56 Mind Mapping

When a topic or a problem has many moving parts, mind mapping provides a method of visually organizing a problem space in order to better understand it.

Mind mapping is a visual thinking tool that can help generate ideas and develop concepts when the relationships among many pieces of related information are unclear. It provides a nonlinear means of externalizing the information in our heads so that we can consolidate, interpret, communicate, store, and retrieve information. Because of its visual, diagrammatic nature, it is a powerful mnemonic device, and can be used to promote understanding and enhance recall of a problem space.

Because the way people think is rarely linear, and complicated problems do not follow a neat pattern of steps that can be isolated from one another, mind maps reflect how we think through complexities of a given problem. As the map takes shape, it allows us to summarize and test assumptions, make and break connections, and consider alternatives while we shape the data into meaningful themes and patterns.

By limiting mind maps to one side of one sheet of paper, the process of freely mapping associations should not feel overwhelming. To draw a mind map, follow the steps below:[1]

1. Identify a focus question to serve as the central theme and keep the mapping process from straying off topic. Draw the subject in the center of a sheet of paper, and circle it.
2. Start drawing extensions outward from the center of the map, and label them with simple verb-noun pairs or noun clusters. The closer a word or image is to the center, the more importance it takes on in your map. These are your primary connections.
3. As the spokes of primary connections are identified, each will reveal deeper, more granular levels of secondary information. Connect primary and secondary connections with lines. It is the connections of concepts that create meaning.
4. Continue this process of making free associations until all relevant pieces of information are represented. As new information comes up, add it to the map.
5. Before declaring the map complete, stay with it for a while. The idea is to strengthen concepts and their interconnections with hopes of creating new knowledge and understanding.

By providing people a means to visually represent their unique thinking patterns in a nonlinear, visual way, researchers can better understand different ways that people prioritize and organize information. After the map is complete, have the user explain the pieces of the map, and its meanings. When mind mapping is used in this manner, it would fall under a "self-reporting" method, and should be further vetted with additional observation-based research. Nonetheless, it can be used to reveal basic, idiosyncratic patterns of thinking.[2]

1. Hyerle, David. *Visual Tools for Constructing Knowledge*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1996.

2. See note 1 above.

3. See note 1 above.

Further Reading

Buzan, Tony. *The Mind Map Book*. New York: Plume, 1996.

Buzan, Tony. *Use Both Sides of Your Brain*, 3rd ed. New York: Plume, 1991.

Wycoff, Joyce. *Mindmapping: Your Personal Guide to Exploring Creativity and Problem-Solving*. New York: Berkley Books, 1991.

See www.mindmapinspiration.com.

Behavioral
Attitudinal

Quantitative
Qualitative

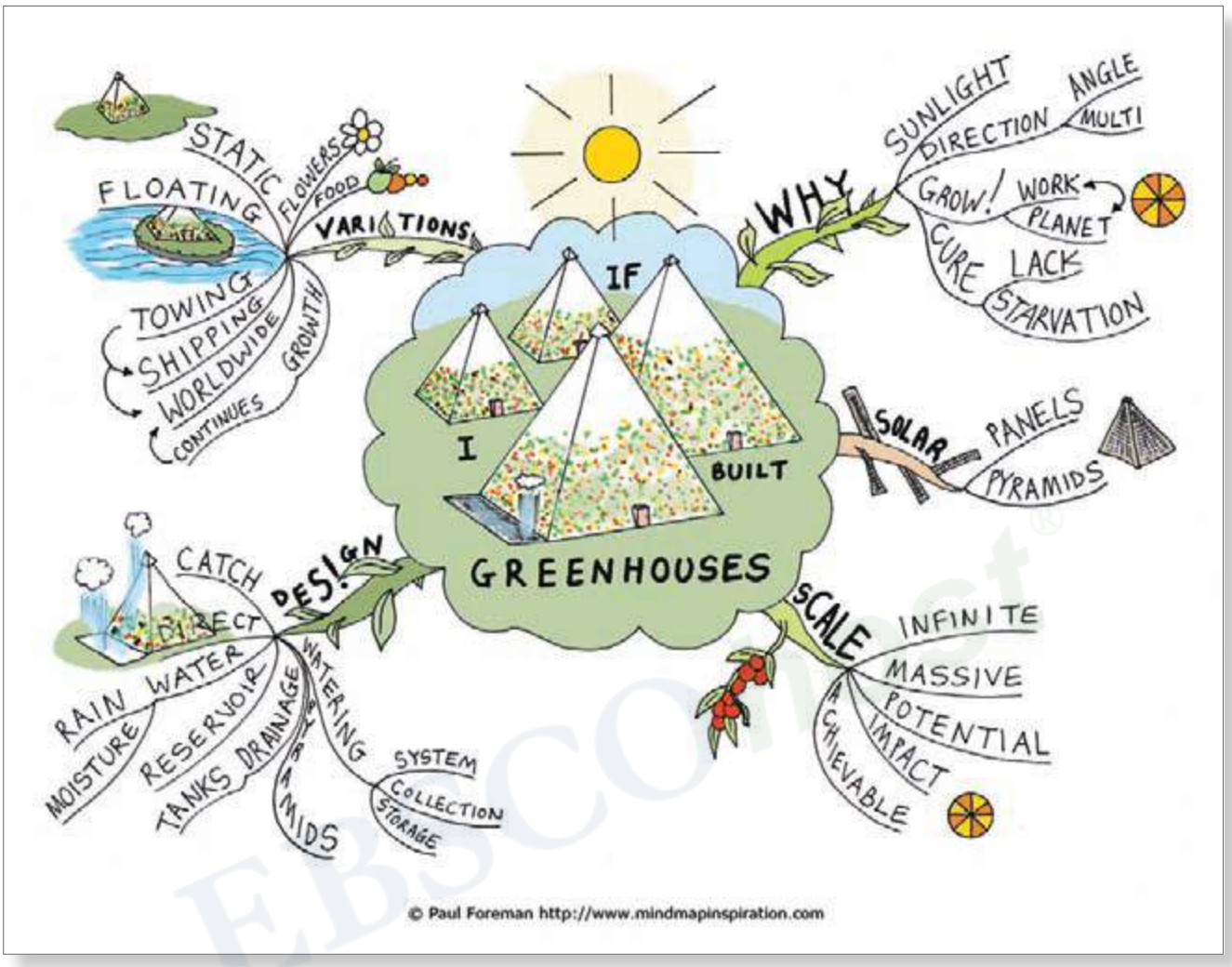
Innovative
Adapted
Traditional

Exploratory
Generative
Evaluative

Participatory
Observational
Self reporting
Expert review
Design process

Copyright © 2012. Rockport Publishers. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

Copyright © 2012. Rockport Publishers. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.



When used as a method of analysis and sense-making, mind mapping allows us to simultaneously identify the subject of the map, relationships between the components, and understand the relative importance of the information that is represented. The ability to understand the boundaries, and at the same time understand the interconnecting parts within the system, reflects our human capacity for systems thinking at work.[3]

Use single words or simple noun clusters, common symbols, hand-drawn images, and group-related information with starbursts or clouds. These visual cues serve to transform the map to a mnemonic device that can more readily trigger recall of the information space.

See also *08. Brainstorm Graphic Organizers • 14. Collage • 16. Concept Mapping*