HOW TO… Develop Your Skills Using Mind Maps

"Mind Map" is a trade mark of the Buzan Organisation

Mind Maps are very important techniques for improving the way you take notes, but can also be used to plan research. By using Mind Maps you show the **structure of the subject** and **linkages** between points, as well as the raw facts contained in normal notes. Mind Maps hold information in a format that your mind will find easy to remember and quick to review.

Mind Maps abandon the list format of conventional note taking (linear note taking). They do this in favour of **a two-dimensional structure**. A good Mind Map shows the 'shape' of the subject, the relative importance of individual points, and the way in which one fact relates to others. Mind Maps are more compact than conventional notes, often taking up one side of paper. This helps you to **make associations** easily. If you find out more information after you have drawn the main Mind Map, then you can easily integrate it with little disruption.

Mind Maps are also useful for:

- ❖ summarising information;
- ❖ consolidating information from different research sources;
- ❖ planning research and generating keywords;
- ❖ identifying gaps in your knowledge;
- ❖ thinking through complex problems; and
- ❖ presenting information that shows the overall structure of your subject.

Mind Maps are also very **quick to review**, as it is easy to refresh information in your mind just by glancing at one, and are therefore useful for studying for exams.

Mind Maps can also be **effective mnemonics**. Remembering the shape and structure of a Mind Map can provide the cues necessary to remember the information within it and how topics are linked. They engage much more of the brain in the process of assimilating and connecting facts than conventional notes.

Basic Mind Maps

To make notes on a subject using a Mind Map, draw it in the following way:

- ❖ Write the title of the **subject in the centre of the page**, and draw a circle around it. This is shown by the circle marked **1** in **figure 1** below (time management).

- ❖ For the **major subject subheadings**, draw lines out from this circle. Label these lines with the subheadings. These are shown by the lines marked **2** in **figure 1** below (e.g. personal performance).

❖ If you have **another level of information** belonging to the subheadings above, draw these and link them to the subheading lines. These are shown by the lines marked **3** in **figure 1** below.

❖ Finally, for **individual facts or ideas**, draw lines out from the appropriate heading line and label them. These are shown by the lines marked **4** in **figure 1** below.

As you come across new information, link it in to the Mind Map appropriately.

A complete Mind Map may have **main topic lines** radiating in all directions from the centre. **Sub-topics** and facts will branch off these, like branches and twigs from the trunk of a tree. You do not need to worry about the structure produced, as this will evolve of its own accord.

Note that the idea of 'levels' in **Figure 1** below is only used to help show how the Mind Map was created. All we are showing is that major headings radiate from the centre, with lower level headings and facts branching off from the higher level headings.
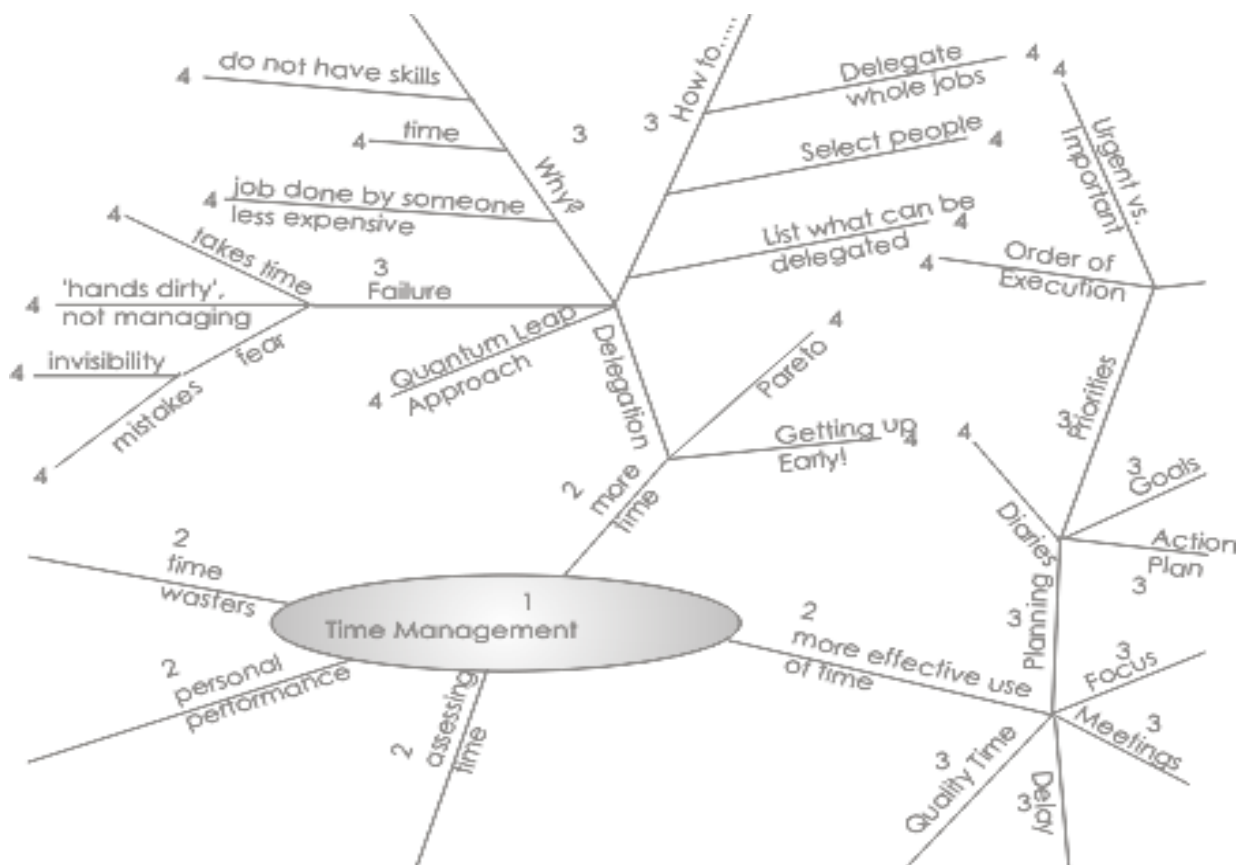
Figure 1: Part of an Example Mind Map

Improving your Mind Maps

Your Mind Maps are your own property: once you understand how to make notes in the Mind Map format, you can develop your own conventions to take them further. The following suggestions may help to increase the effectiveness of your Mind Maps:

- ❖ **Use single words or simple phrases for information:**
  Most words in normal writing are padding, as they ensure that facts are conveyed in the correct context and in a format that is pleasant to read. In your own Mind Maps, single strong words and meaningful phrases can convey the same meaning more potently. Excess words just clutter the Mind Map.
- ❖ **Print words:**
  Joined up or indistinct writing can be more difficult to read.
- ❖ **Use colour to separate different ideas:**
  This will help you to separate ideas where necessary, and helps to show the organisation of the subject. It also helps you to visualise the Mind Map for recall.
- ❖ **Use symbols and images:**
  Where a symbol or picture means something to you, use it. Pictures can help you to remember information more effectively than words.
- ❖ **Using cross-linkages***:*
  Information in one part of the Mind Map may relate to another part. Here you can draw in lines to show the cross-linkages. This helps you to see how one part of the subject affects another.

Key points

Mind Maps provide an extremely effective method of taking notes. They show not only facts, but also the overall structure of a subject and the relative importance of individual parts of it. Mind Maps help you to associate ideas and make connections that you might not otherwise make.

Mind maps are also useful for:

- ❖ Planning your research strategy;
- ❖ Identifying gaps in your knowledge;
- ❖ Listing keywords for searching;
- ❖ Showing the links in a subject which can help structure a report/essay; and
- ❖ Studying i.e. using them as a tool which visually aids memory.

Excerpts taken from **http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newISS_01.htm**

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