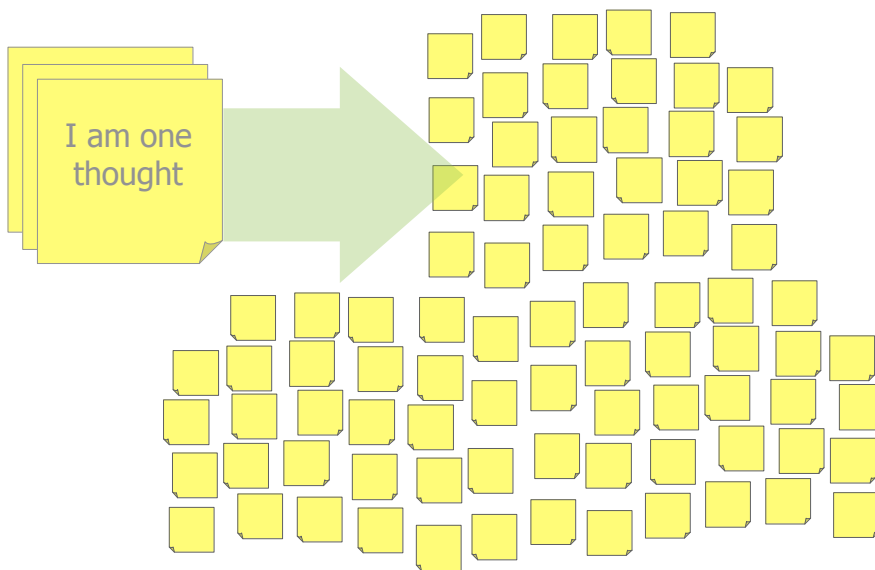
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Getting Started : Setting the Stage



- Define what you're there to do:
ie: "Understand how people think about mobile devices"
or "Gather ideas about new features"
- Write down the objective and display it where everyone can see it and reference it.
- Briefly describe the process you plan to use, and ask people if they have questions.
- Have enough stickies and markers to go around.

List : Freelisting | What it looks like

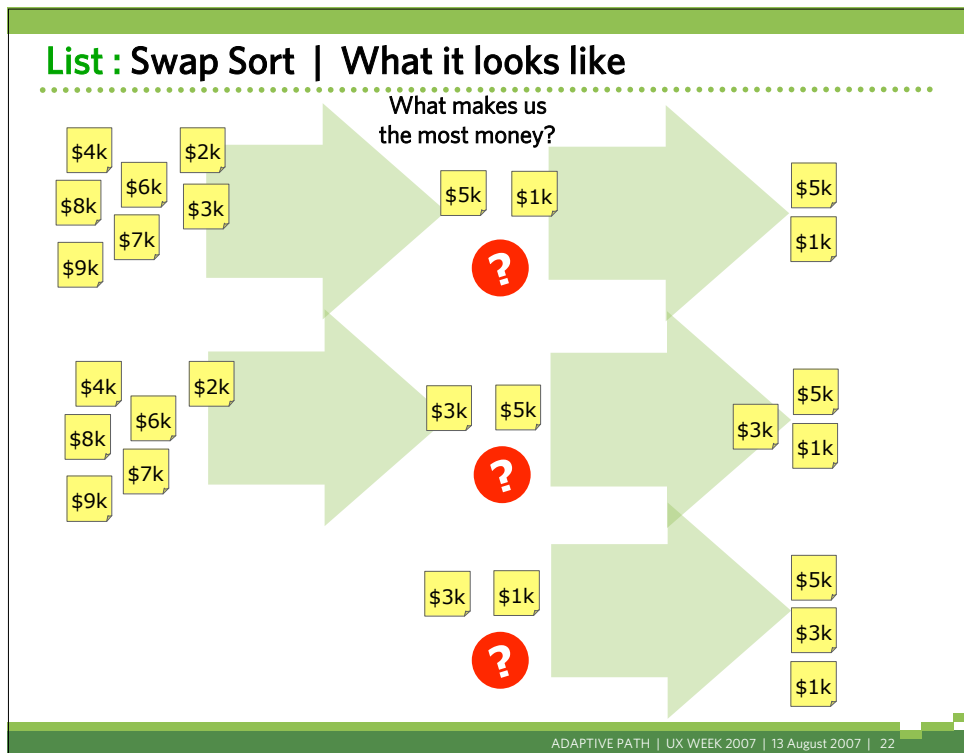




Don't have a big wall for stickies?

- Use a rolling whiteboard
- Use a window!
- Use the back of a door
- Use a wall in the bathroom
- Get large sheets of gatorboard or foam core





List: Swap Sort Detail | How to do it

Use the Swap-Sort to order items by priority.



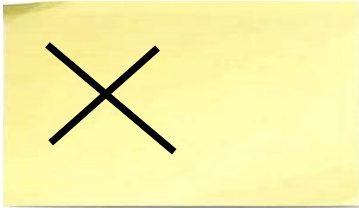
- Start with a set of stickies. These can be the result of freelisting, clustering or a set of information from other sources, like feature lists or projects. This works best when prioritizing a set of **10 or less**.
- You will need agreed-on criteria. 1-2 items of criteria work well...more than that and it gets confusing. The criteria should be objective, not subjective.
- Take 2 notes and compare them, based on the specific criteria. Which one is better based on the comparison? Put the 2 stickies in a column with the preferred one on top.
- Take another note from the pile, and compare it with the top note. If the new note is more important, put it on top. If not, compare with the note beneath it. If it's more important, move the 2nd one down and place it between the 2 notes. If it's less important, but it at the bottom of the list.
- Continue with each new note. Start the comparison at the top of the column, and continue until the sticky is placed in the column.
- End result:** a prioritized list.

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Pen and sticky size

- Use the right size pen for the right size sticky.

Super Ninja Tip

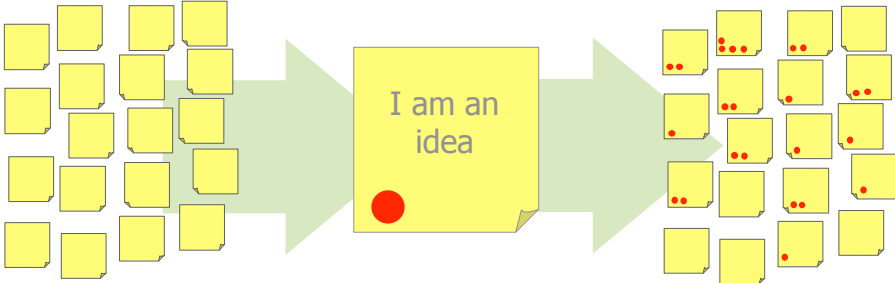
Fine point Sharpie		3" x 3" sticky
Super Sharpie		3" x 5" sticky
Chisel point Sharpie		7 ⁷ / ₈ " x 5 ⁷ / ₈ " sticky

Why Sharpies? Because Sharpies smell like ideas.

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List : Dot Voting | What it looks like [1]

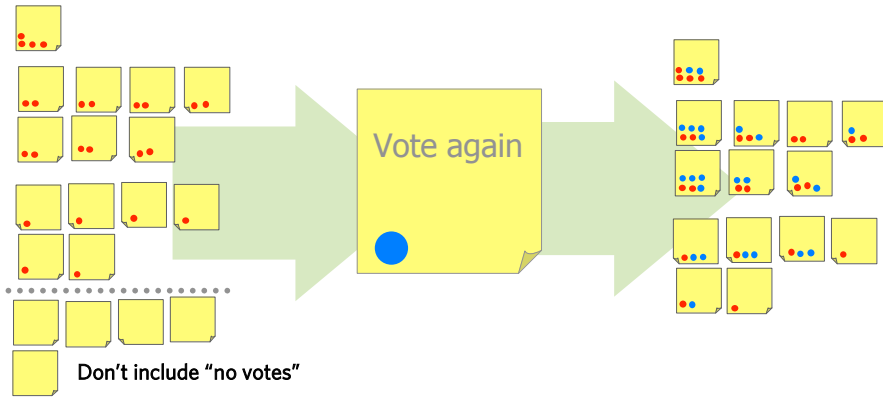
.....



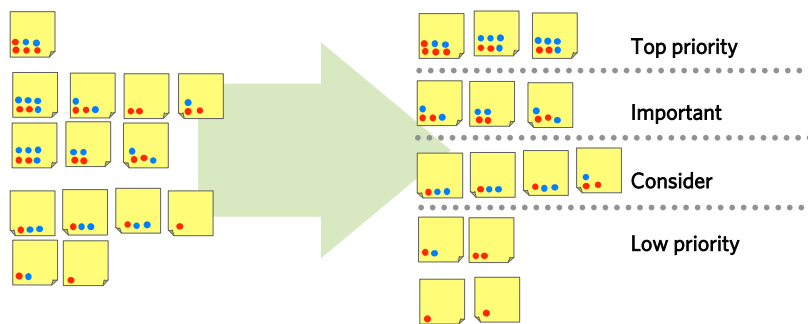
The diagram illustrates the dot voting process. On the left, there is a grid of 16 yellow sticky notes. A large green arrow points from this grid to a central sticky note that says "I am an idea" and has one red dot. Another large green arrow points from this central sticky note to a second grid of 16 sticky notes on the right. In this second grid, each sticky note has a different number of red dots (0, 1, 2, or 3), representing the votes cast for each idea.

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List: Dot Voting | What it looks like [2]



List: Dot Voting | What it looks like [3]



List: Dot Voting | How to do it [1]

Use Dot Voting to identify top choices.

- This method allows a group to narrow the options and to focus on what's important.
- Give everyone 3 votes. This is important, because multiple votes helps people make clearer decisions, without having to pick "just one."
- Each person marks their vote by placing a dot on a sticky. Note that you can use multiple votes on one sticky.
- Have everyone vote at the same time. This reduces the political overtones of "voting." Folks will concentrate on their own votes instead of watching how their colleagues are voting.

[continued]

List: Dot Voting | How to do it [2]

- After the first vote, arrange the stickies according to the number of votes. The higher-vote results show where the group should focus the actions.
- If you don't get clear results, vote again on the top contenders. Don't include any stickies that received 0 votes.
- To create stronger patterns, give people more votes. However, to avoid diluting the results too much, limit the number of votes to no more than 1/2 the total number of options. For example, if you have 10 items, limit the number of votes to 5.
- Despite the simplicity of the process, dot voting is a clear and powerful way to understand the priorities of a group.
- Top items on the list have the support and buy-in needed to move forward.

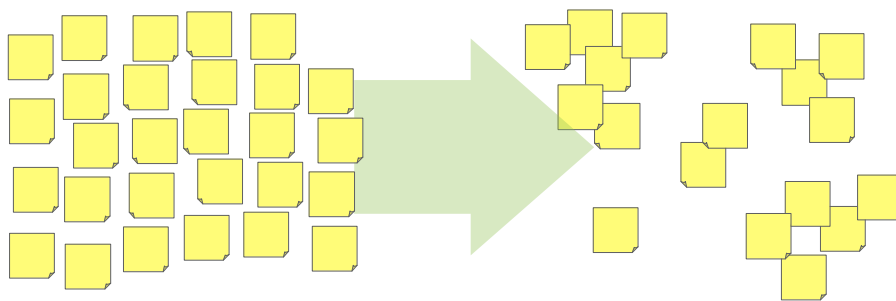
End result: a set of items that are prioritized based on shared agreements.

Stick 'em when you need 'em

- Sticky-sessions are not just a workshop technique.
- Quick cluster = quick clarity
- Quick freelisting gets issues out, visible and open for discussion.



Cluster : Loose Cluster | What it looks like



Cluster : Loose Cluster | How to do it

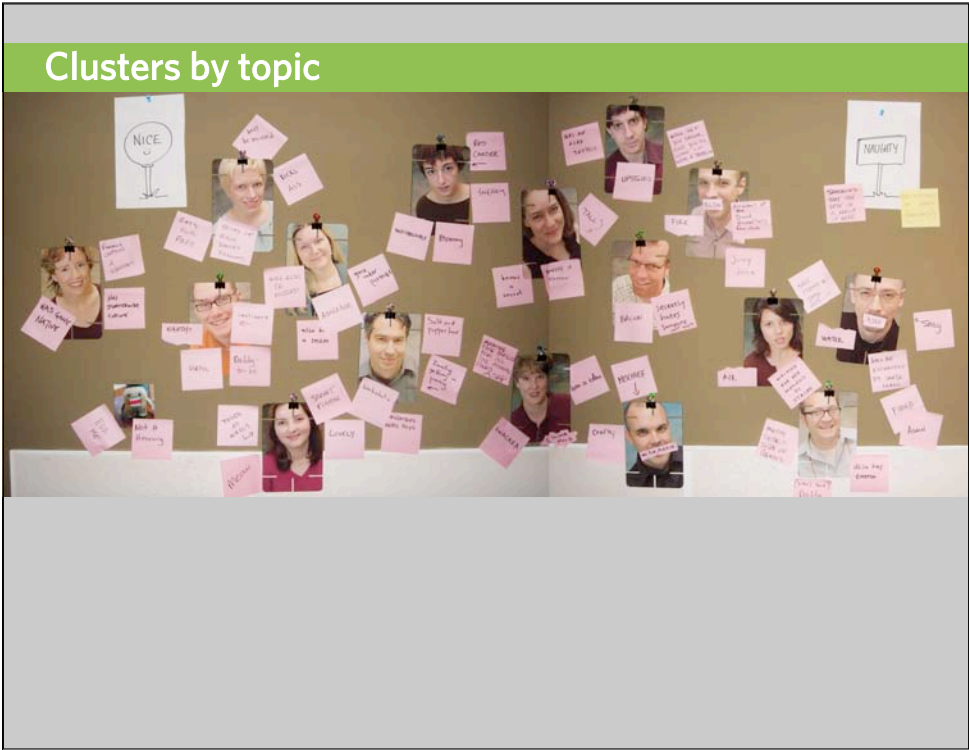
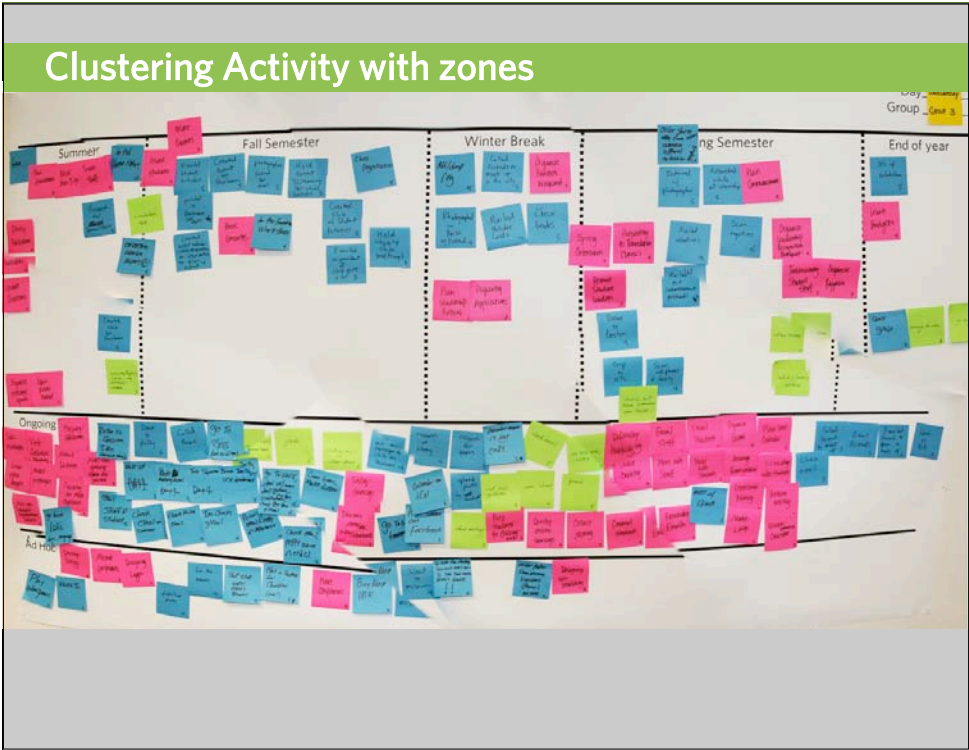
Use Loose Clustering to identify patterns in information.

- Start with a set of stickies. Working silently but together, identify notes that seem to “go together” and move them near each other. Note that you can move each others’ stickies.
- Tip: If you have different audiences (ie: departments, roles, etc.) you can use color-coding to trace the stickies by audience. Use a different sticky color for each type of audience.
- Continue to work and group until clusters begin to emerge from the set of items.
- If a cluster gets more than 10 items in it, look for ways to break it into smaller sets.
- When complete, step back, look at the groupings, and discuss what patterns have emerged.

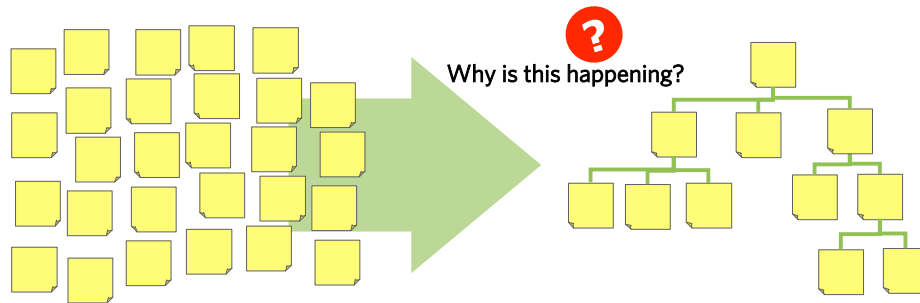
End result: groups of like items that show patterns and themes.

Clustering Activity





Tree: Top-Down Tree | What it looks like



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Tree: Top-Down Tree | How to do it

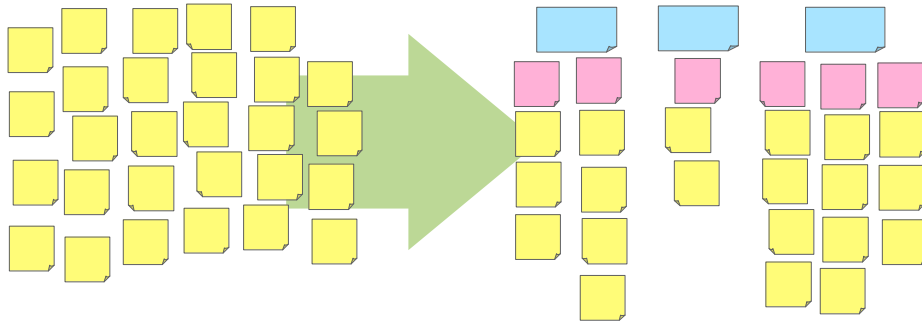
Use the Top-Down tree to examine a topic thoroughly.

- Start with a root question such as "how can we reduce product support calls" or "what set of features does this product have?" Write this on a sticky and place it on the wall.
- Ask a probing question (ie: "why is this happening?" or "how do we do that?") Write down each answer on a sticky, and arrange in a branching layout.
- For each new sticky, ask the same probing question, digging deeper and deeper into the issue. (Note: This is similar to the IDEO method of asking "why" 5 times in a row...)
- Keep doing this until you answer yes to this question:
"Do all these stickies, taken together, **completely** represent the sticky above it?"

End result: A branched tree diagram of causes or components that characterize a core question.

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Tree : Bottom-Up Tree | What it looks like



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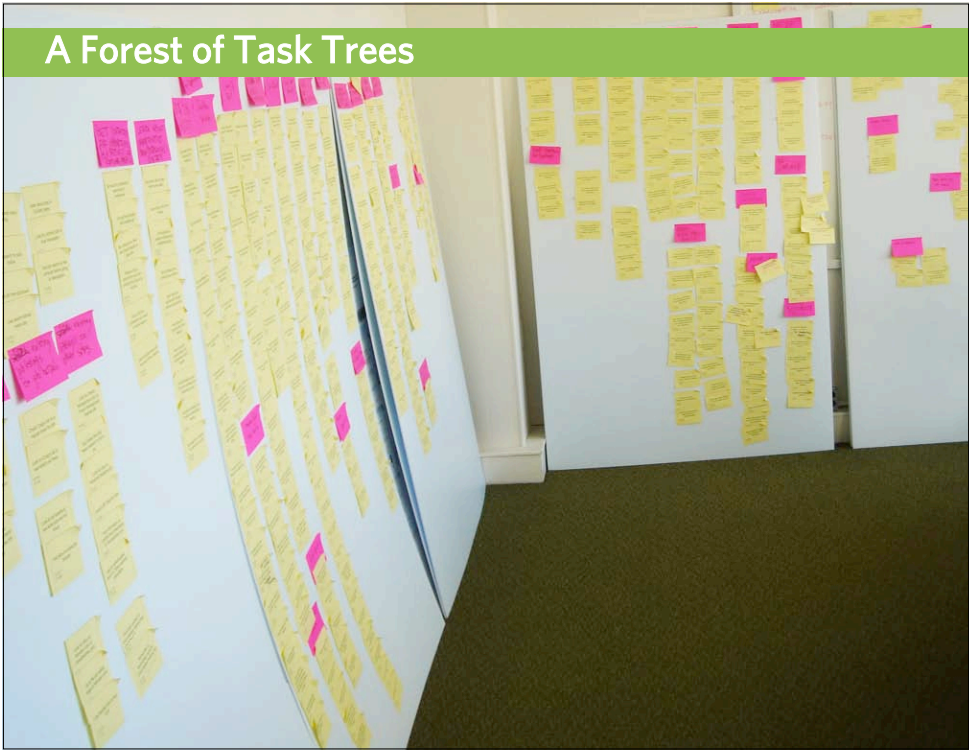
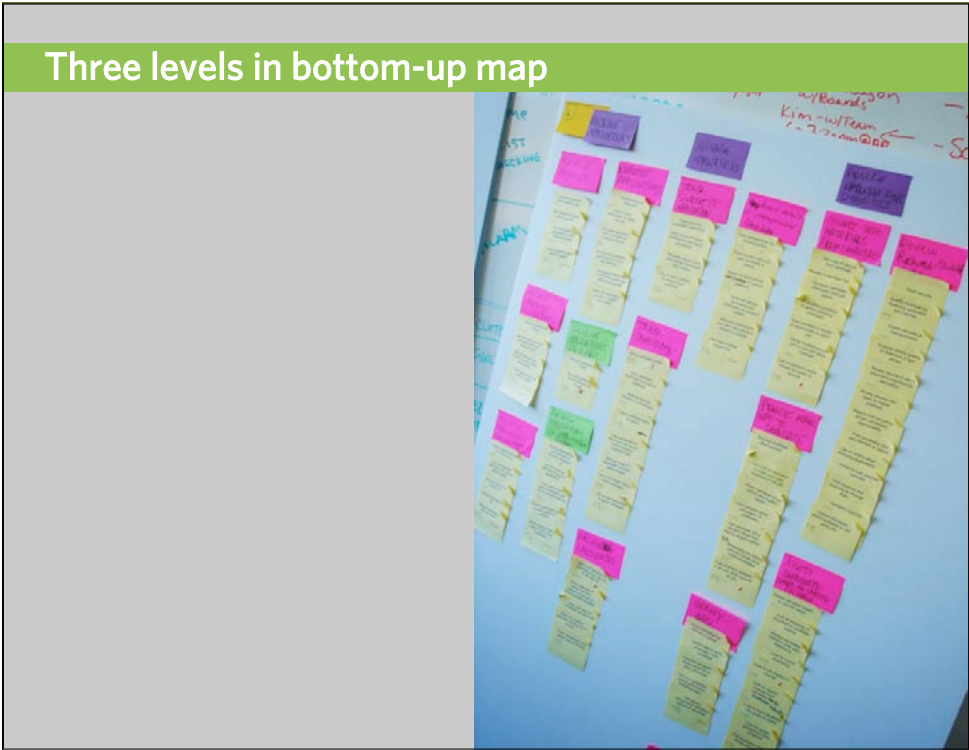
Tree : Bottom-Up Tree | How to do it

Use the Bottom-Up Tree to identify the fundamental nature of a topic.

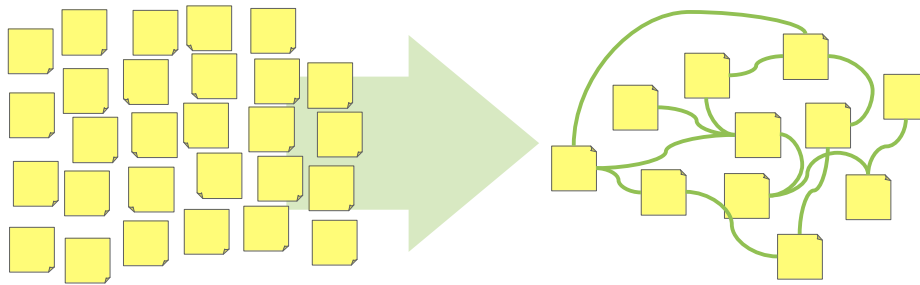
- Start with a set of stickies. Working silently but together, identify notes that seem to “go together” and move them near each other. Note that you can move each others’ stickies. Also note that this step is the same as a loose clustering exercise.
- Re-arrange the clusters into columns. If a column gets more than 10 items in it, look for ways to break it into smaller sets.
- When all the stickies are in columns, discuss the groups and write labels for the columns. Use a different color or size of sticky for the labels.
- Some labeled columns may “go together.” Move these next to each other and add header labels. Use a different color or size of sticky for the labels.

End result: a map of related items, and the higher-level categories that define them.

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Map : Information Map | What it looks like



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Map : Information Map | How to do it

Use the Information Map to understand complex relationships.

- Start with a set of stickies. Working together, move items that are connected to each other near each other.
- When you have a rough cut of grouping, start to draw lines to show connections. (This works great on a whiteboard.) If an input or impact is one-way, draw an arrow to show the direction.
- When complete, look at the overall picture to identify key nodes. Look for central things (these have lots of lines in and out of them) and edge things (these only have a few lines or only incoming arrows, no outgoing.)
- You'll usually need to re-arrange and re-draw the map to clean it up. But stickies move easily, so it's worth it to get a clearer picture of the connections.
- Documentation can be done with photos of the sticky-wall or redraw in a flowcharting application like OminGraffle or Visio.

End result: a map that shows the relationship between items.

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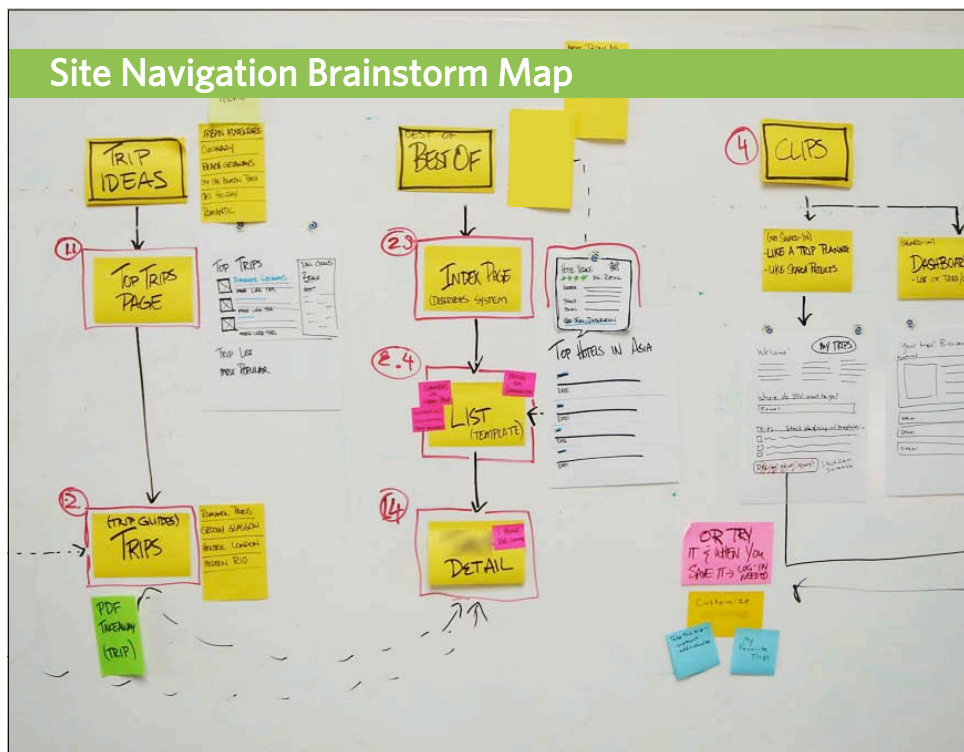
Map : Process Map | How to do it

Use the Information Map to understand complex relationships.

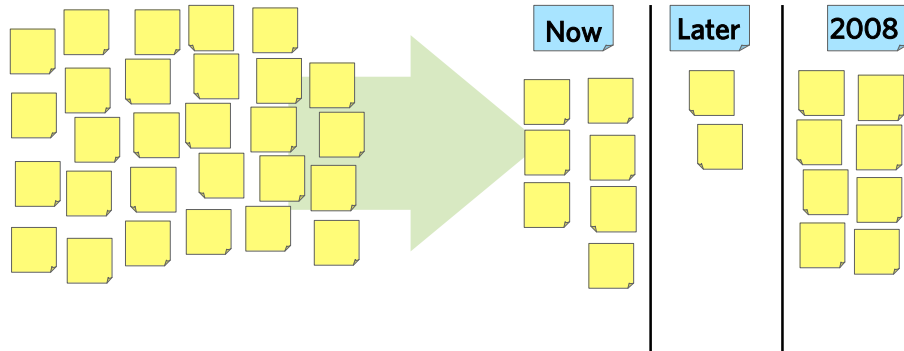
- The process map is a flavor of the information map. The difference is that you are showing ordering of something...time, steps, dependencies.
- Orient the map based on the order of a flow. Move the stickies around to hone in on the process. Ask questions to probe: "Does this happen every time?" or "What needs to be in place before this step can be done?"
- Delve down to ferret out details, and add stickies with this new information as you go along.
- When complete, verbally walk through the process and make any adjustments.
- Documentation can be done with photos of the stickywall or a flowcharting application like OminGraffle or Visio.

End result: a process map.

Site Navigation Brainstorm Map



Map : Action Map | What it looks like



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Map : Action Map | How to do it [1]

Use the Action Map to define what's needed to meet a goal, such as defining a plan or assigning responsibility.

- Start with an existing set of stickies and an organizing principal with a few categories. The 2 main organizing principals are: *When does this get done?* (time-oriented) and *Who will do this?* (people-oriented.)
- **Time-oriented:** You can be as specific as day or month, or as general as *now*, *soon* and *later*, or 1st step, 2nd step, 3rd step. Make header stickies for each category.
- **People-oriented:** Same as above, but with people. Again, specific to the person, or general by team, department, office, division, etc. Don't be surprised if it's a mix. Make header stickies for each group as they are mentioned.
- Place the category names across the wall, spaced out. Do a loose clustering exercise and have people place stickies in the category they feel is appropriate. Encourage people to create new group names for items not yet represented.

[continued]

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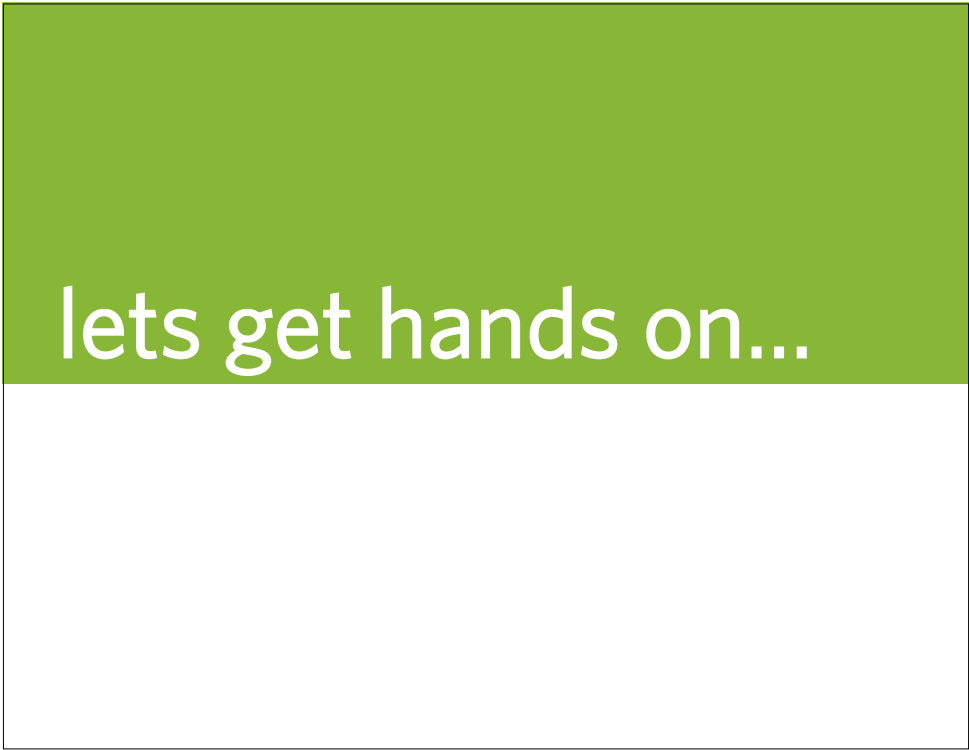
Map : Action Map | How to do it [2]

- Use dots or corner-notes on stickies to collect the info that is not the main way you are laying it out. ie: note people’s names on the time-oriented map, and note timing on the people-oriented map.
- When complete, verbally walk through the schedule or responsibilities and make any adjustments. Also decide how the team wants to share the information with others.
- This method is especially powerful as the last step of any tree or map exercise.

End result: a visual outline of timing and/or responsibilities.

8 great techniques

Name	Type	Use it to...
Freelisting	List	Collect information about a topic
Swap-Sort	List	Order items by priority
Loose Cluster	Cluster	Identify patterns in the information
<i>Dot Voting</i>	Tip	Decide what to focus on
Top-Down Tree	Tree	Examine a topic thoroughly
Bottom-Up Tree	Tree	Identify the fundamental nature of a topic
Information Map	Map	Understand complex relationships
Action Plan	Map	Define steps to meet a goal



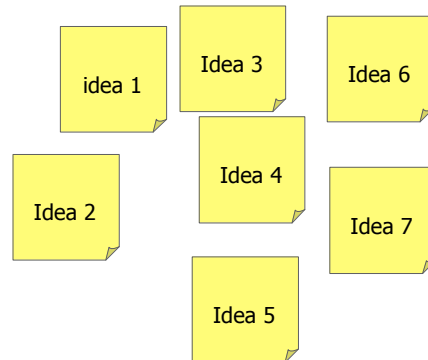
A challenge for us...

How can we
engage our
organizations
in adopting UX
practices?

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1. Freelisting

How can we
engage the
organization
in adopting UX
practices?



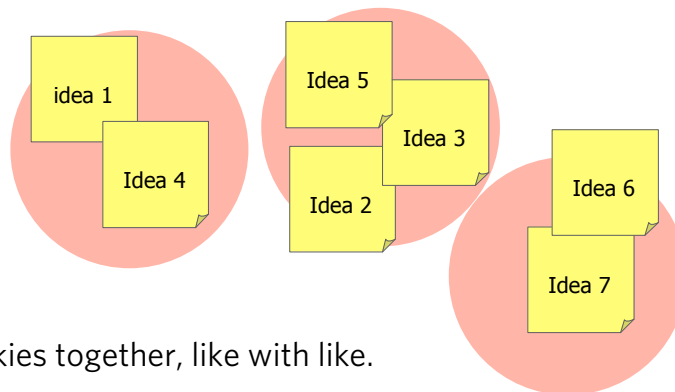
- Independently down your ideas. Don't talk, just write.
- Write each idea on a sticky. Make as many as you can.
- When you're done, put the stickies in the middle of the table, spread out so that they are randomly distributed.

2 minutes

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2. Clustering

How can we engage the organization in adopting UX practices?



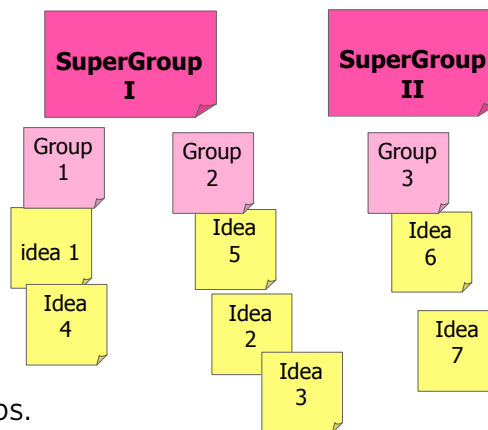
- Group the stickies together, like with like.
- You can discuss groupings, but keep conversation to a minimum. Focus on keeping things moving.
- When time is up, take a look at the groups and see what you've got.

5 minutes

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3. Labeling

How can we engage the organization in adopting UX practices?



- As a team, name the groups.
- Write the name on a different color of sticky and put it at the top of the group.
- If you get to groups of groups, use the larger stickies.
- Take a look at what you've got. What about the patterns is surprising?

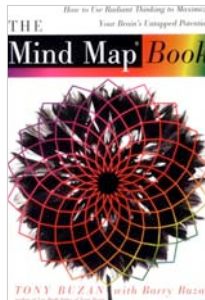
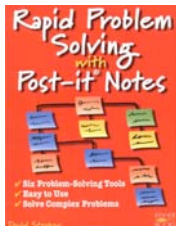
3 minutes

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yea!

Further Reading and Credits

Good Books



Flickr Images

- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/superamit/1043379069/>
- "To Do" artwork by: [illegalart.org](http://www.flickr.com/photos/illegalart.org)
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tiagopinhal/387756816/>
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/48889080879@N01/96243768/>

walk softly...



and carry a big sticky!

August 2007 | Kate Rutter <kate@adaptivepath.com>