



Effective Mind Maps

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

Type of map: Project management – lessons learned

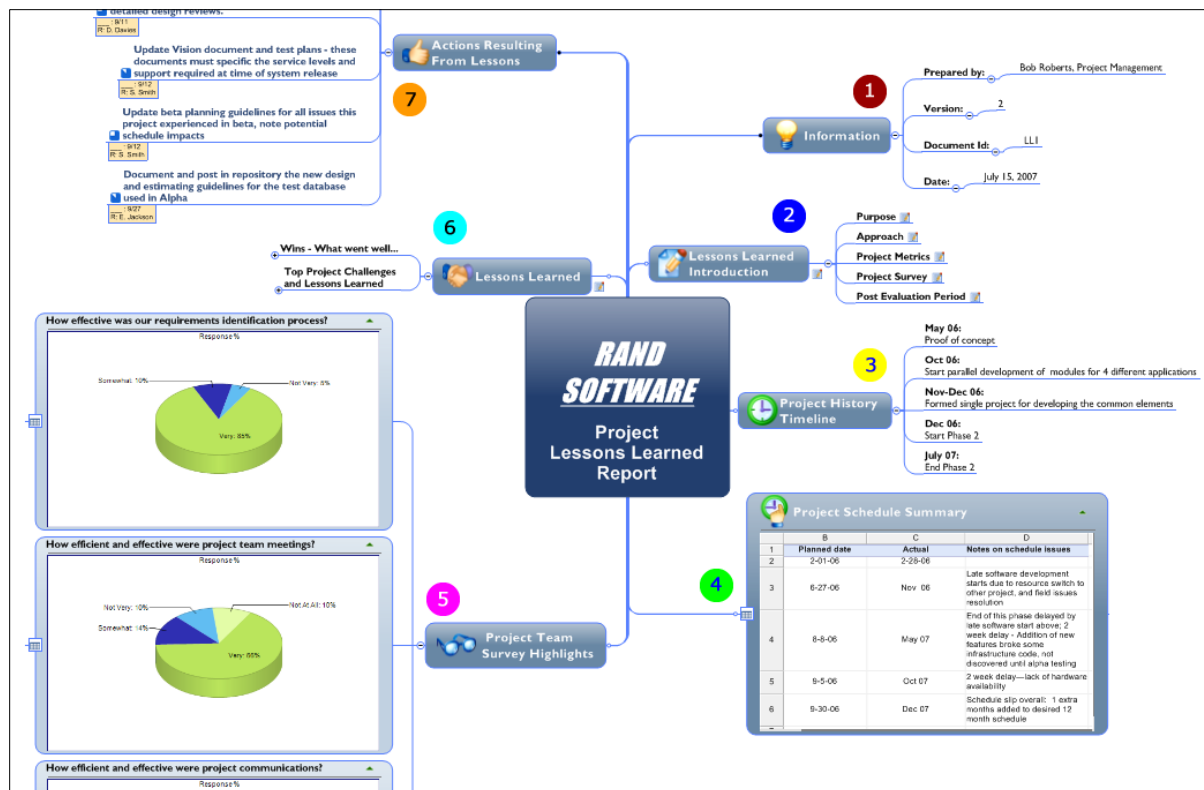
Software used to create: MindManager 8

Source: Mindjet website

URL: <http://www.mindjet.com/support/template-gallery/overview>

Overview

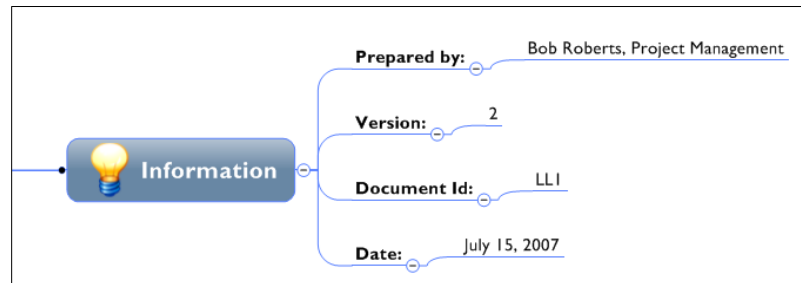
A common use of mind maps in business is to manage complex projects. But much less common is utilizing it to capture the team's learnings – what went well, what needed improvement, and what the team will do differently during the next project. By capturing this information, a project team can ensure that it doesn't repeat the same mistakes again. This is a valuable exercise, which shouldn't be overlooked by project teams. After all, if you don't learn from your mistakes, then you're probably doomed to repeat them again.



This map is very well designed, and contains some features that significantly increase its value. In addition, it contains several elements that you may want to consider incorporating into many of your business-focused mind maps, because they are simply effective mapping practices. Please use the colorful numbered call-outs to follow along as we deconstruct this mind map.

1 Map version

This is one of those map elements that you may want to consider integrating into many of your mind maps. On a single branch, it summarizes the author of the mind map, the date on which it was created and, most



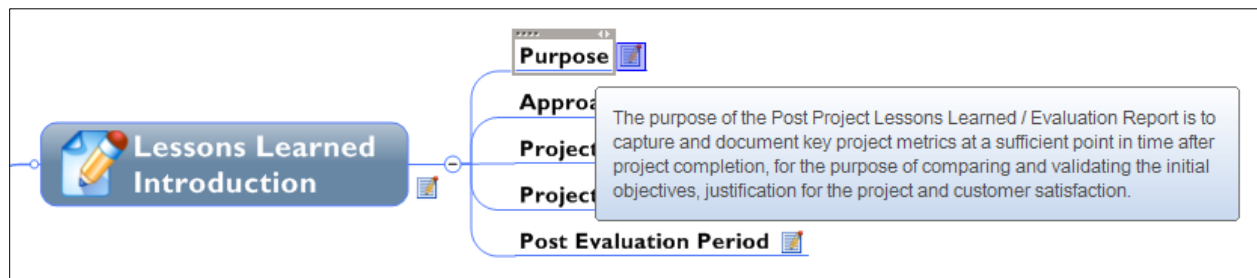
importantly, the version. A complex mind map is likely to go through a number of iterations, especially if it needs to be approved by one or more managers, or if other team members will be reviewing it for accuracy and completeness. A version number helps to ensure that you're always working with the latest and most up-to-date iteration of it.

This topic could also be used to record other meta-data, such as:

- The location in which it is stored on your firm's computer network (useful if you're viewing a printout of this map, and want to be able to locate the mind map file),
- A revision timeline (who approved it and when – which may be useful for others to see farther along the approval process), and
- The name of the project to which this "lessons learned" map refers.

Just a few ideas to get you thinking; I'm sure you can come up with additional types of meta-data that would fit your needs.

2 Lessons learned introduction

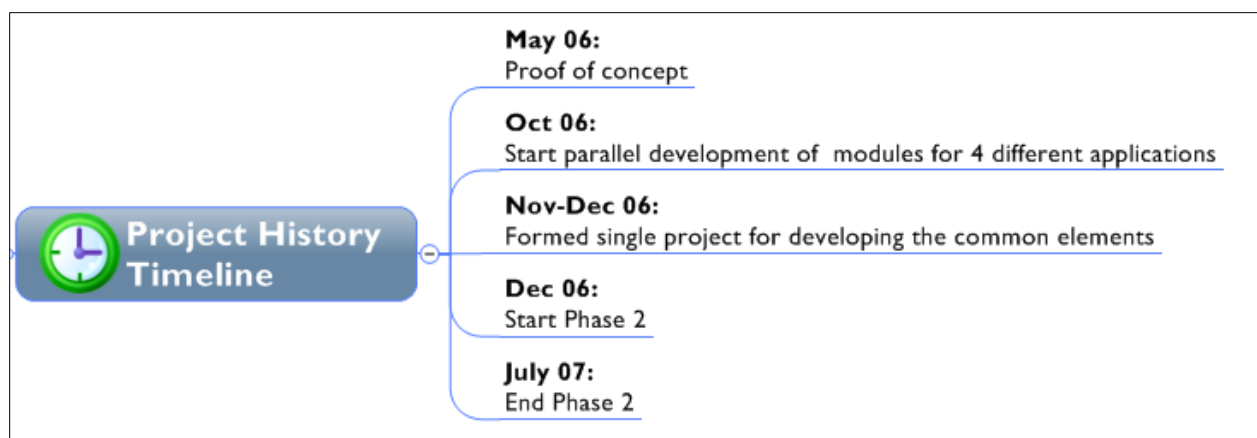


One of the problems with many mind maps is that they don't take into consideration the needs of their target audience. You understand the nuances of your mind map because you created it. Each topic, sub-topic and embellishment has full meaning to you. But your team members, colleagues, customers and other key stakeholders will be viewing the map out of context – without all of the background that you may be taking for granted.

That's why this “introduction” topic is a marvelous addition to this lessons learned mind map, because it does an excellent job of providing that missing context. It employs a series of topics and notes, which stakeholders can read to understand the purpose of it and what they will learn from it.

Like the document version topic, this introduction topic idea is one that you can easily employ on many of your mind maps – especially if they will be shared with others!

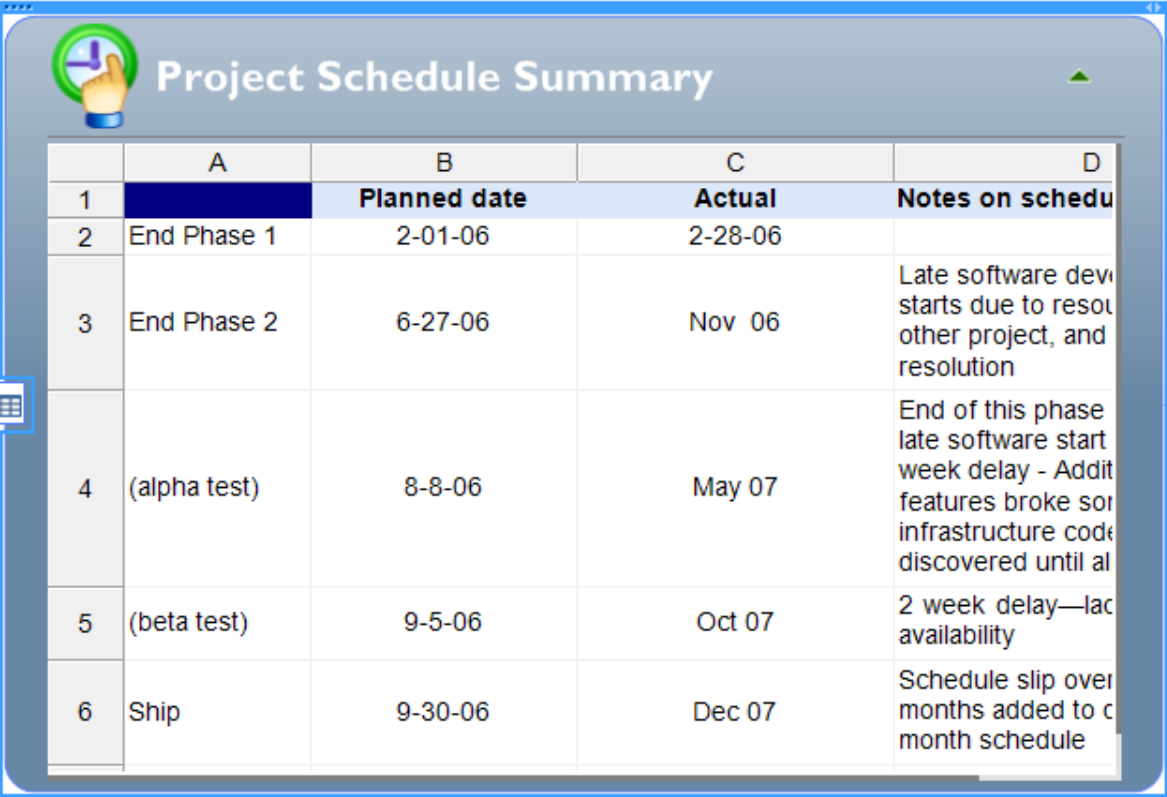
3 Project history timeline



This topic is more useful background information for any colleagues or key stakeholders who will be viewing this map. By summarizing the key milestones of the project, anyone can get an accurate mental picture of this project's arc, from its inception, through key stages and on to its completion.

I also like the neat and easy to read two-line format that the map author employed to lay out the subtopics: The top line utilizes bold formatting to provide a framework, while the line below it in normal text format displays the data for that month and year. It's nicely structured and easy to read and understand.

4 Project schedule and summary



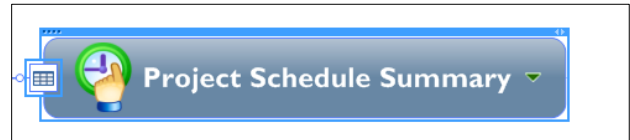
The screenshot shows a window titled "Project Schedule Summary" with a hand icon pointing to a clock. Inside the window is a table with 4 columns (A, B, C, D) and 6 rows of data. The table is styled with a blue header and alternating light and dark grey rows. A small calendar icon is visible on the left side of the window.

	A	B	C	D
1		Planned date	Actual	Notes on schedule
2	End Phase 1	2-01-06	2-28-06	
3	End Phase 2	6-27-06	Nov 06	Late software development starts due to resolution of other project, and resolution
4	(alpha test)	8-8-06	May 07	End of this phase late software start week delay - Additional features broke some infrastructure code discovered until all
5	(beta test)	9-5-06	Oct 07	2 week delay—lack of availability
6	Ship	9-30-06	Dec 07	Schedule slip over months added to current month schedule

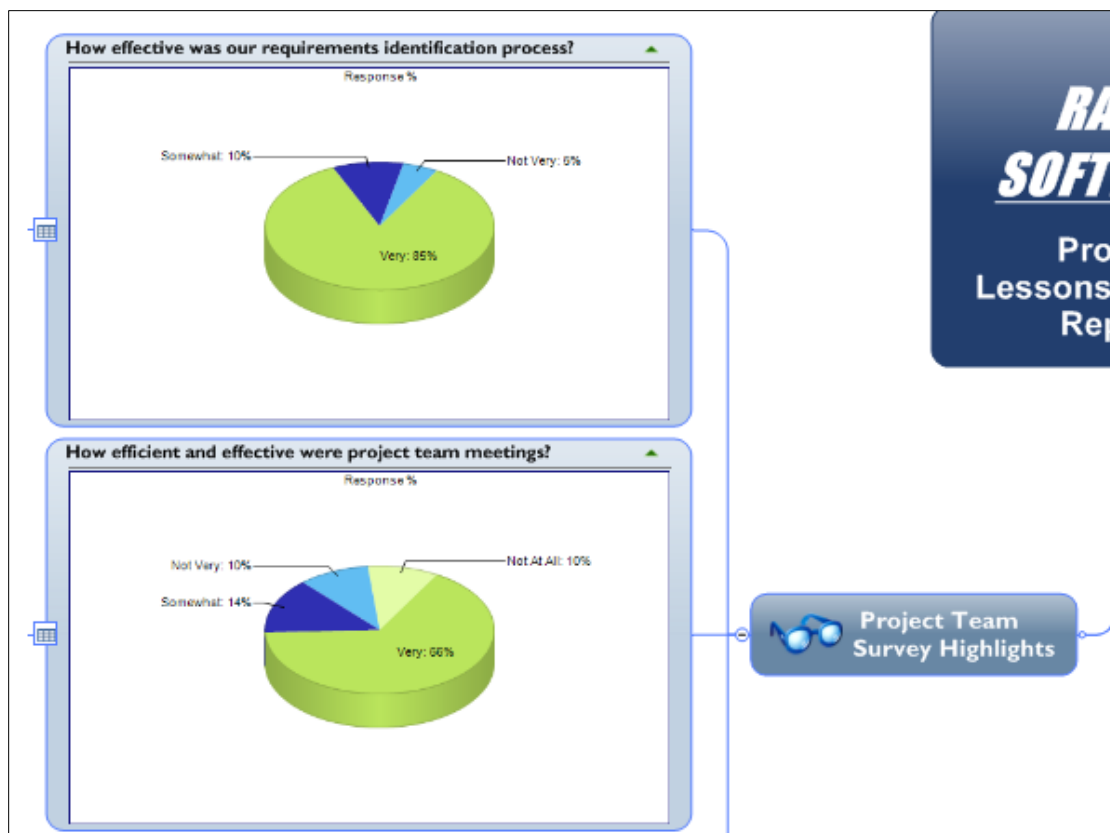
One of the nice things about the latest high-end mind mapping software is that it makes it possible to embed key business data into your mind maps – such as this spreadsheet range. Some programs enable you to import Excel spreadsheet cell ranges, while others enable you to create ad-hoc mini-spreadsheets directly in the mind mapping application, as this map's author did here.

This mini-spreadsheet does an excellent job of comparing the planned completion date of each project phase, its actual completion date and the reasons behind the variance.

One final point: The mind map format makes it easy to hide this spreadsheet if we don't want to view these details, as shown at right.



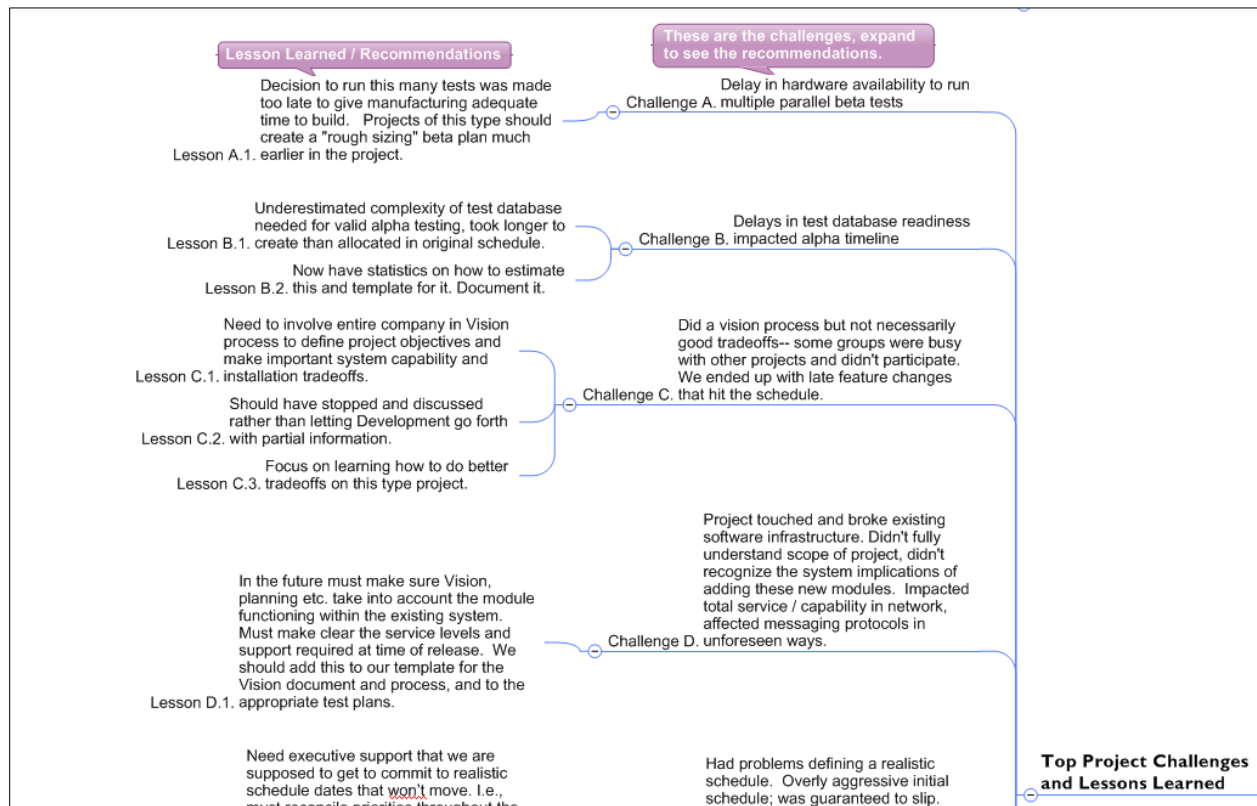
5 Project team survey highlights



I think it's really interesting that this team's post-project analysis contains the results of a survey on project communications, because this is where many projects tend to break down. The authors have used MindManager's capability of embedding mini-spreadsheet cell ranges directly in the mind map, and then displaying them as pie charts to add some really valuable "soft" data (based on stakeholder perceptions) to the "hard" (observable, measurable) project data. This data is nicely presented, and adds a lot of visual interest and appeal to this mind map.

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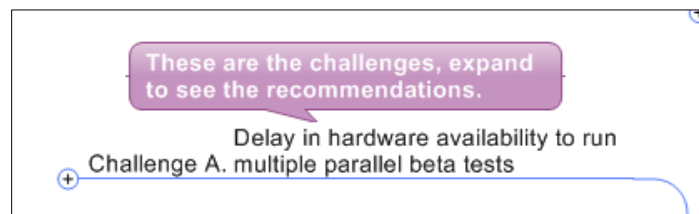
Lessons learned

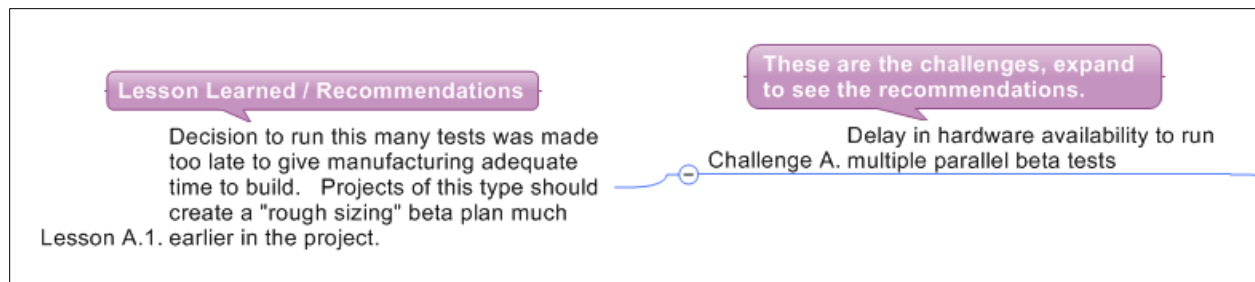


This section of the mind map contains its greatest value. In the segment of the map above, its author breaks down the top challenges the team faced, and what was learned from each one. Note the cause/effect relationships between topics and sub-topics: "Here's what went wrong, and here's what we learned from it."

I'd like to call your attention to several other innovative touches that make this section of the mind map work really well. The author has thoughtfully included several callouts that help

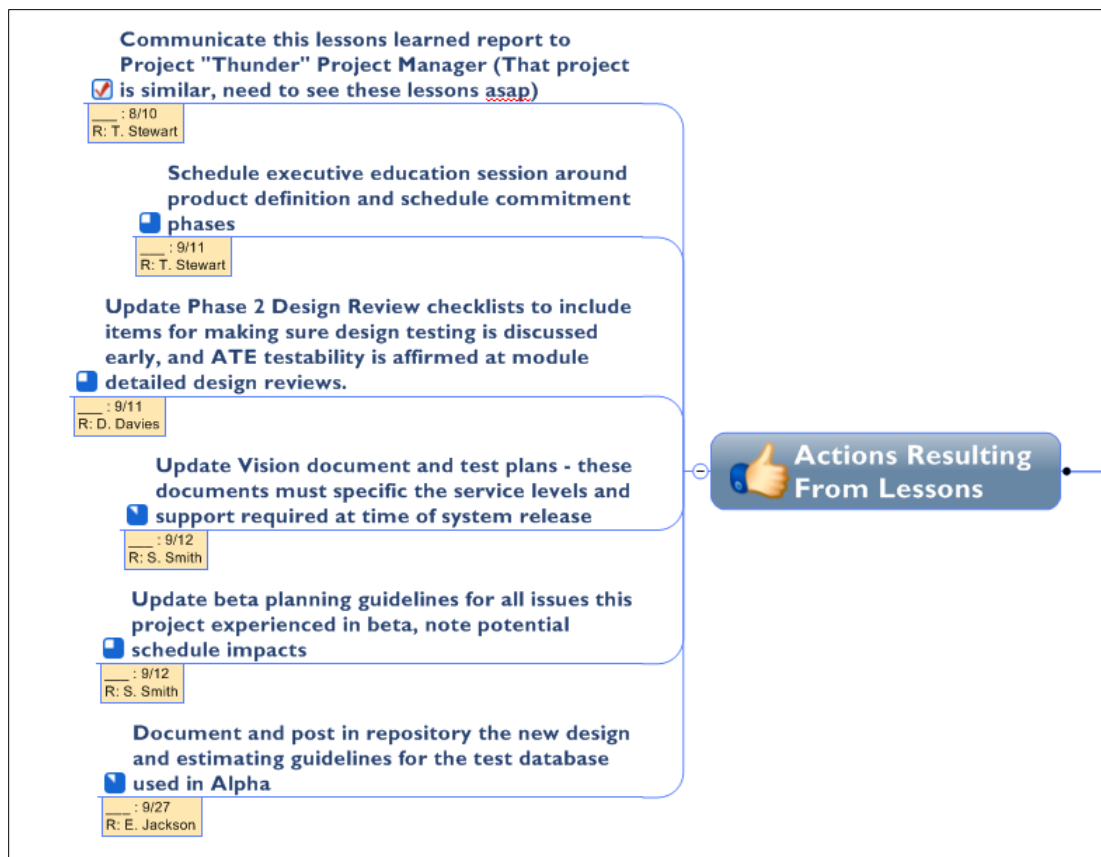
stakeholders viewing the map to understand that, if this branch of the map is collapsed, it does contain more detail (see the screen shot, right). I think this is an excellent practice.





Once this branch of the map is fully expanded, note how the set of both callouts together resemble column headers on a spreadsheet (see the screen shot, above). Effectively, the author has created a two-column list, with the column on the right displaying challenges and the one on the left, their corresponding lessons and recommendation. I think this is simple but quite brilliant!

7 Actions resulting from lessons



Now that we've identified what went wrong and processed the lessons learned, it's time to identify corrective actions and the people responsible for them. That's the focus of this branch of the lessons learned mind map. Note how each action step contains a percentage complete icon, plus a resource box (the yellow rectangle that appears at the left end of each topic line) that indicates to whom each action item has been assigned.

Think about how you can give you business mind maps more of a bias for action. What are the next steps? Who is responsible? When does each item need to be done? This is where the task functionality of your mind mapping program comes into play. If you haven't explored this aspect of the program you're using, now would be a good time to get familiar with it, because it's an indispensable part of managing any project.

If you're using MindManager, open the map markers panel and create resources for each person on your team – or each person who is involved in the project. This little visual touch makes it easy to see at a glance to whom each task is assigned. I've used MindManager for years, and never used this capability – until I started to work on a complex project (a newsletter) that required me to solicit input from several dozen people. If I didn't receive the information I needed for a particular part of the project, I could simply glance at the resource block to quickly see who I needed to follow up with – a real time-saver!

Questions?

Please contact Chuck Frey at chuck@innovationtools.com.

Please [visit the Mind Mapping Software Blog](#) for all of the latest news, trends and resources related to visual mapping.

You can also [follow Chuck Frey on Twitter](#) for even more insights and ideas.

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