



Mind Mapping Software User Survey

March 2010



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Executive summary

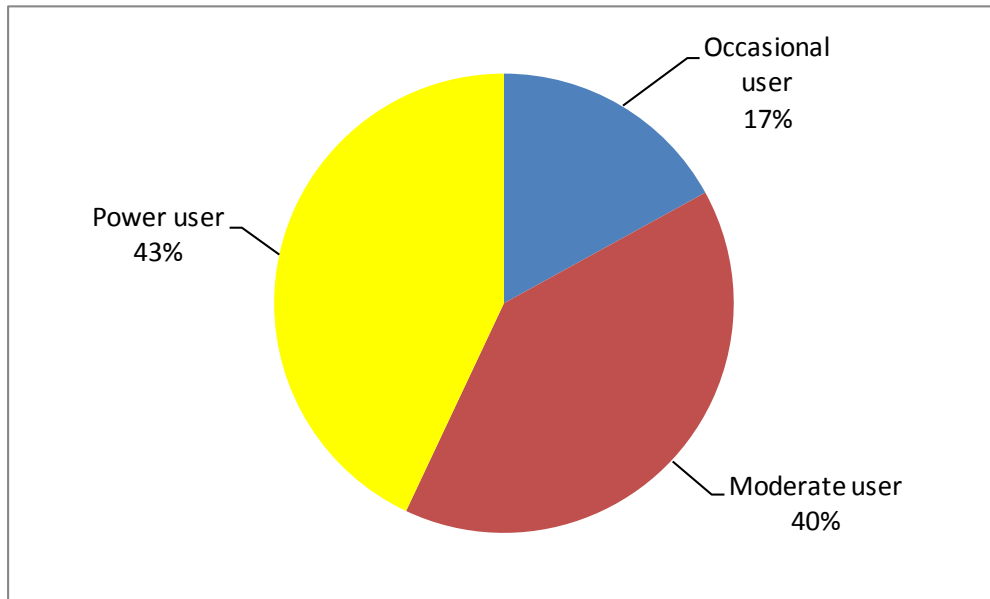
In 2006, I published a landmark survey of mind mapping software users. Never before had anyone quantified how it was being used, or how much of a productivity increase was possible from utilizing this amazing type of productivity software. This survey, conducted nearly 4 years later, was an opportunity to take a fresh snapshot of what you're using, how you're using it and the benefits it provides.

Among the findings of this year's survey:

- Users of mind mapping software say it provides them with a 10-20 percent increase in productivity, which is down slightly from the 2006 survey.
- Achieving clarity of thinking remains the biggest benefit cited by users of mind mapping software. Other benefits have shown steady growth during the last four years, including managing information overload, visualizing relationships between pieces of information and getting better organized.
- Nearly 80% of respondents said that mind mapping software is either an "essential" business tool or one which they use "often" during their work day. In other words, it is assuming a place next to their productivity software suite (Microsoft Office or any number of open-source equivalents) as a tool they depend upon to get their work done efficiently.
- Despite steady growth in popularity, widespread adoption of mind mapping software is still stymied by the same two forces cited by respondents of the 2006 survey: lack of awareness and lack of acceptance by left-brained, linear thinkers – in other words, many managers and leaders, who for the most part still aren't very comfortable with information presented in a visual format.

The bottom line is that mind mapping software needs a bigger push into the mainstream of business worldwide. Although it is talked about extensively in blogs and reviews are written by various computer and technology magazines, all of this amounts to preaching to the choir. More needs to be done to promote it to the general business media, and to upper level managers and leaders.

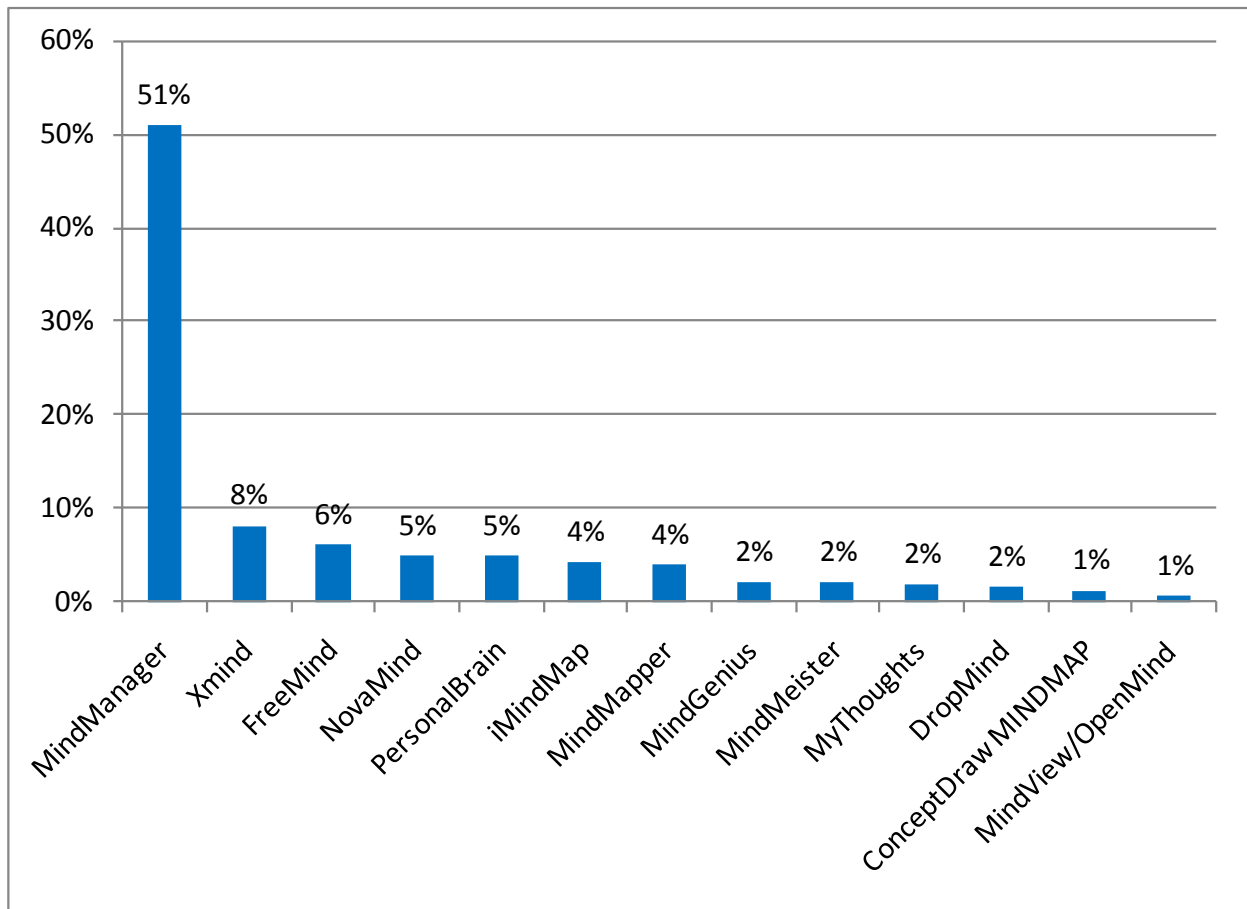
1. What kind of a user of mind mapping software are you?



The respondents to this survey showed a nice mixture of experience levels. Perhaps what was most surprising was the high percentage (43%) of people who consider themselves to be power users. I would have expected something more in the range of 20-30%.

Perhaps one of the reasons that the number of power users is so high is because it's a reflection of how important mind mapping software has become in the work of the people who use it. Or perhaps they are so heavily represented in this survey because they are the primary readers of the Mind Mapping Software Blog. In any case, the nearly even split in experience levels means that the results of this survey should be fairly accurate, since no one group is disproportionately over- or under-represented in the data.

2. What is the primary mind mapping program you use in your work?

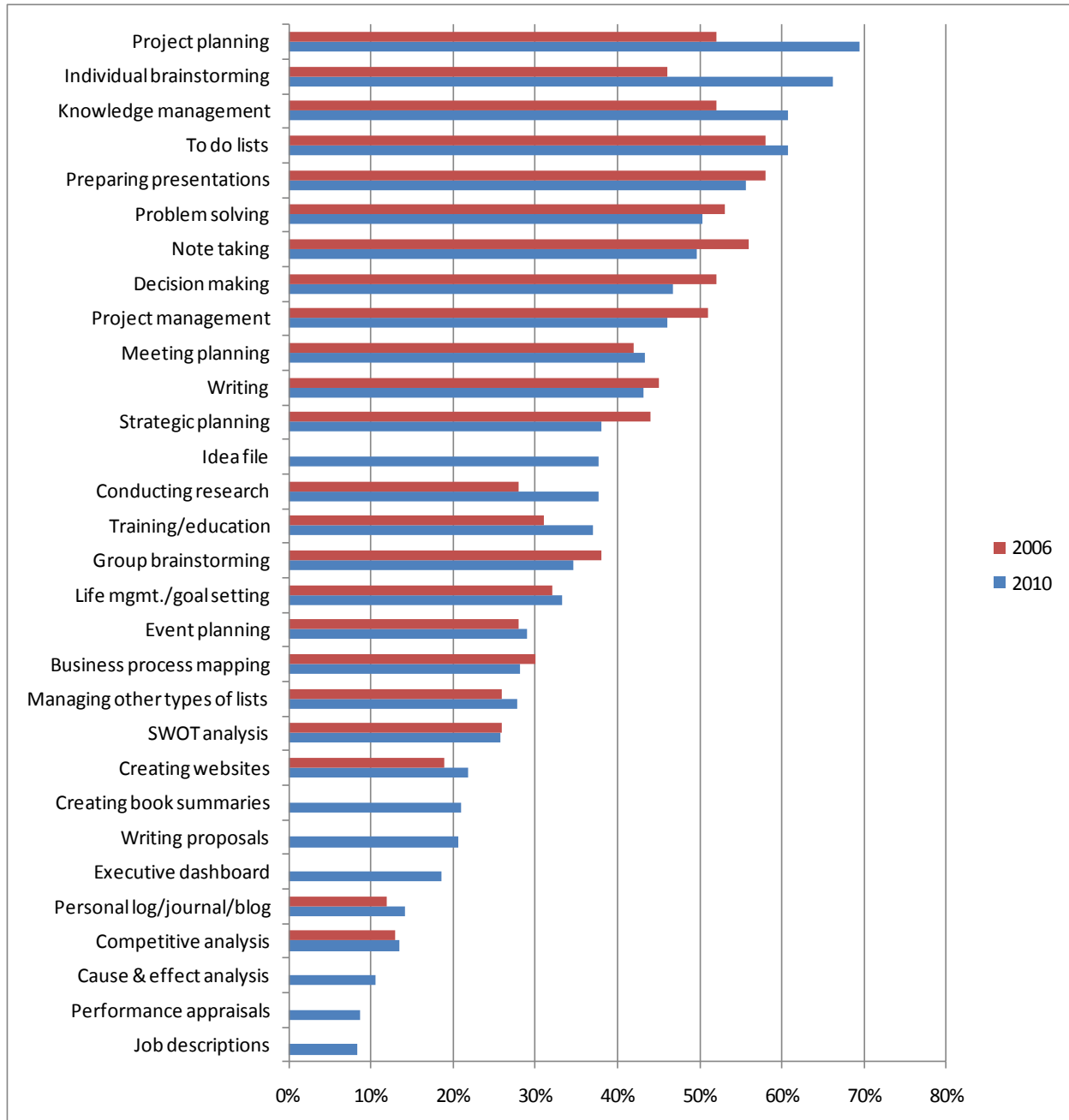


MindManager continues to dominate the market for mind mapping software. No surprise there. But the percentage of respondents who say they use it (51%) is down almost 22% from the 2006 survey. I didn't include the 2006 data in this chart, because it becomes too busy and too confusing. The other software program that experienced a slight decline during the last 4 years was FreeMind, which went down 4%.

The big news in this chart are the programs ranked in the top 6 after MindManager – which includes two programs that didn't exist in 2006: XMind is now the second most used program (8%), according to survey respondents. This is probably in large part due to its decision to offer a free, open-source version of its mind mapping software – which made it the first real no-cost alternative to FreeMind and a great entry point for anyone who is just starting out with visual mapping. The other “new kid on the block” who has done very well is iMindMap, which is now used by 4% of survey respondents.

Don't see your favorite program here? If a program received no responses, or the percentage of use was less than 1%, I didn't include it in this chart, for the sake of clarity.

3. What applications are you currently using mind mapping software for?



One thing that this chart makes abundantly clear is the incredible variety of applications for which mind mapping software can be used. In a business setting, much of what the average

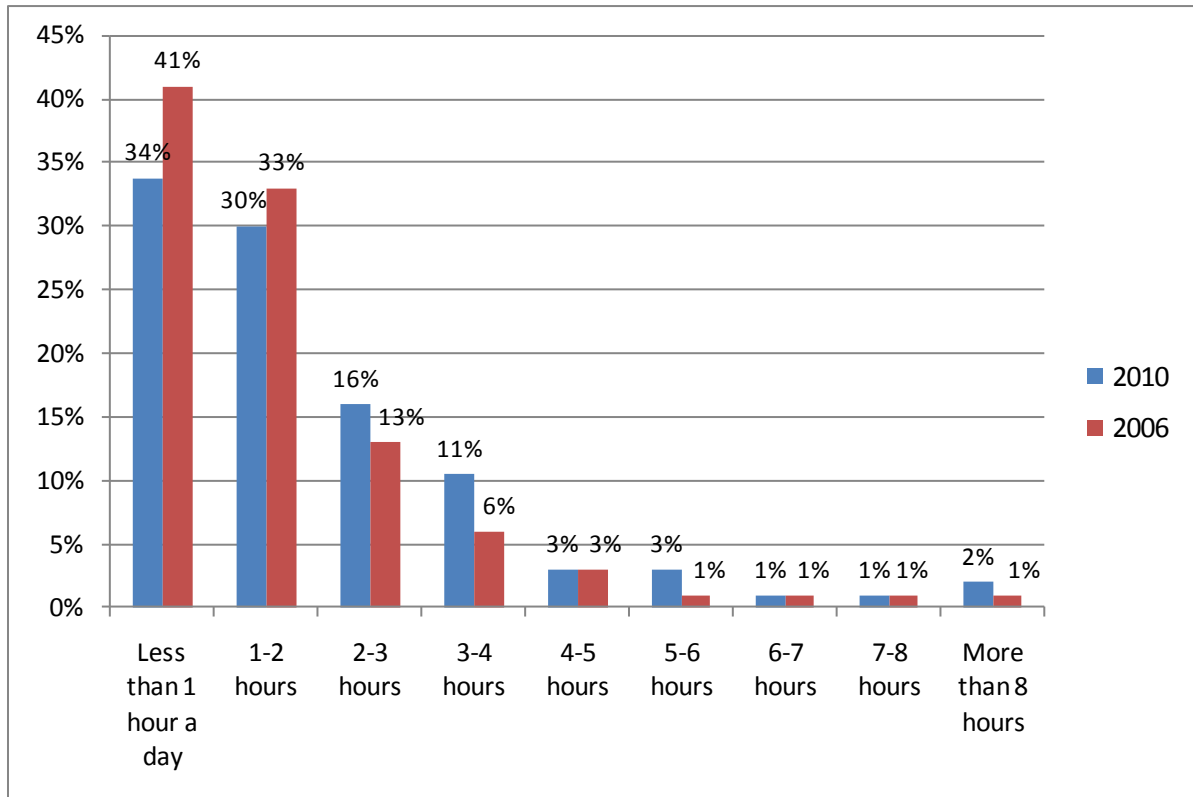
information worker does is gather, distill, organize and disseminate information and knowledge in one way or another. This chart reflects that.

During the last four years, the usage of mind mapping software has shifted somewhat, according to this chart. Project planning increased 18% from 2006 to 2010, while individual brainstorming soared by 20%. Another big gainer was the use of mind mapping software to conduct research, which increased 10%.

Interesting “other” responses to this question included these:

- GTD List Manager
- Link aggregator for website
- Knowledge maps
- Web site (bookmark) and software management
- Tracking key software product bugs
- Personal knowledge base
- Validation and test procedures
- Graphical organizer
- Database interface
- Active capture of anything interesting on the web
- Social network analysis (qualitative)
- Important phone calls
- Issue maps
- Employee management system
- Organizing monthly newsletter content
- Mapping functional hierarchies
- Interview preparation
- Software functional design, test planning and results
- Doctoral dissertation
- Planning conversations
- IT qualifications framework

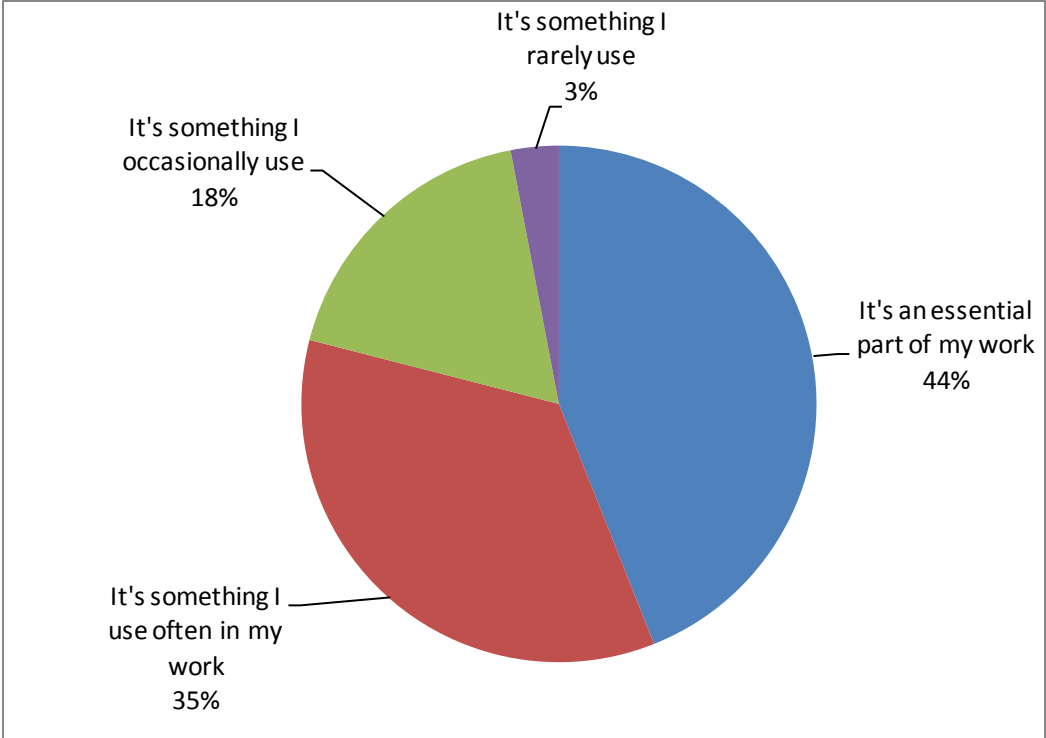
4. How many hours a day do you utilize mind mapping software in your job?



According to this chart, occasional use of mind mapping software (less than 1 hour a day) has dropped off significantly (a decline of 7%). That's not a bad thing, though. If you look at the responses for 2-3 hours and 3-4 hours per day, those numbers are on the way up, posting 3% and 5% increases, respectively. Above the range of 4 hours a day, usage of mind mapping software remained steady between 2006 and 2010.

That chart says that mind mapping software is steadily becoming a bigger part of the average respondent's work day.

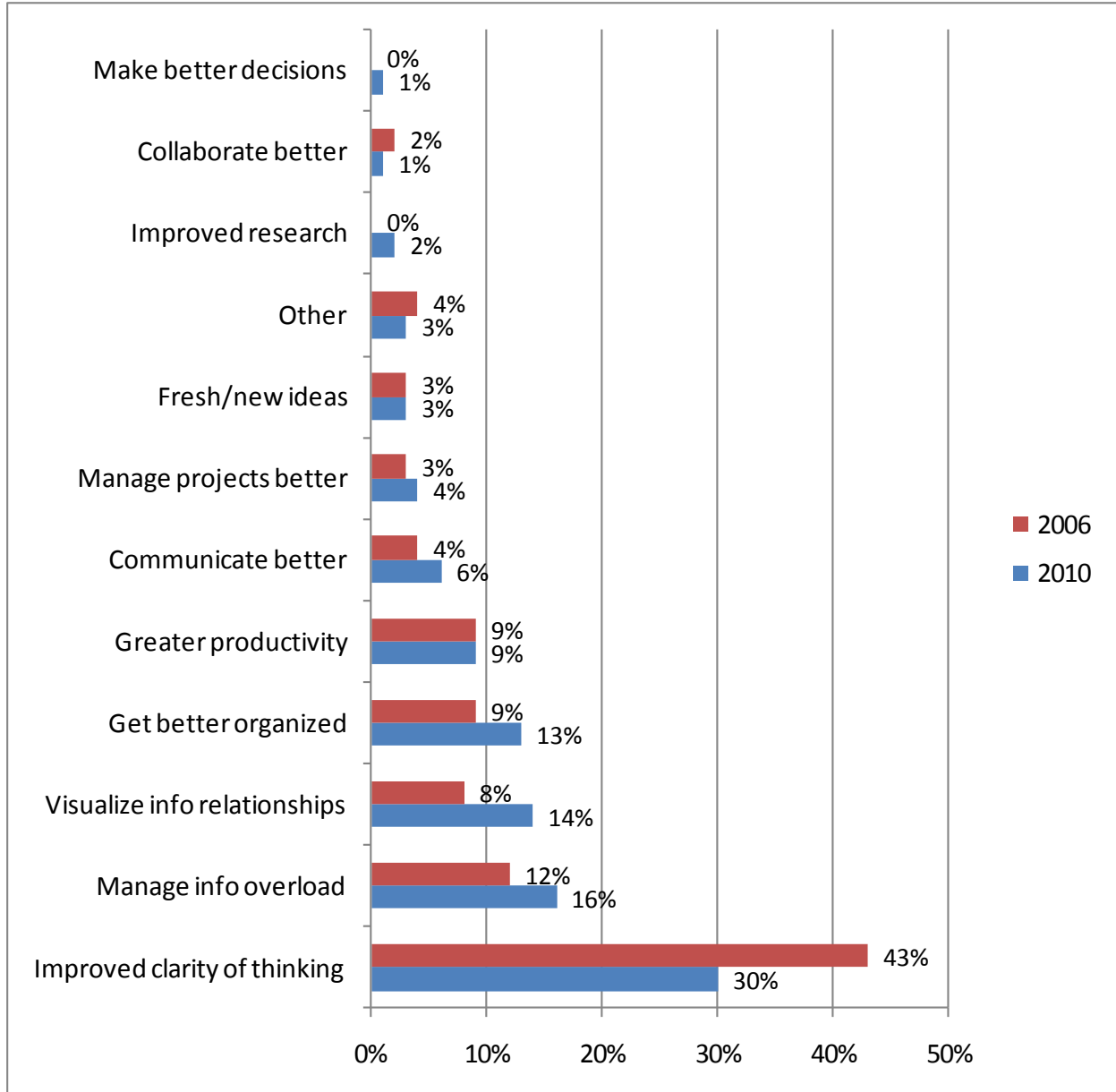
5. How would you characterize your business use of mind mapping software?



The responses to this question point to the growing importance of mind mapping software as a key business tool: Nearly half of respondents (44%) said “it’s an essential part of my work,” while another one-third (35%) said they use it often.

If you roll those two numbers together, almost 80% of respondents said that mind mapping software is a business tool that is an important part of their work day. That’s very impressive!

6. What is the biggest benefit you've experienced from mind mapping software?



The biggest benefit of mind mapping software to its users continues to be clarity of thinking, by almost a 2-to-1 margin. But the percentage of users who say this is its primary benefit to them dropped by 13% from 2006 to 2010.

Big gainers over the last four years were visualizing information relationships (up 6%) and getting better organized and managing information overload (both up 4%). Information overload continues to be a major challenge for most knowledge workers; in this context, it's encouraging that a growing number of respondents view mind mapping software as a remedy to it.

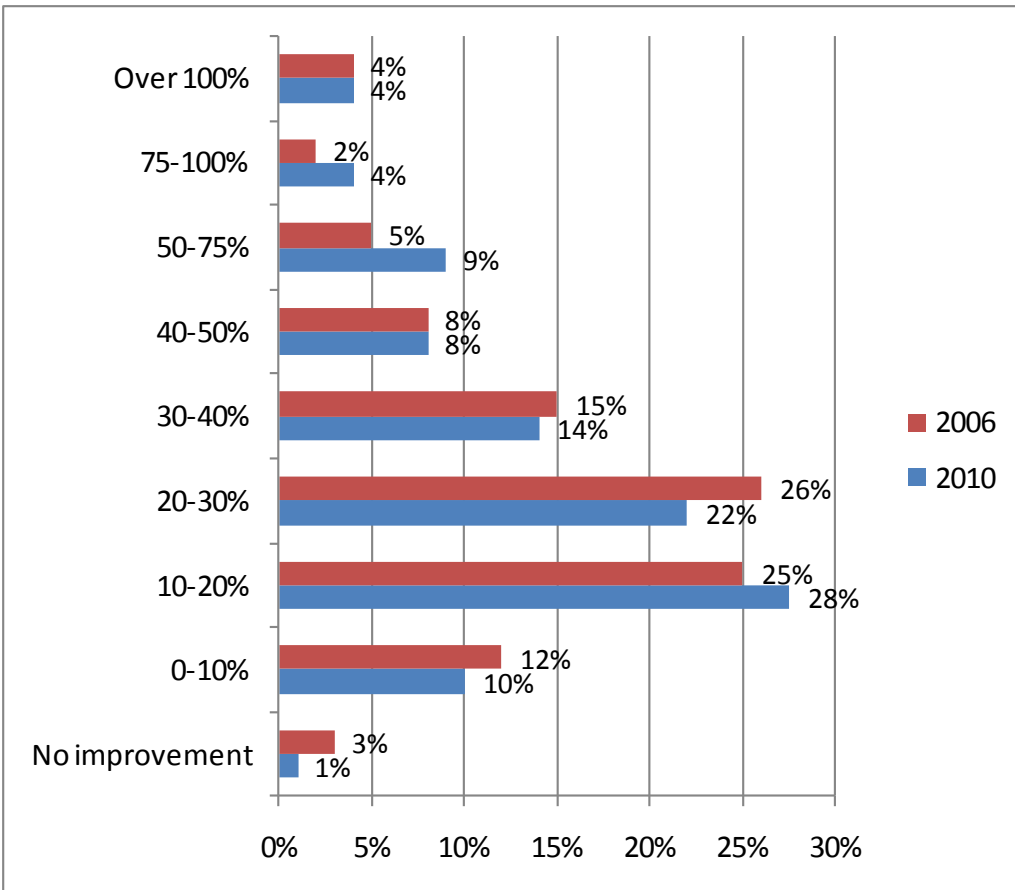
One of the surprising findings in this chart is that “traditional” benefits of mind mapping were ranked fairly low in the hierarchy of benefits: Only 4% of respondents said it helps them to manage projects better, and only 3% viewed it as a tool for generating fresh ideas and insights. It appears that mind mapping software is valued most as a tool for gathering, organizing, distilling and sharing information.

Keep in mind as you look at this chart that this question only asked respondents to select the single biggest benefit of mind mapping software to them. Had we asked them to list all of the benefits or to rank them, what we’d probably find is that this type of productivity software actually provides each of its users with multiple benefits (mental note for the next survey – set up the question so you can rank to what extent each benefit applies to you).

In fact, if you look at the “other” responses to this question, that’s what a third of them tell us: That they believe several or most of these benefits are important to them:

- Synthesize
- Make a picture of information / project
- Most of the above
- Saves time
- All of the above
- Repository of subject focus
- At least 7 items of this list
- Point people to mindmap; (it) saves time
- Why choose one? It helps with all the mentioned above

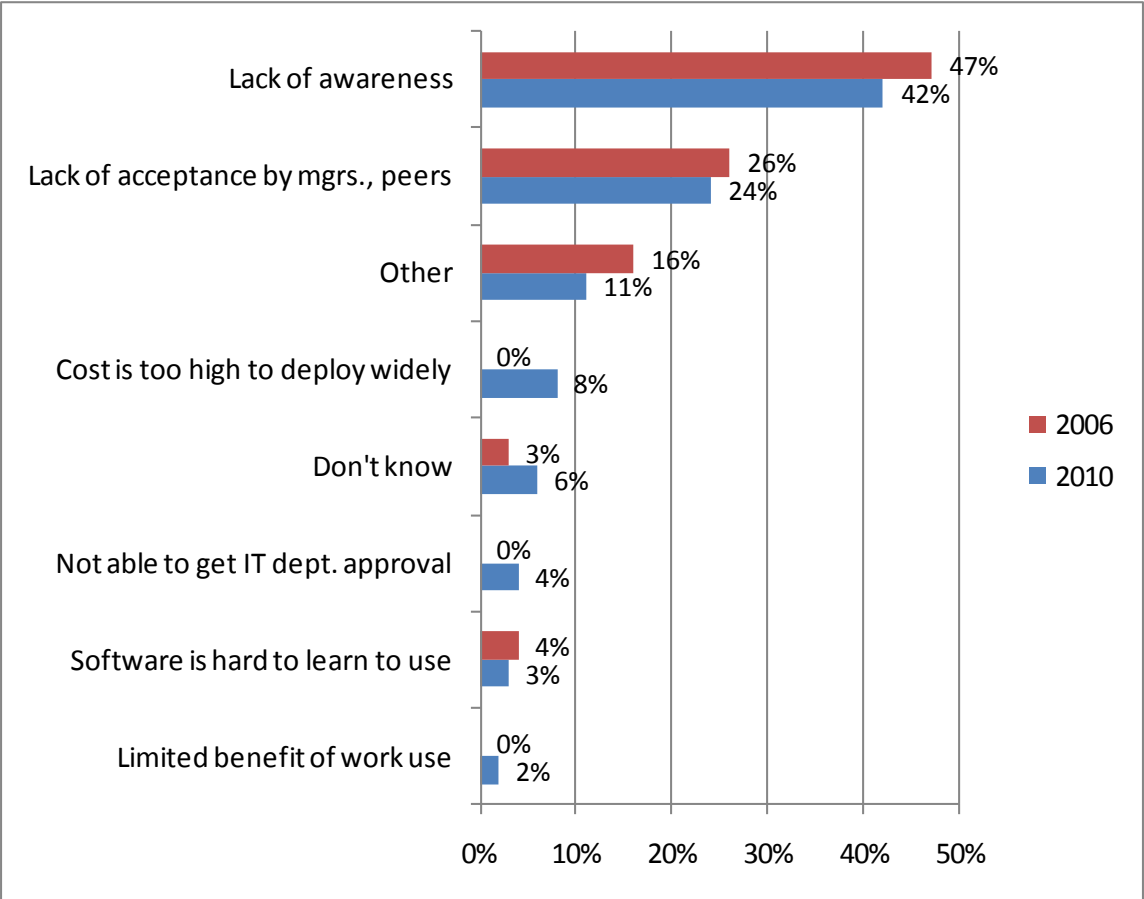
7. If you had to quantify the productivity increase that mind mapping software has enabled in your work, how much would that be?



One of the biggest overall benefits of mind mapping software is the way in which it helps people to be more productive. Survey respondents quantified this increase in their efficiency at between 10-20% in this year's survey. In 2006, the increase was almost evenly split between 10-20% and 20-30%, so we called it an average increase of 20%. That result turned out to be consistent with several other studies that were subsequently conducted of users of mind mapping software.

Why the decrease in 2010? Perhaps because users have been working with this type of software for a longer period of time (remember, the majority of respondents consider themselves to be power users), the newness of experiencing its productivity-enhancing benefits have become more routine, part of their baseline performance. So they don't rate it as highly as they did 4 years ago.

8. What's holding mind mapping software back from becoming more widely accepted in business?



Lack of awareness is the biggest impediment to the increased adoption of mind mapping software in business, according to nearly half (47%) of the respondents of this year’s survey. But the percentage of respondents who cited this as the biggest challenge dropped 5% between 2006 and 2010.

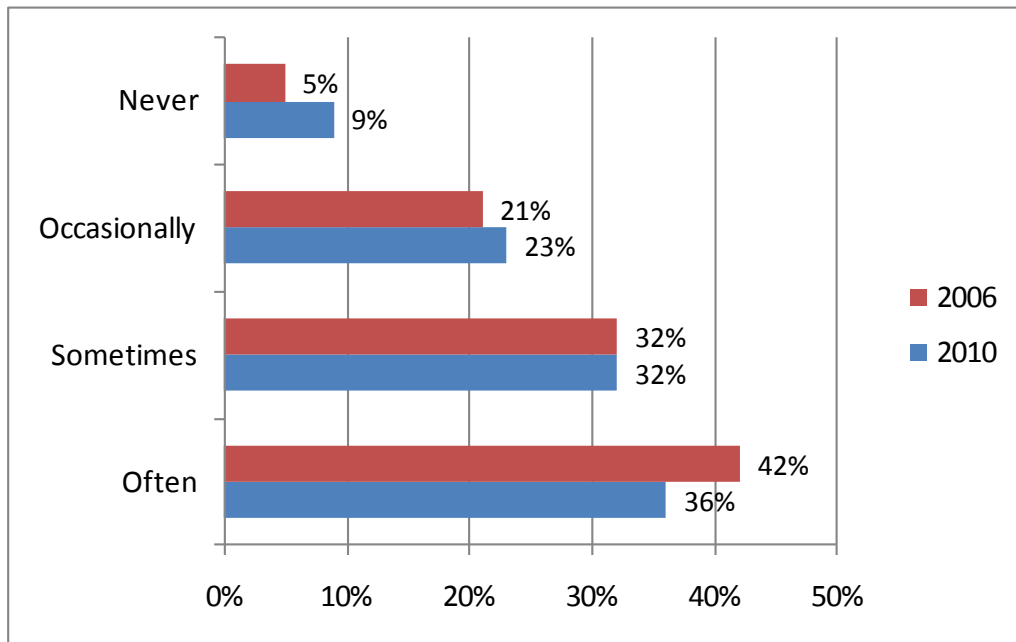
The second highest response, lack of acceptance by managers and coworkers (24%), reflects one of the “great divides” of mind mapping software – it tends to appeal to right-brained workers who are more creative. More pragmatic linear thinkers (which describes the majority of business people around the world) don’t really understand the benefits of capturing information, knowledge and ideas in a colorful, non-linear format – which they tend to view as frivolous and unnecessary.

Clearly, this question struck a nerve, because it generated a large number of “other” responses (just as it did in 2006). Here’s a sampling of what respondents had to say:

- Exporting map to other applications
- Formatting - being able to share it in a usable manner with other software apps
- Not only acceptance of visual maps, but à culture's change too
- More applicable training
- Different cognitive styles
- Using this tool is a change - many people need to go through the process of becoming aware, wanting the benefits, knowing how to use a tool, etc. before it becomes adopted in an organization
- Many people are not visual thinkers and it is a big problem
- Mindmaps are still too highly personal
- Inability to publish (Mindmaps) to (the) web
- Mind Maps are very personal and can hardly been shared with people that did not take part to their creation.
- Not knowing 98% of how to use it and do not commit time in learning and experiencing it. At the beginning it takes time to get familiar with it.
- Need some use of it to appreciate full benefits (vicious circle)
- Cost (is a factor in) lack of acceptance
- The term "mind mapping"
- Unclear what is best business use and target users (does too many things too many ways)
- Lack of standards for transferring data between mind mapping applications, including between desktop and cloud apps.
- Lack of consistent use by staff
- Recognize that some people just aren't visual and they will never get mindmapping
- It's not a part of any major productivity suite, such as Microsoft (Office), Zoho, OpenOrg, Google Docs, etc.
- Mind Map software (programs) do not effectively open any but their own documents. Each lives in its own isolated, 14th century "city-state."
- People are hesitant to think outside of their normal routine
- The accessibility implications of broadly implementing a highly visual, GUI tool
- I very rarely have used a map in a graphical form since not many people have the software to see it; almost always, the output is a document in a Word or PowerPoint document
- Lack of appreciation of information overload and of benefits of mapping
- Not easy enough to share with non-users.
- Reluctance to change

- Requires a behavior change for tasks that have been done a certain way for a long time. If not willing to keep an open mind and try on multiple projects, (mind mapping software) never gets a fair shake
- Perceived as difficult to use and learn
- Doesn't seem business-like, too artsy
- Top managers (are) unaware of the benefits

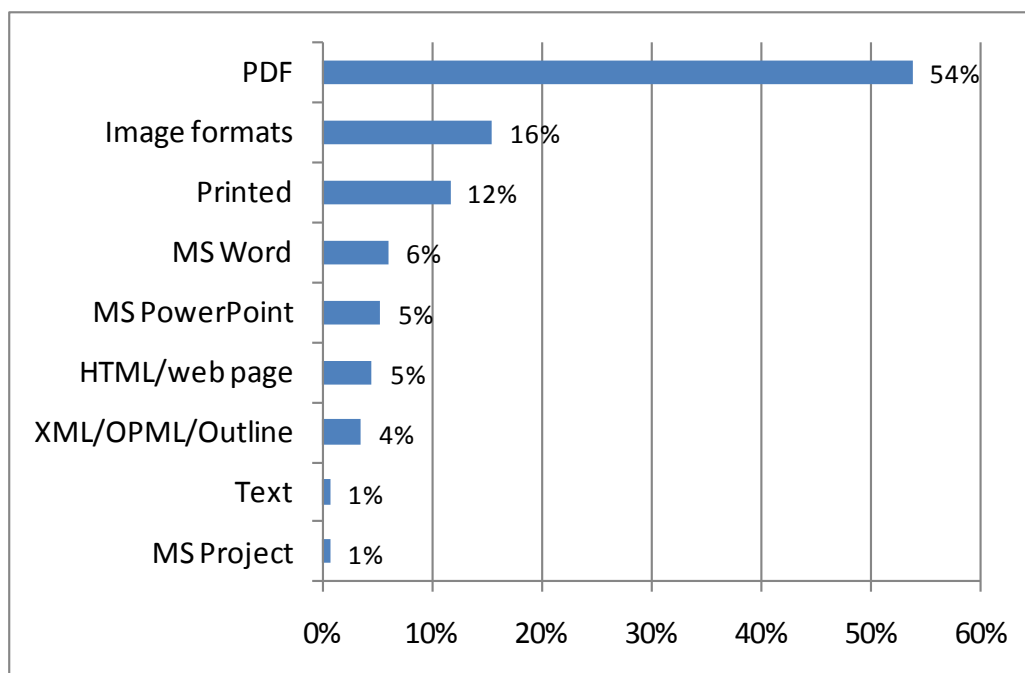
9. Do you share the maps you create with team members or colleagues?



Surprisingly, the percentage of respondents who say they share mind maps they create with others “often” dropped 8% from 2006 to 2010; at the same time, the percentage of people who never share their maps with team members or colleagues increased by 4%.

One likely explanation: Because mind mapping software isn’t widely used in most organizations, users must often convert their maps into more common file formats such as Word documents or PowerPoint presentations.

10. In what formats do you usually share your mind maps?



This was an open-ended question, answered by 283 respondents. Many people said they shared their maps in multiple formats; I went through the list of verbatim responses and compiled the results shown above. More than half of respondents (54%) share their mind maps in PDF format. This isn't surprising, because typically only one or a handful of people in an organization have mind mapping software installed on their computers, and PDF has become the de facto standard for sharing read-only information with others who don't have a visual mapping tool installed on their computers.

One interesting item of note: MindManager can now publish mind maps to a Flash-enhanced PDF format, which enables recipients to expand and collapse map branches, and to click on file and web page links. Of the people who said they export their maps to a PDF file format, 4% (12 respondents) specifically mentioned that they publish to this enhanced format.

The next most common format for sharing mind maps was as image files (16%). Responses included GIF, JPG, TIF and PNG file formats; I rolled these up into a single "image formats" category. Images are easy to embed in other applications, such as Microsoft Word documents or PowerPoint presentations.

The third most popular format for sharing mind maps is simply printing them out (12%). Because mind mapping is a new concept to many linear thinkers, it makes sense that survey respondents commonly print out their mind maps for sharing in small group meetings, so they can help other participants to understand their contents.

I would have thought that exporting mind maps to Microsoft Word (6%) and PowerPoint (5%) would be more popular than survey respondents said they were. I'm especially surprised that the Microsoft Word percentage isn't higher, because most mind mapping programs make it easy to create a visual outline of a report, article, proposal, white paper or other business document. When exported to Word, topics and subtopics become heading styles, while topic notes are converted to a standard paragraph style. This gives the writer a very well-organized rough draft that they can then embellish with additional details. So why don't more people use this capability? It's a mystery to me.

11. What applications of mind mapping software would you like to know more about?

I will be using the responses to this question to tailor the content of the Mind Mapping Software Blog more closely to your needs. Therefore, I will not be sharing the results of this question in this report.

12. What else do you need to know about mind mapping software?

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Questions?

Please contact:

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