

Why Do I call my consultancy “Affinity by Design”?  
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On August 1<sup>st</sup> the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions accepted my application to start doing business as Affinity By Design, LLC. I’ve gotten positive feedback on the name and hope it makes a lasting impression on people.

There are a number of reasons I like the name Affinity By Design. The fact the name has a nice ring to it is good. I’m also happy to see where the name falls in alphabetic indexes I’ve reviewed. Most importantly, however, I find “affinity by design” to be an intriguing idea.

I found two definitions of the word affinity that are quite meaningful to me:

1. A close connection marked by community of interests or similarity in nature or character.
2. Rapport, resonance — relation of mutual understanding or trust and agreement between people

In contrast, the phrase “by design” suggests action, in an intentional manner. The meaning I give to the phrase “affinity by design” is the intentional bringing together of a community of people for the purpose of pursuit of a common interest based upon mutual trust and understanding.

The majority of my professional life has been spent helping organizations put together the best combination of resources to get the job done. In my personal life, my wife and I have spent many years working with couples to build sustainable marriages. A common element in both settings is the enthusiasm surrounding the start of the journey.

At the start of a new organization, endeavor or committed relationship, it is the pursuit of a common interest based upon mutual trust and understanding that drives many decisions. Questions like “What do we have to do to make this work?” and responses like “I can take care of that.” Are common at the start of many new ventures.

When my wife and I talk to groups of couples preparing for marriage, I use a model portraying “Passion”, “Intimacy”, and “Commitment” spaced in a circle. All

three are critical to a successful, sustainable marriage. The relationship could start from any point on the circle, and we'd like to think we could always keep a perfect balance between passion, intimacy and commitment. The challenges of life put a strain on this balancing act. Our personal experience has shown sometimes all we have left is our commitment. Our relationship is all the better for having met these challenges.

By substituting "Organizational effectiveness" for "Intimacy", we can apply the same model to organizational life. New ventures are often a result of a passion for a mission, a commitment to serving a set of clients, or out of a recognition that the organization has the capacity and capability to effectively address a need in the community.

The challenges faced by organizations are many. At the start of any organizational endeavor, it is normal to divide the work to be done. These divisions are most commonly done around discrete business functions. As the organization grows, business functions grow into organizational units with their own sense of passion, effectiveness, and commitment.

In personal relationships, the passion is lost and commitment strained when couples forget how to sustain the level of intimacy that once bound them so closely together. Similarly, organizations sometimes become a collection of distinct business units, all striving to be highly effective, but oblivious to the impact they have on other units within the organization. In fact, improvements in effectiveness in individual business units can sometimes be a source of ineffectiveness at the organizational level.

As a couple, Helen and I work to keep a balance of passion, intimacy and commitment in our relationship. Some of the ways we do this is by starting each morning with a renewal of our wedding vows and taking time to be together with no specific agenda. Similarly, organizations need to find ways to intentionally come together to reinforce the mission they have mutually agreed to pursue. While hugs and long walks might be helpful in both situations, a reconciliation of strategic plans to operational practices may be a more direct route to organizational effectiveness.

The mission of Affinity By Design, LLC is to help organizations achieve their goals by overcoming obstacles. The approach I use is to bring together groups of individuals to determine how they can channel their passion and commitment for the benefit of those who are served by the organization's mission.