

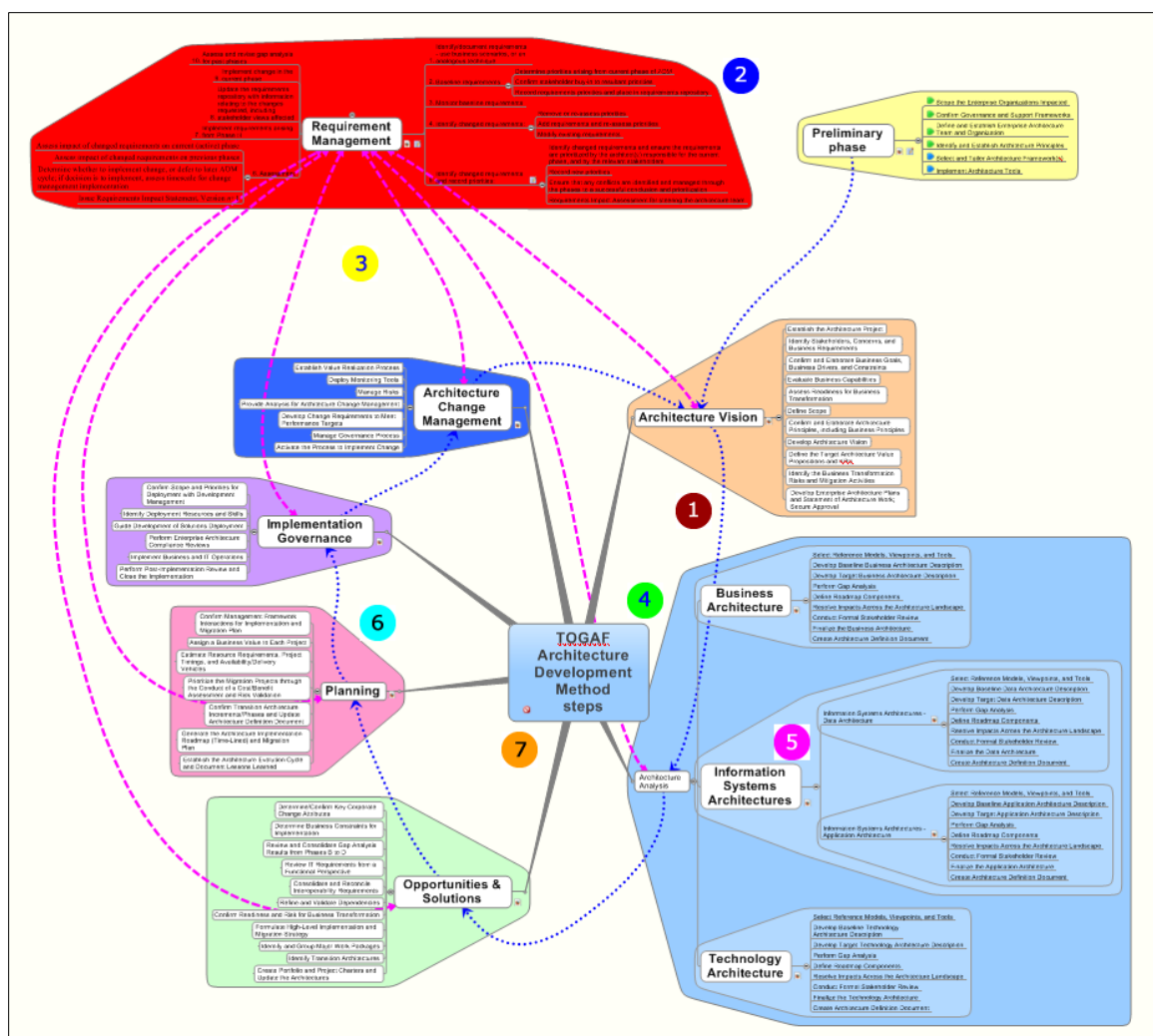


Type of map: Architectural process map

Source: BiggerPlate map gallery

Overview

Sometimes, mind maps are used for applications for which they weren't really intended. Sometimes that can work out really well; other times, not so much. This is one of the latter cases. This architectural process map attempts to depict a complex business process visually, but ends up creating a lot of visual clutter that ultimately makes it confusing to look at.



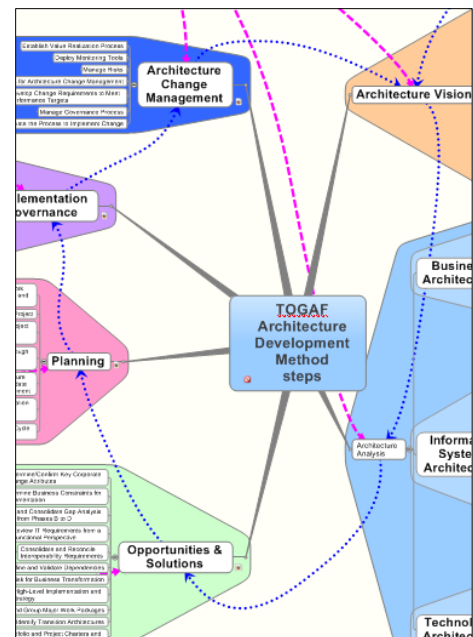
Ultimately, this map author would have been better off using a visual diagramming tool like Visio or SmartDraw to show this process.

In this report, I'll walk you through the areas where I think this mind map falls apart, and provide suggestions for improving it. As usual, this is a powerful lesson you can apply in your own mind mapping efforts: What NOT to do is sometimes even more important than what TO DO in designing a visual map or diagram.

1 Process flow mapped out with relationship lines

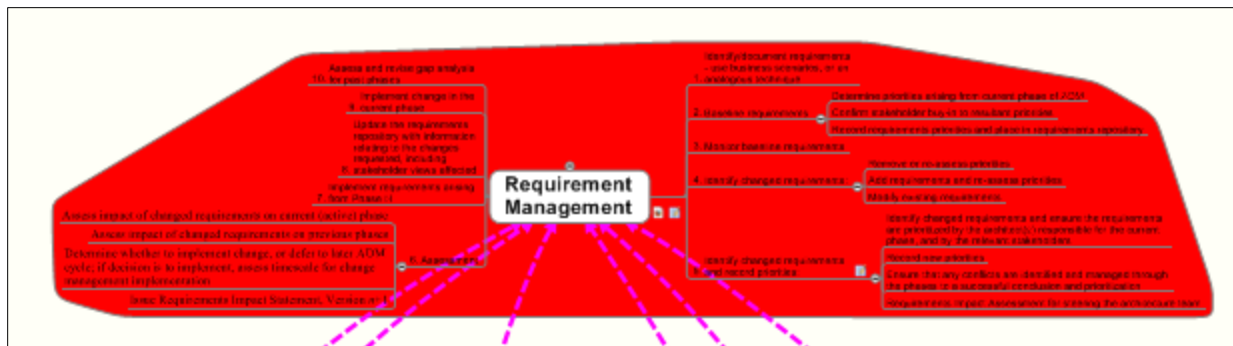
In this mind map, as with most well-designed visual maps, the flow of information begins at the 12 o'clock position and then progresses clockwise around the central topic. The relationship lines attempt to do the same thing, making it more explicit where the process starts, the order in which each step is to be taken and where it ends. It even includes a preliminary step that is "outside the loop."

In my opinion, these relationship lines add some visual clutter to the map, but aren't egregiously bad. What's worse are the pink lines descending from the floating topic at the top of the page. But we'll deal with those later in this report.



2 Too many boundaries

I've said it many times before in these reports, and I'll say it again: Boundaries should ideally be used to emphasize one, perhaps two, main topics of a mind map. They aren't intended to be placed around every first-level and floating topic! When everything is emphasized, nothing is emphasized. Perhaps the author used this technique to add color to the map. In my opinion, all it does is add the high degree of visual clutter.

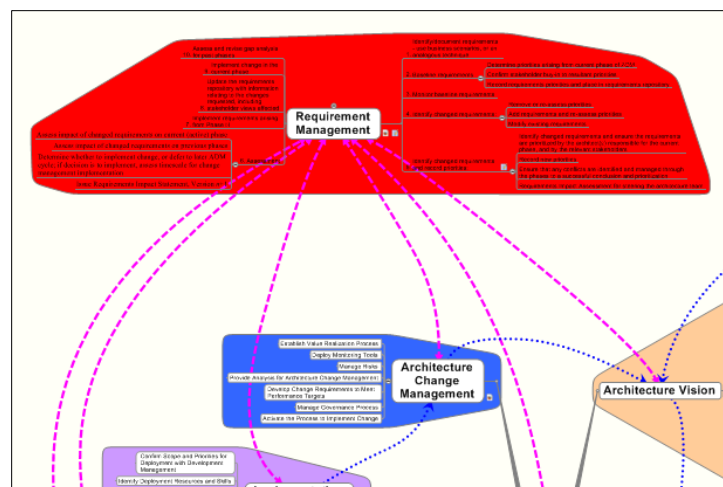


The worst is the floating topic above, which appears directly above the main part of the mind map. Its bright red color makes the text within it hard to read. Ideally, if you're going to give your mind map or a boundary region a background color, you need to take great care to ensure that there is adequate contrast between the topic text color and the background by which it is surrounded. Otherwise, you make it hard on the reader's eyes, and also end up with a map design that doesn't print out very well.

What would be more helpful is if this mind map contained a floating topic with brief instructions on how to use it. Then you could eliminate most or all of these relationship lines, and with it, much of the visual clutter.

3 WAY too many relationship lines cause visual clutter

Not only does this map author utilize relationship lines to show process flow, he also uses them to tell us that requirements management is necessary at every step of the process. That results in series of 6 pink relationship lines extending from the floating topic at the top of the page down to all six first-level topics. Is this really necessary?

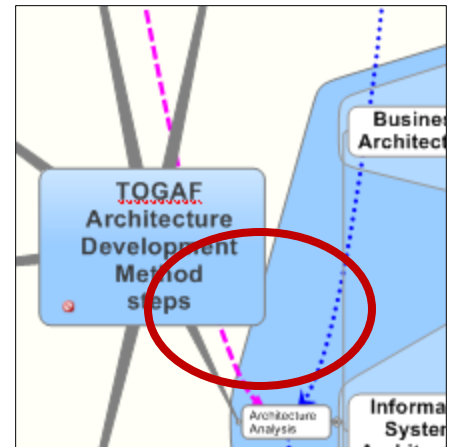


Once again, why not create a floating topic specifically for instructions, and handle this there – let the reader know that requirements management is, well – required – at each step? That would be much simpler, and would result in a cleaner, easier-to-read mind map!

4 Overlapping map topics

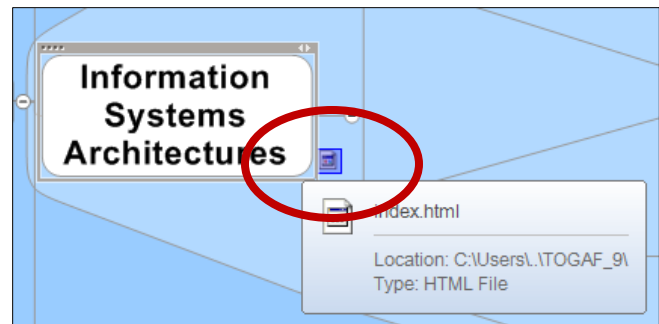
For some reason, one of the six first-level topics overlaps the central one. This could have been avoided by pushing the offending topic to the right before publishing it to BiggerPlate.com.

Compared to some of the other shortcomings of this mind map, this isn't the most egregious. It's more of a clarity vs. clutter issue.



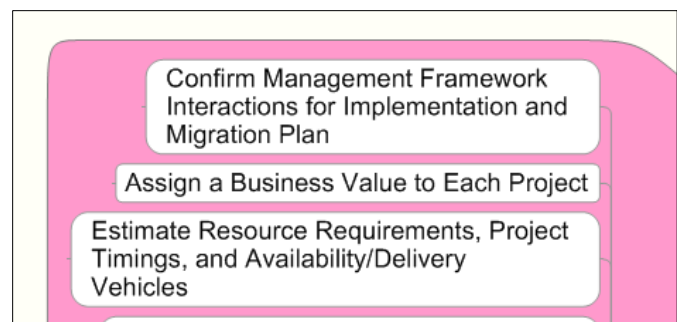
5 Missing links

If you're going to share your mind map, make sure people can access the web pages to which you refer. Otherwise, delete them from your map before you publish it or share it. These point to network locations that make sense within the firm that created it, but are useless to us.



6 Initial caps on every word hurts readability

Admittedly, this is picky: Using initial caps on every word makes it harder to read - especially for some of the more lengthy topics.



Questions?

Got questions about this report? Please contact me at chuck@innovationtools.com.

Published 8/11/2012