



Effective Mind Maps

Analyses of business mind maps by Chuck Frey, author of the Mind Mapping Software Blog

Type of map: Get Things Done mind map

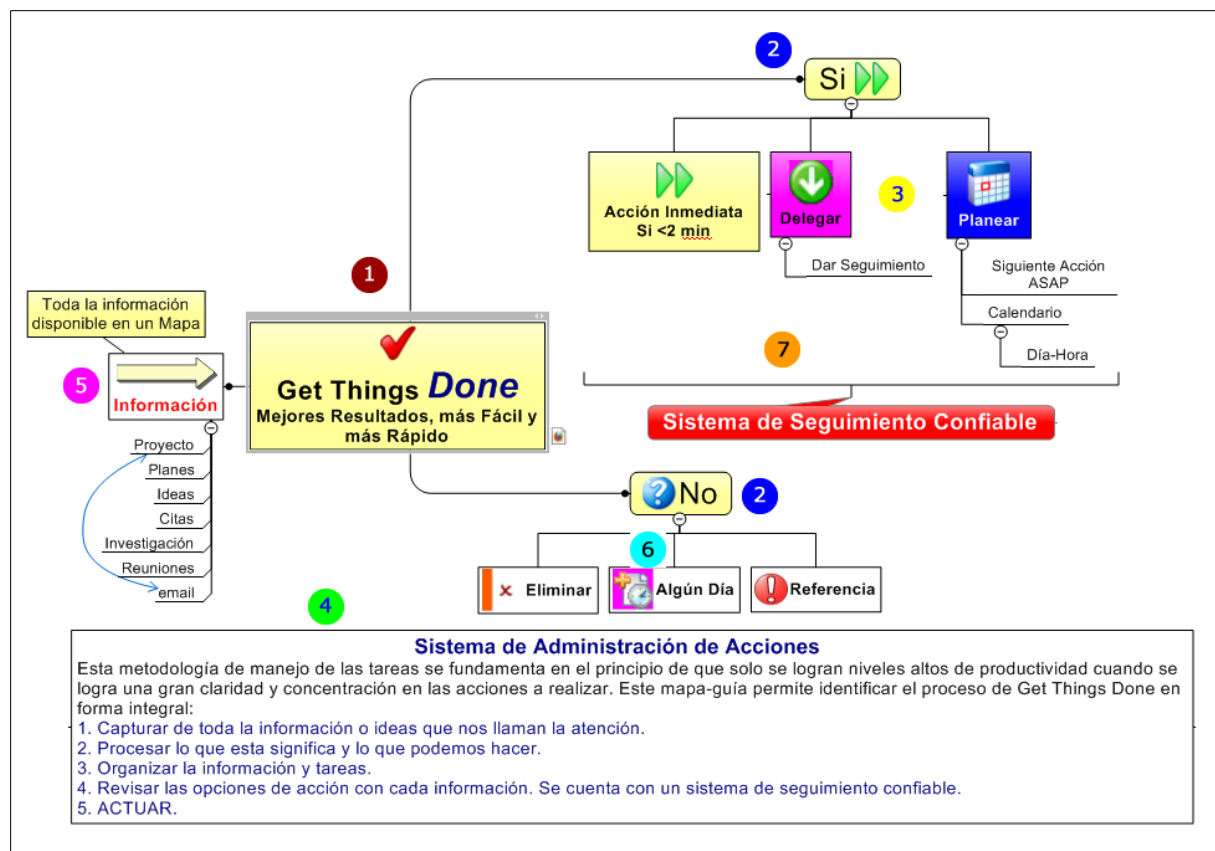
Software used to create: MindManager

Source: MapsForThat! map gallery

URL: <https://www.mapsforthat.com/map.php?m=187>

Overview

Creating a personal dashboard, which you can use to track projects, tasks and your larger life purpose, is a popular use of mind maps. There have been many excellent examples published online. Unfortunately, the subject of this report is not one of them. Compared to all of the great GTD (Getting Things Done) mind maps and templates available, this map seems poorly thought out and confusing. In this report, we'll analyze why this map isn't as effective as it could be, and I'll present some recommendations for improving it.



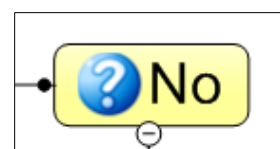
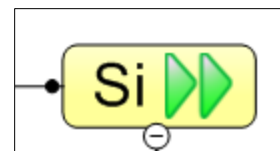
1 Map layout is confusing

When I look at this mind map, I'm not sure where to look first. It's colorful, with much to attract my eye. Part of what makes it visually hard to follow is that it combines elements of a radial map at the first level with top-down map segments for the children of those topics. This makes for a very compact layout for this map template, but what happens when you start to add tasks under the topic Si/Yes? It will push everything below it out of the way. Same with the topics under "no," which appears to be a parking lot for tasks to be eliminated, "some day" (algun dia) and reference items. This section of the map could become quite tall vertically, as you add tasks to it, which would make it much harder to read and navigate.

On another level, the high-level arrangement of this map's topics – yes/no/information – doesn't match any personal productivity system I've ever read about. David Allen's highly regarded Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology focuses on immediate processing all items in our physical and mental "in boxes." We must either do the item now, delegate it or place it in a "some day" pile for periodic consideration. I'm not sure that the binary notion of "yes/no" fits into the ways in which people handle tasks. It's not usually as black and white as that.

2 Inconsistent use of icons

Looking at the top-level topics of this task management mind map, we see items entitled "Si" (yes) and "No." Si utilizes a "fast forward" double right-arrow icon, like you would see on a CD or DVD player. However, the topic No has a question mark icon assigned to it. This is inconsistent. First of all, if you're going to use a fast forward icon for items you do plan to take action on, shouldn't the topic "No" be depicted by a stop icon (in consumer electronics, that's depicted by a square)?



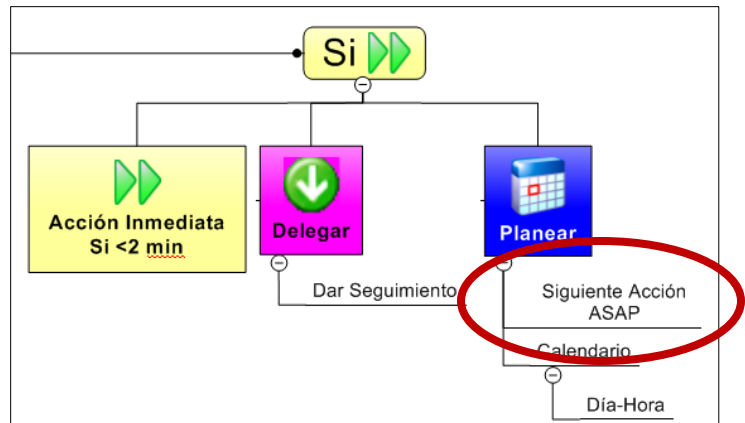
Secondly, the use of a question mark icon for "No" is very confusing. Why should a question be associated with a task that you're going to defer or not do at all?

As we've discussed in previous reports, you need to use icons, symbols and images in a consistent manner that is easy for others to understand. This means you must pretend for a moment that you are a person with whom you'll be sharing this map. Would I, as this other person, understand what this icon or symbol means? If not, eliminate or replace it with

something that does a better job of communicating what you do mean. If you can't find one that does the job, then I'd rather see you let the topic stand on its own, without an icon or symbol, rather than adding one that may confuse people.

3 Unclear task priority scheme

The section of this mind map under the first-level topic "Si" (yes) is supposed to be used for processing those to-dos that you have decided you are going to do. The three subtopics below it, translated into English are (left to right) "immediate action," "delegate" and "plan." Where I got confused is one level deeper in this branch, where one of the subtopics is entitled "Siguiete Acción ASAP," or



"Next Action ASAP." How does this differ from "immediate action?" Presumably, this subtopic is meant to give you an organized way to defer tasks to some future date and time. If that's the case, then a topic that is focused on "next actions ASAP" has no place here.

4 Instructions: A great idea, but could be better

Sistema de Administración de Acciones

Esta metodología de manejo de las tareas se fundamenta en el principio de que solo se logran niveles altos de productividad cuando se logra una gran claridad y concentración en las acciones a realizar. Este mapa-guía permite identificar el proceso de Get Things Done en forma integral:

1. Capturar de toda la información o ideas que nos llaman la atención.
2. Procesar lo que esta significa y lo que podemos hacer.
3. Organizar la información y tareas.
4. Revisar las opciones de acción con cada información. Se cuenta con un sistema de seguimiento confiable.
5. ACTUAR.

I actually like the fact that the author of this mind map created a set of instructions to tell us how to implement this task management system. That would be very helpful on many types of mind maps, because now everything is self-contained: I can see the map, as well as the author's thinking behind it.

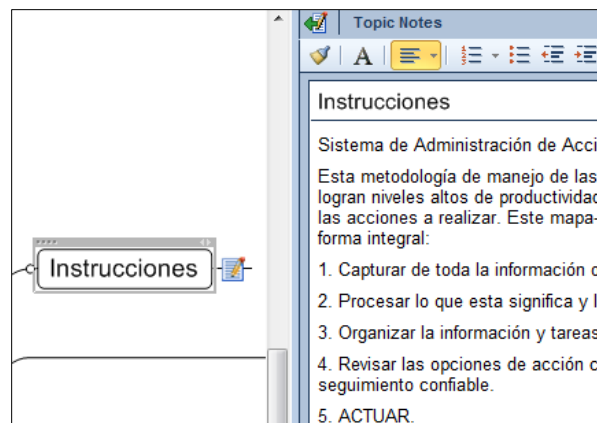
Unfortunately, this set of instructions (roughly translated into English below), only tells us what to do at a very high level – capture your tasks and ideas, process them and take action. What's missing is a brief explanation of what the function of each first-level topic of this map is, and what types of information should be added to each one. Right now, I understand what this mind map is about – what I still need help with is how to use it.

Translation of the instructional text (using Google Translate – not the best translation, but it's fairly understandable):

This method of handling the tasks is based on the principle that only achieve high levels of productivity when it generates a great clarity and focus on actions to be performed. This map guide identifies the Get Things Done process as a whole:

- 1. Capture all the information or ideas that attract attention.*
- 2. Process what this means and what we can do.*
- 3. Organize information and tasks.*
- 4. Review the options for action with each listing. It has a reliable tracking system.*
- 5. ACT.*

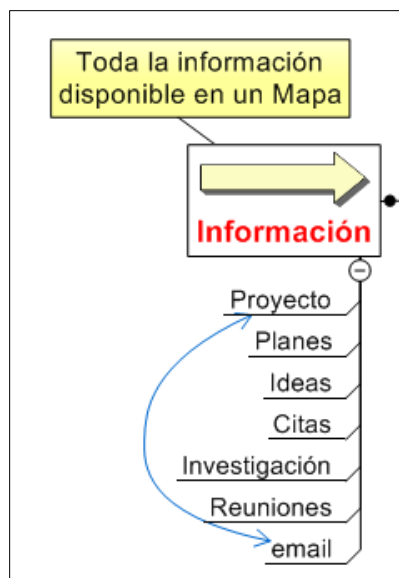
I urge you to think about ways in which you can creatively incorporate instructions into your mind maps. Alternatives to using up this much screen real estate include placing instructional text within a topic note, as shown at right, or using call-outs to provide brief, context-sensitive tips for each topic that needs it. I like the text note the best, because it would do the best job of reducing visual clutter in this map.



5 Information section of this map is confusing

Within this section of the map, its author has created subtopics for projects, plans, ideas, meetings (Reuniones), e-mails and more. It appears to be a “parking lot” for items that you don’t know what to do with, but may want to keep track of. Why would I want to mix important information about current projects and upcoming meetings with items of a more future nature, such as ideas and research (Investigación)?

Even after I translated the call-out for this section of the get things done map, I still wasn’t sure what the author’s intention was in creating this topic. Translated into English, the call-out says, “all information available on map,” but I don’t know what that means.



The other item that I’m not sure about is the relationship line that extends between “Proyecto” (projects) and “email.” How are these two concepts related, and why is it necessary to let us know that they have a reciprocal (2-way) relationship? Presumably, you will be receiving important project-related updates in your e-mail, and they need to be incorporated into your task management system. But that needs to be made more clear in this mind map.

Finally, when I see the term “information” in a mind map, it tells me anything contained within this topic is probably just background or supporting information, not of primary importance. So I will focus my attention elsewhere, looking for visual cues that tell me what I must know in this map. If this section of the map contains project data, that may be a problem, because for most of us, projects are the most important part of what we do for our jobs. I’m not sure what a better term would be for this first-level topic, because I’m not the map’s author and I can’t quite discern what he or she meant to do here. I just know that “information” doesn’t do it for me...

6 What doesn’t belong here?

The topic “No” contains a subtopic entitled “Algún Día,” or “some day.” In the Getting Things Done methodology, the “some day” file is an important but not urgent part of a closed-loop (nothing goes missing) personal information management system. It requires periodic review

(say, perhaps, once a month), so we can determine if any of the items it contains should be moved to our active task or priorities list.

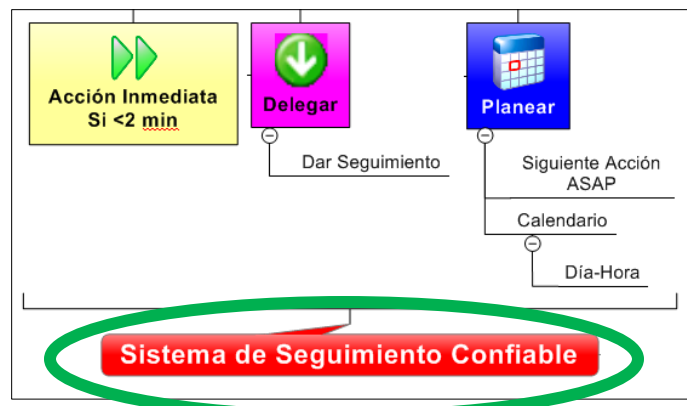
But in this mind map, the author has buried “some day” in with items that are to be deleted (“Eliminar”) and reference (“Referencia”) items. I think that’s a mistake, because it makes it too easy to ignore “some day” items in this parking lot topic.



Considering the importance of “some day” items to the GTD system, I think it ought to have its own first-level topic.

7 This note attracts WAY too much attention

In the middle of this mind map is a red topic with a bracket pointing to the topic Si/Yes and its child topics. This callout is entitled “Sistema de Seguimiento Confiable” or “reliable tracking system” in English. How does this add to our understanding of this mind map? Not at all, in my opinion. On the other hand, its bright red color, large bold font and central location makes it a major distraction. It immediately catches your eye, yet communicates no real information to the person viewing it. If you want to tell people it’s a reliable tracking system, do so in the instructions – not in the middle of your mind map.



What’s missing from this mind map?

This mind map is all about managing your tasks and ideas effectively. But curiously, it doesn’t display any MindManager tasks. A sample task, showing start and end dates, percentage complete and priority, would be very helpful to people viewing this map – so they understand they can use this capability of MindManager to manage their next actions and future follow-up items.

Questions?

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

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