



[PROCESS OF THE MONTH]

MIND MAPS: UNLEASH YOUR CREATIVE POTENTIAL

Purpose

This tool provides a different approach to brainstorming. It allows you to unleash your creativity by allowing free association of thoughts and the use of non-standard forms of communication, such as colored markers, pictures, and images.

Background

For many, creativity feels like an elusive task. You may look at yourself, your relationship, and your existing challenges and see the same solutions. You walk into a brainstorming session or a planning session and your mind goes blank. When everyone else is engaged in the process and sharing ideas, you hold back because no new thoughts come to mind. Yet, you each have a creative portion to your brain; you simply have not learned how to tap into it. Traditional forms of idea gathering tend to be linear and highly structured (e.g., outlines, lists, and matrices). While these are great organizational tools, they do not necessarily inspire new ways of thinking, for they use only a fraction of the brain's innovative potential!

In the late 1990's, Tony Buzan introduced a concept called "Mind Mapping." The essence of Mind Maps is "radiant thinking," and it mimics the brain's natural tendency to connect information with a variety of words, images, textures, and memories. For example, when you listen to a song or smell a flower, do you create a list of thoughts that come to your mind? Not likely! Typically, you have several random, seemingly unassociated thoughts. Perhaps you think of a loved one or a picture of a garden. Maybe you envision a dream or an impression you have of the future. Whatever the thought, chances are it does not come in the form of an outline!

In this process* you will learn the fundamentals of mind mapping and how to use them to help unleash your brain's potential. Whether you create a Mind Map as an individual to reach new levels of personal growth or use Mind Maps in a group setting to address an organizational or business challenges, you will discover new ways to innovate and increase your creativity!

*The Mind Map process is adapted from the book [The Mind Map Book: How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential](#) by Tony Buzan. Penguin Books, New York, New York, 1996.

Preparation

To maximize your results, take a few minutes to prepare properly.

Mental Preparation

- **Positive mental attitude:**
A positive approach to your Mind Map process will unblock the mind and allow you to connect with your passion and creative energy.
- **Copy images around you:**
Take advantage of other Mind Maps you have seen or images you find pleasing. Your brain will respond positively to these and allow your creativity to move even further.
- **Commit to your Mind Map:**
Like acquiring any new skill or process, your first results may not meet your expectations. Stay with it!
- **Commit to the absurd:**
Record all ideas, no matter how "absurd" or "silly" they may seem. It is these ideas that stimulate other thoughts and create breakthroughs in your approach and in your life!

Material Preparation

- Paper – very large sheets such as flip charts or butcher paper*
- Colored pens – in good condition and in colors that you like
- Highlighters – in good condition, several different colors
- Sticky notes (optional) – in several sizes and colors

*Buzan's precept: "a mind map will expand to fill the space available". The bigger the paper, the more ideas you will gather.

Workspace/Environmental Preparation

- **Temperature:**

Make sure you are comfortable and able to adjust the temperature easily; layer your clothing if needed.

- **Lighting:**

Natural lighting is best; if that is not available, make sure the lighting allows you to see images, colors, and dimension easily.

- **Fresh Air:**

Access to fresh air periodically is paramount, for oxygen is essential to providing fuel for your brain.

- **Surroundings:**

Create pleasing surroundings. Make sure you are able to sit, stand, and write comfortably. It is OK to play music or do this process in silence. It is all a matter of preference.

Process

There are five stages in the Mind Map process:

1. **The Quick-fire Mind Map Burst**
2. **First Reconstruction and Revision**
3. **Incubation**
4. **Second Reconstruction and Revision**
5. **Decision Making**

1 Stage 1: The Quick-fire Mind Map Burst

1. Draw a stimulating central image.
2. Place the image in the center of a large blank piece of paper.
3. Write every idea that comes to mind as you think of your subject.
4. These ideas will radiate from the subject (like rays coming from the center).
5. Let your ideas flow for 20 minutes, working as fast as possible. Working quickly for a limited time releases your brain from its habitual thinking patterns and encourages new and often absurd ideas. Capture these! These are the beginnings of new perspectives and insights.

2 Stage 2: First Reconstruction and Revision

1. Take a short break and allow your brain to rest.
2. On your original Mind Map, identify the different categories and themes that your ideas represent. Pay attention to the order in which your ideas appeared and what thoughts inspired them.
3. During this phase, you may notice that some concepts may appear several times on your Mind Map. These do not represent unnecessary repetition. Keep them intact as they represent an underlying theme or idea that influences several levels of your thinking.
4. Highlight recurring themes in different ways each time you see them appear. For example, on a second occurrence, underline the concept. On a third time, outline it with a geometric shape, and on a fourth time, use three-dimensional shapes to distinguish these ideas and concepts.
5. Link the related areas on your Mind Map to create a new mental framework. This simple step will create new insights as you observe your thoughts from a new perspective!
6. Create a new Mind Map. Your categories and themes are the major branches or “Basic Ordering Ideas (BOIs) which represent common themes, categories, and hierarchies of ideas from the first phase.
7. As you review these themes, you may notice that your central subject is changing. That is OK! This change is a sign that your perspective is expanding and you are beginning to tap into the brain’s creative potential.
8. Draw your restructured Mind Map integrating colors, images, and shapes to represent the various branches and your ideas.

Below are examples of BOIs to help you begin:

- History: personal or organizational (past, present, future)
- Strengths or Opportunities for Improvement
- Likes or Dislikes
- Long term goals
- Family
- Friends
- Associates
- Competitors
- Customers
- Achievements
- Market trends
- Emotions
- Culture

3 Stage 3: Incubation

1. This step is essential! The brain is most creative when it is relaxed and peaceful.
2. While there is no specific timeframe for incubation, a good guideline is a minimum of 24-48 hours.
3. During this time, keep a pen and notepad handy to write down new thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. Now that your brain has been stimulated, it will continue to work and provide new insights when you least expect them!

4 Stage 4: Second Reconstruction and Revision

1. Perform another quick-fire burst to integrate the various insights and perspectives gained during incubation.
2. The result is another (a third) consolidated Mind Map.

NOTE: A particularly important or complex subject may require several iterations of the reconstruction/revision/incubation phases. As your brain processes the information over time, it will continue to create new thoughts and concepts. By repeating the process, you will capture these new thoughts.

5 Stage 5: Decision Making

Several methods are available to reach a decision:

- **Process Driven:**

In this method, the process of Mind Mapping creates the solution. As your brain gathers and processes all of your ideas and information, you experience an “aha” moment when the solution presents itself.

- **Weighted Decision:**

- Use a weighting factor (1-5) to assign importance to a given characteristic or quality in your solution. If each characteristic is equally important, then there is no need to assign a weighting factor.
- Assign a number value (1-10) to each branch or concept against the chosen characteristic (the higher the number, the better it meets the characteristic).
- Multiply the weighting factor by the assigned value of each concept.
- Add up the numbers. The concept or group of ideas with the highest value represents the best choice.

- **Intuition:**

After looking at all of the ideas and concepts on the Mind Map, you might have a “gut feel!” what the best choice is. It is OK to listen to your intuition.


Mind Maps will not make your choices for you. A Mind Map will highlight key trade-offs and considerations, thus increasing your opportunity to make the best choice for your given situation.

Success Factors for Group Mind Maps

- Include individuals representing different perspectives (e.g., different age groups, genders, experience levels, etc.) to inspire greater creativity, innovation, and new approaches
- Prior to a Group Mind Map session, have the individuals do stage 1 and 2 (quick-fire Mind Map and reconstruction/revision to create Basic Ordering Ideas). Start the session with a small group discussion allowing people time to share and exchange ideas before creating a group Mind Map that integrate everyone's ideas.

Conclusion

In order to break through to higher levels of performance, it is necessary to take a new approach. Whether your focus is on your personal growth or on your organization's growth, creativity and innovation is at the core of your development. The Mind Map process is a fundamentally different way to gather ideas and tap into your brain's natural ability to generate new thoughts. Its flexibility allows the brain to relax and generate twice as many ideas as traditional brainstorming because you are able to share the images and thoughts exactly as they exist in your mind! This process creates a powerful shift in your thinking and ultimately unleashes your creative potential.

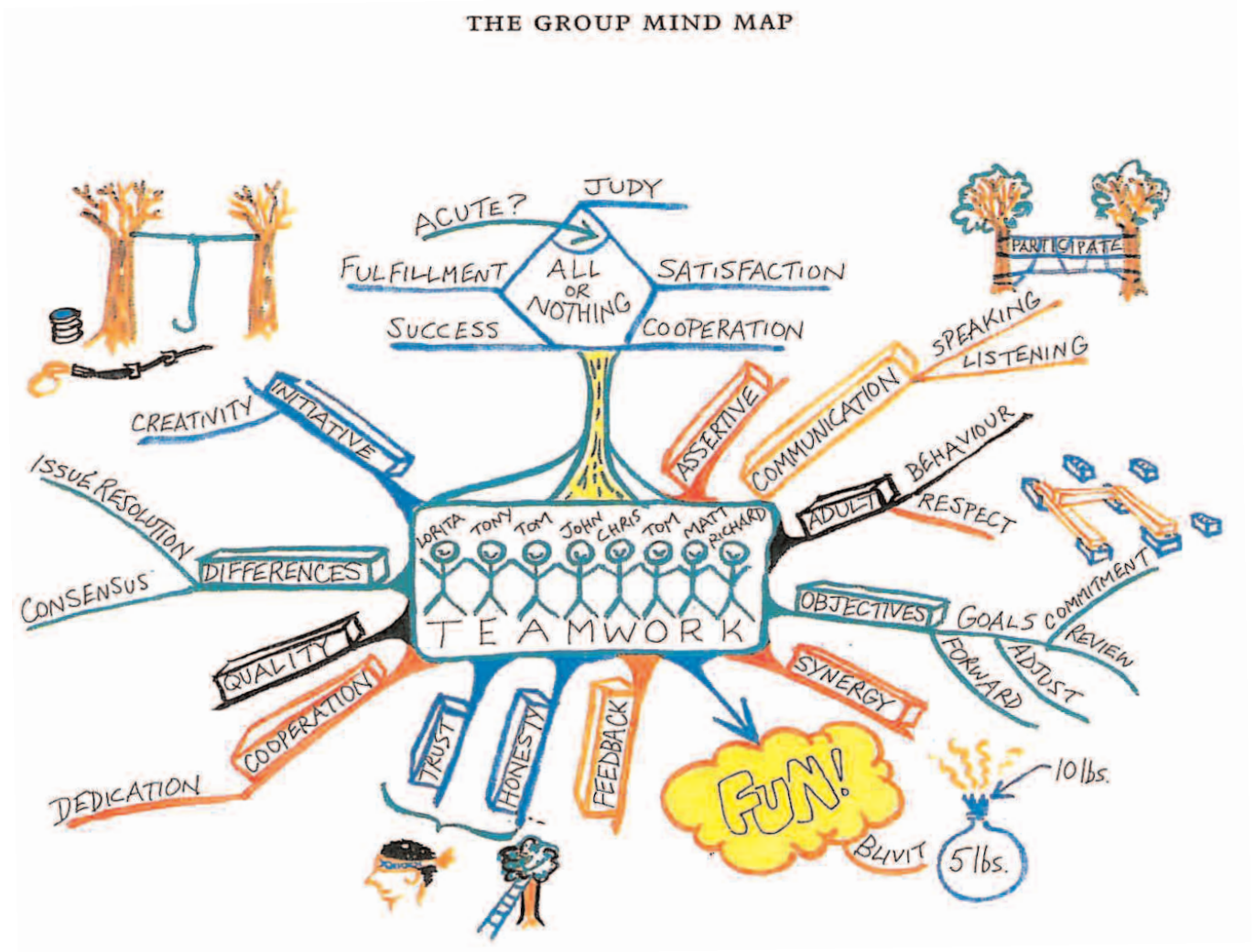
 *reative thinking may mean simply the realization that there is no particular virtue in doing things the way they have always been done..”*

– RUDOLF FLESCH, PHILOSOPHER

Rapport

LEADERSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Mind Map Example



Mind Map on the development of teamwork, created by executives at Digital Equipment Corporation. (*The Mind Map Book*; Tony Buzan, pg. 171)