The New World of Project Management
The new world of project management

As the speed of business continues to increase and projects become more complex, managers need better tools to help them plan and implement projects, monitor their status and communicate effectively with team members and stakeholders. Mind mapping software has emerged as a powerful tool that is particularly well-suited to project management.

Dedicated project management software programs like Microsoft Project and Primavera are overkill for many of today’s projects. These enterprise-level programs were designed to manage mega-projects that with hundreds of tasks and complex dependencies. Today’s manager needs a simpler, more flexible alternative that is a better match with today’s project design, management and reporting needs.
Fortunately, there is a solution to this challenge: mind mapping software.

According to Paul Williams, author of the book Visual Project Management, we have entered the era of visual project communication: “Visual Project Management is essentially a new practice concept that integrates visual thinking tools and data visualization methodologies with more traditional project communication, reporting and facilitation practices. It leverages the latest techniques in presenting data and information within visually-rich models that make it easier for project teams to understand of critical project information data points and key performance metrics,” he explains.

Lengthy project status documents and progress briefings are quickly becoming a thing of the past. What’s needed to replace them is a set of agile tools that enable “at-a-glance” views of project status, real-time updating, real-time issue management and resolution status, and data-rich environments for better decision-making. All of this translates into greater project velocity, improved collaboration and less wasted time and effort.

After nearly a decade-long recession, most companies now are operating with lean staffs – fewer people are handling significantly more work. There is little or no excess capacity in human or capital resources. As a result, company leadership must manage them very carefully. For smaller companies, even more is at risk: A single, poorly-planned and executed project could critically weaken them.
2 How mind mapping software streamlines project management

Mind mapping software is especially useful for project design – brainstorming project phases, information needs, people requirements and other data. The visual, hierarchical format of a mind map makes it easy for project managers and team members to identify and capture the phases of the project, capture people, resources and scope, and develop milestones and a timeline for the project.

To help you and your team get started faster, most mind mapping programs include a set of templates for common business uses. You can even save a map that you’ve created as a template, so that you don’t have to start a project map from scratch each time you begin a new project.

Templates speed new mind map creation in XMind 8.
Projecting a mind map at the front of the meeting room and inviting team members to contribute to it is a powerful way to quickly and visually outline all aspects of your project. Some mind mapping programs offer a brainstorming mode, which enables one person to quickly capture a large quantity of ideas from the group, and then arrange them into a logical hierarchy later. This keeps project planning moving at the speed of thought!

XMind 8's brainstorming mode enables you to capture ideas quickly and arrange them later.
Task management in XMind 8.

In addition, mind mapping software enables managers and team members to convert topics into tasks and assign project management attributes to them, such as priority level, task start and end dates, work hours required, resources assigned and percentage complete.
Also, project managers can organize all project-related research materials, notes, links and other documents as links in the project map. Color-coding topics and adding icons or symbols to them can add important context to your project data, and can make it easier for project managers to visually skim the mind map and identify tasks are on track and which need more attention.

In a mind map, topics can be rearranged until they make the most sense to the project manager and team members. In comparison, most project management software uses a linear, tabular structure to help you manage your projects. It’s much harder to rearrange tasks in this cluttered view.
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XMind 8 gives you two presentation options: You can “walk through” the content of your mind map, one topic at a time or create slides(pictured) to customize your own topic groupings.

In addition, many of today’s mind mapping programs have integrated GANTT charts, which provides a useful timeline view of project tasks and their timetable. Managers can also create and adjust task dependencies in this view (for example, Task A must be completed before Task B can begin). Any changes made to tasks in the GANTT view are also reflected in the visual map.
XMind 8’s Gantt view enables you to see a timeline view of your project and easily identify tasks that are at risk or running late. You can even export to Project/PDF.

Modern mind mapping software enables you to collaborate with team members in multiple locations by providing shared cloud storage and a web-based version of the software so they can contribute to the team map anytime, anywhere.
XMind Cloud gives project team members access to project maps and resources anywhere.

Finally, some mind mapping programs that are equipped with project management capabilities enable you to export your task data to Microsoft Project. This is especially useful for large, complex projects with multiple project phases, tasks and dependencies. Project and other enterprise-level project management tools aren’t efficient for project design. Your mind mapping program enables you to efficiently brainstorm and structure your project, and then export the project data to Microsoft Project. For smaller projects, you can manage them entirely via the mind map and its Gantt view.
XMind 8 enables you to export your mind maps to over 20 formats.
3 Types of project maps you can create

In addition to project planning, mind mapping software enables busy managers to create a number of related types of planning documents, including:

Project benefit analysis: The purpose of this type of mind map is to check the potential positive or negative effects of the project on stakeholders, and to ensure that no stakeholder groups have been overlooked during the planning process.

Work Breakdown Structure (WBS): In project management, this is a critically important planning document: It divides the project into phases and displays the tasks required to complete each one in an org chart type of view. The visual design of a WBS mind map makes it easy to see how all of the information it contains is related. You can more easily identify what’s missing and where more clarification or information is needed.

One of the results of a more complete WBS design is more accurate budgeting. By brainstorming the project scope in a mind mapping tool, the project manager can easily assign budget and duration estimates to each task. This data can then be exported into Excel or Project for additional planning and analysis.

Risk management mind map: As with any business plan, there is always a certain degree of uncertainty when formulating a project plan. Using a mind map, the team can take steps to identify potential risks and mitigate them during the planning process – rather than being blindsided by them during project execution.

Project charter: This high-level map’s purpose is to clearly define the top-level project boundaries in enough detail that your organization’s senior management can make an informed decision on committing resources to the project.

Collecting and prioritizing requirements: Once the project charter has been approved, the process of collecting and prioritizing the project’s requirements begins in earnest. These can be gathered and organized in a separate mind map.

Scope of work: Once the project requirements have been mapped and finalized, it’s
time for the project team to prepare a scope of work. This mind map outlines the processes and the activities needed for the project to be completed successfully. To define a project scope, you must first identify these elements: project objectives, goals, sub-phases, tasks, resources, budget and schedule.

**Project team skill assessment:** Because each project and the team assembled to execute it varies from one project to the next, the project manager must pay careful attention to the strengths and weaknesses of each person on the project team – especially those areas where skill building may be required in order for the project to be completed successfully.

**Project dashboard map:** The purpose of this mind map is to provide an at-a-glance view of the project’s status, as well as links to all of the maps and supporting data just described.
4 How collaboration multiplies the effectiveness of project maps

The benefits of using mind mapping software to manage projects are multiplied when it’s used with a team. In this environment, it acts a catalyst, spurring more ideas than conventional methods of team-based planning, such as whiteboards and sticky notes.

Mind maps tend to spur greater discussion during team planning meetings, ensuring a higher degree of buy in and support for the project. That’s critical, because if team members don’t feel a sense of ownership in the project, they will be unlikely to fully support it during project execution. Such passive resistance can undermine even the best-planned projects.

A software-produced mind map also fosters a common language for conversations and discussions among the members of your project team. If your team members have a shared vision of what needs to be done and why, they can implement faster, with fewer misunderstandings and less miscommunication.

Without a tool like a mind map to bring both creativity and structure to the work breakdown structure, teams can too quickly get mired in the details, entering tasks into a GANTT chart or project management software. Preoccupied with minutiae and the tools used to manage it, they may miss valuable details that need to be included in the plan. Mind mapping software, with its ability to expand and collapse topic branches, is ideal for giving teams a clear idea of the bigger picture as well as for digging down into the details.

In addition, during the planning process, the project manager can filter the mind map to show only tasks assigned to a specific team member, one at a time. This helps team members better understand what they’re responsible for, and can be useful for resource leveling – making sure that tasks are equally distributed among the team members.

In today’s extended organization, it’s common for project planning and status meetings to involve team members in multiple locations. A cloud-based mind
mapping tool can enables everyone to contribute to the project design and to make status updates once the project is underway.

When the project planning meeting is done, the project manager can immediately distribute an updated mind map (in its native format or as a PDF) to all project participants and stakeholders. For those who aren’t comfortable with mind maps, you can easily export project data to other popular formats, such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Project.
5 Summary

Welcome to the new era of project management, which can be managed effectively and efficiently using mind mapping software. Paul Williams paints a clear and compelling picture of how it accomplishes this: “Today’s project manager has more to manage than just project scope, deliverables, communications and teams,” he explains. “They are also expected to manage large volumes of project-related data. And the expectation goes beyond just managing the data. It extends into creating great visualizations that allow stakeholders to fully digest all that data in ways that are quick, effective and clear. They are also expected to serve as facilitators in the use of visual thinking tools as a method for working through project issues, risks and problems. These new expectations require new skills. The era of multi-page, text-based project communication is over. The era of visual project management is here.”
About XMind

XMind is the world’s most popular mind mapping tool. Millions of people use XMind to clarify their thinking, manage complex information and projects, capture the output of their brainstorming sessions and get work organized for greater clarity and productivity.

XMind is well-known for its ease of use and low learning curve. Chuck Frey, publisher of the well-respected Mind Mapping Software Blog, calls XMind an ideal tool for new users, yet with enough power to meet more advanced business needs.

If you’re intrigued by the possibilities of visual project management, why not get XMind today to determine if it’s a good fit for your organization and the types of projects you need to manage efficiently.

Buy XMind 8 Pro