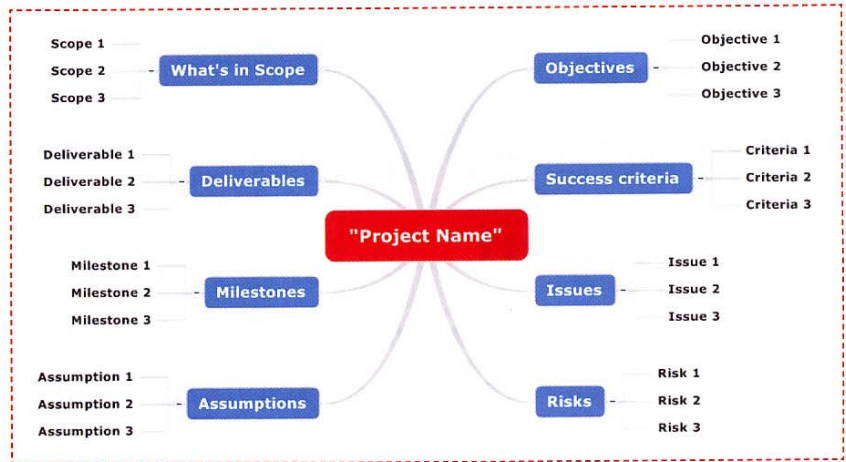




Map your way from chaos to clarity



'Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I'll understand' – Chinese proverb

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The art and science of mind mapping is burgeoning throughout New Zealand as organisations come to appreciate the benefits of working visually to plan and carry out strategic projects. Use of mind mapping software is particularly evident across the commercial sector, in government and in education. Mind mapping encompasses visual mapping and free-form thinking, backed by interactive visual collaboration. It is revolutionising the way people engage with information, ideas and each other.

New Zealanders are using the technology to enhance productivity and improve efficiency, and they appreciate certain products' ability to import projects from Microsoft Office applications (including MS Project) and other project management tools. While these applications are feature-rich, users often employ only a fraction of their functionality. Imported into mind mapping software, these projects are 'visualised' on an electronic drawing board, which stimulates ideas and makes planning easy, essentially unlocking all the functionality of traditional programs. The results can then be exported back to MS Office, project management or business intelligence tools.

The following are pointers on using mind mapping as an effective tool in the workplace. The early stages of a mind mapping project are critical because each decision has a rippling effect, which can have an impact on

costs, the bottom line, customers or time. Depending on the project, it can even make or break an organisation. Before embarking on a project journey, one of the best ways to increase your chances of success is to involve the team in building a project charter 'mind map'. This visualisation technique graphically breaks down broad goals into increasing levels of detail so your team is able to better understand its existing knowledge about the project. It provides not only a visual overview, but puts your project into a dynamic framework where you can discuss, document, organise and share ideas and information with others. Your team gets a clearer image of what is known and all the gaps that must be filled in order to achieve success.

Building your project map

- 1. Find a workspace.** To begin, you'll need a white board or large flip chart and some markers.
- 2. Define your focus.** Print the project name in the center of the board. The name should reflect either the primary goal or problem that you need to fix.
- 3. Branch outwards.** Start surrounding your central focus with project keywords that need to be clarified. For example, use objectives, success criteria, issues, risks, assumptions, milestones and deliverables. Connect these 'branch' keywords to your central focus with lines.
- 4. Let your ideas flow.** As each detail or idea is generated, write it

next to its related branch. Associate the idea to the branch with a line.

5. Get creative. Don't be afraid to integrate pictures, shapes and colours into your map to highlight areas of interest. It adds new dimensions to your work and encourages creativity.

Navigate your map

When you've exhausted your ideas, step back and take a look at the big picture.

Examine your project map, discuss and reorganise it so you can answer the following questions:

- What does the team think and know about the holistic problem?
- What areas need to be further investigated?
- Who else can help fill in the blanks?
- Is this initiative aligned with larger departmental or organisational goals?

Once you have done this, continue to complete your map with additional research.

Take action

The team process involved in building a project map also improves team alignment. Stakeholders and members walk away with more excitement and a greater sense of ownership. The next challenge is to harness that energy and build on your action plans. A project charter map is the perfect way to introduce and share your team's ideas with all the people who need to carry out the detailed work.