

# llamatrax

by llamawerx

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## Have You Thought About Thinking?

What organization isn't looking to improve productivity? How about communications? Ineffective problem solving? What about boring meetings? Instead of optimizing and standardizing every detail, let freedom reign. Unlock hidden relationships. See complexity without the clutter. Grasp the "big picture." Banish reams of documents and embrace agility. If it's not memorable, you're not communicating.

Wow, a tall order. Let's look at ways people think, then explore a simple technique to enhance our thought process. Finally, we'll follow up with a software tool supporting it.

So, how do we think? Do we all think the same way? Obviously not since people rarely agree on anything! Some are fast thinkers, others are slower. Some get the "big picture" others are "buried in the details." Sometimes, we think the same things, but we don't understand each other. For now, let's focus on linear and spatial thinking.

The linear thinker processes data from start to finish – like a timeline. They think in terms of outlines, bullet points, and sequences. They find it difficult to identify alternative paths. Many times, a

roadblock at the beginning leaves them stuck for hours.

Spatial thinkers operate on many concepts simultaneously. They leap between concepts easily, shifting, redirecting, and associating seemingly disjoint ideas. Interestingly, they do all of this without thinking about it.

In the 1960's, Tony Buzan proposed Mind Maps<sup>1</sup> to teach efficient note taking to students. By using a range of cognitive skills, he felt concepts would become clearer and more memorable. Mind Map diagrams, with a reliance on keywords, images, color, and spatial awareness, provide a technique to improve productivity. Free-form diagrams, or maps, start with a topic in the middle and spiral outward. You add related topics, and connect them; color and pictures reinforce concepts making the diagram more memorable. Glancing at a Mind Map, you instantly grasp relationships, dependencies, and associations – the big picture. Ah, "a picture is worth a thousand words."

I hear it coming. You've stepped on the brakes at this point. Self-doubt creeps in. I'm not an artist. I can't draw pictures. What colors do I use? Woah, Nelly. Let's turn this horse back around. Lighten up. Remember, it's the content that counts. Who says your map won't

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<sup>1</sup> "Mind Map" is a trade mark of the Buzan Organization

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be a modern art masterpiece? Loosen up that tie and have some fun!

So, when do we use these maps? The list is probably endless: brainstorming, planning, problem solving, and presentations. How about org-charts, meeting minutes, and schedules? Almost any thought process would benefit from Mind Maps.

Dive in – get started. Do you need any special hardware? No. Special software? No. High paid consultant? Not really. What then? Start with unlined paper and colored pens. I know it doesn't sound like much, but trust me; simple is good. Here are some guidelines...

- Main topic in the center
- Add related topics
- Link things up
- There are no boundaries
- Use colors and pictures
- Leave plenty of white space
- Keep moving & have fun!

Now grab a pen, start drawing!

OK, you've tried some maps and found a groove. One day, you decide to introduce your colleagues to Mind Maps by jumping up in a meeting, rushing to

the whiteboard, and drawing furiously. The wow factor is huge; understanding sweeps the room. People "get it." Unfortunately, a technical detail appears. You need to capture the drawing for minutes and the minutes must be in electronic form. Uh-oh. Being in a high-tech office, you hit the print button on the whiteboard, take it to a scanner, scan, and attach the file to the minutes. Success! But, there's got to be another way.

If you're like me, a quick web search leads you to all kinds of mind mapping websites. MindManager® emerges at [www.mindjet.com](http://www.mindjet.com). With a downloadable trial, several case studies and some tutorials, what's not to like? Twenty-one days later, I purchased a copy from Programmers Paradise [www.programmersparadise.com](http://www.programmersparadise.com).

I haven't explored all of its features, but MindManager lets you easily create maps, integrate with Microsoft Office, and output a graphic or PDF file. Templates get you started, while shapes and images make your maps look professional. With a laptop and an LCD projector, you have a winner.

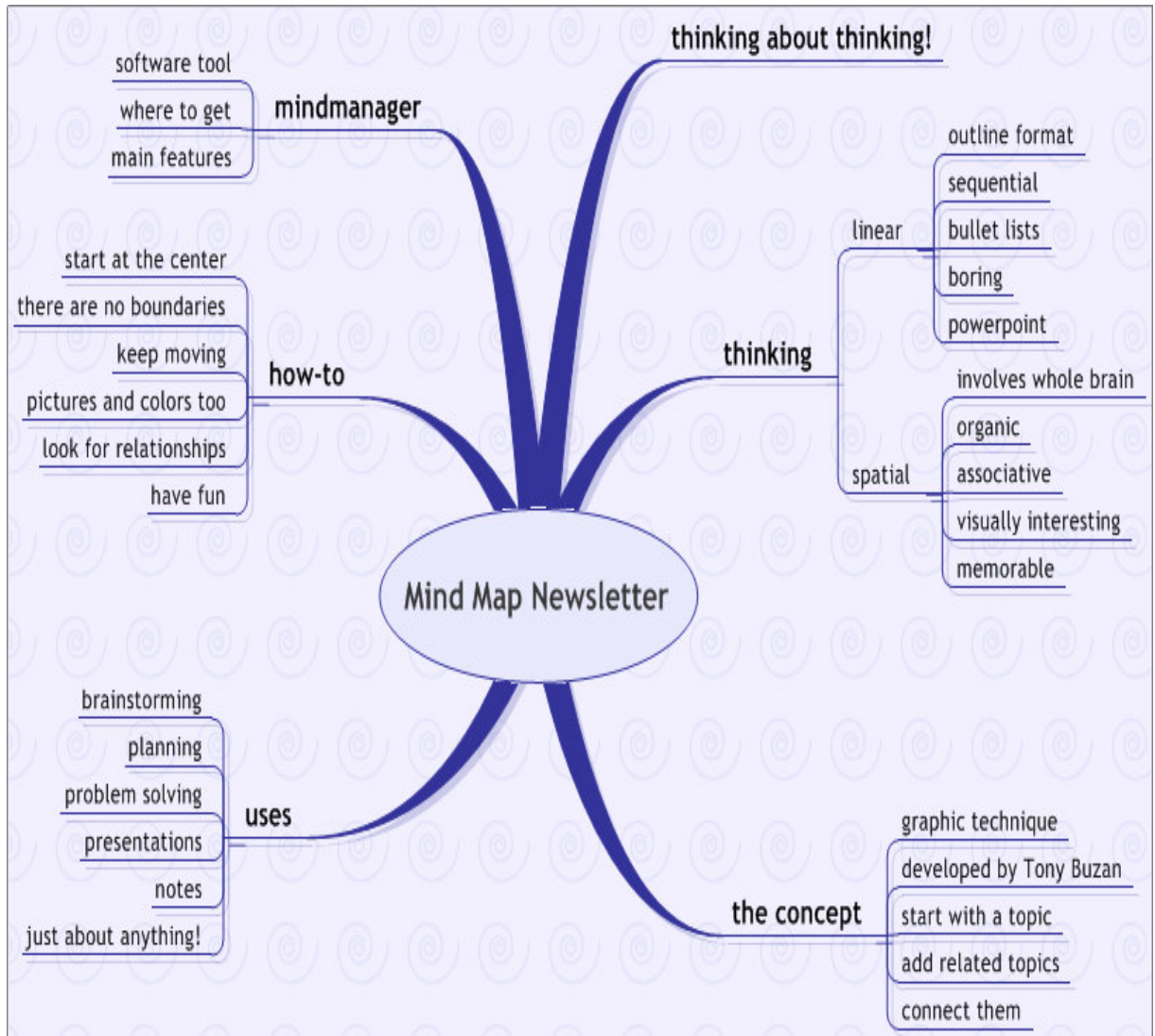
So there you have it, a productivity and communication accelerator. Give it a try and see for yourself.

The map for this newsletter is on the next page.

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