



Mindjet® MindManager®: A Vital Solution for Improved Project Management



Project managers wrestle with mountains of information. Throughout the course of a project, you track, organize, and communicate about everything from finances and scheduling to risk scenarios, human resource assignments, and project deliverables. Often, this information accumulates at a punishing pace, making it difficult to adhere to best practices that optimize project scheduling, costs, and quality.

Powerful project management tools can help you manage all this information. And for those times in the course of a project when you need to visualize information or communicate and collaborate with your team, Mindjet MindManager can play an essential role.

MindManager is an easy-to-use software tool that represents complex information in an organized, easy-to-understand visual format. During certain phases of any project, it can help you grasp connections, obstacles, and pathways so you can quickly choose the best course of action. Better still, information captured in MindManager can move easily into and out of other project tools (including Microsoft® Project®, Word® documents, Excel® spreadsheets, and PowerPoint® presentations) that better address other audiences or purposes.

This whitepaper demonstrates how project managers can use MindManager to cope with the triple constraints of scope, schedule and cost and, in doing so, help deliver higher quality projects, on time and on budget.

MindManager and Project Management Process Groups

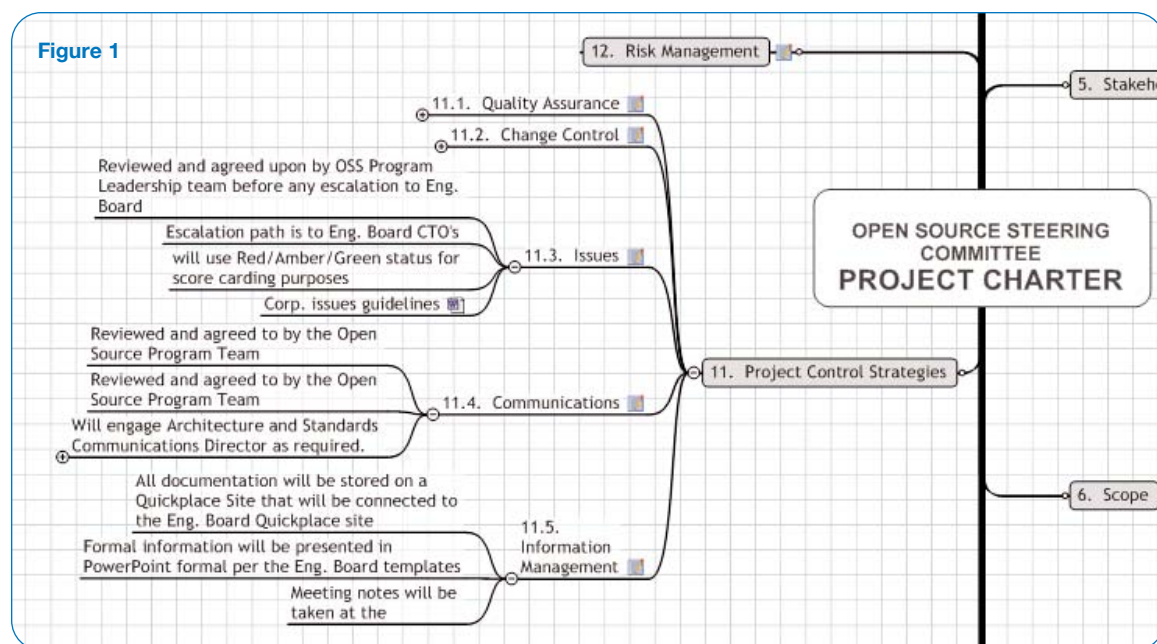
Most project managers agree that you produce higher quality projects when you appropriately apply a range of best practices, which the Project Management Institute (PMI) has documented in its Project Management Body of Knowledge® (PMBOK).

But applying best practices does not imply sacrificing your own creativity and judgment. In fact, the PMBOK clearly states that the knowledge, skills, and processes it describes are not a how-to for project success. Rather, skilled project managers decide what aspects of the PMBOK to apply to any given project – including which tools are most appropriate where.

What follows describes some ways in which project managers have found MindManager to be particularly useful.

In the Initiation Process: One of the key deliverables of the project initiation process is the project charter. According to the PMBOK, the project charter identifies business needs, as well as the results or products that will satisfy those needs. While traditionally the project sponsor is responsible for creating the charter, it's often the project manager who winds up with the task.

There are two reasons that MindManager is ideal for creating a project charter. First, charter creation often begins with a collaborative brainstorm about the who, what, where, when, and why of the project. To help in that process, MindManager has a specific brainstorming feature that allows you to randomly place initial ideas into a blank map. The feature then helps you link those ideas with the processes, phases, and knowledge areas of project management that the PMBOK defines. As the map evolves, you can draw links between the pieces and a draft charter can take shape in real time.



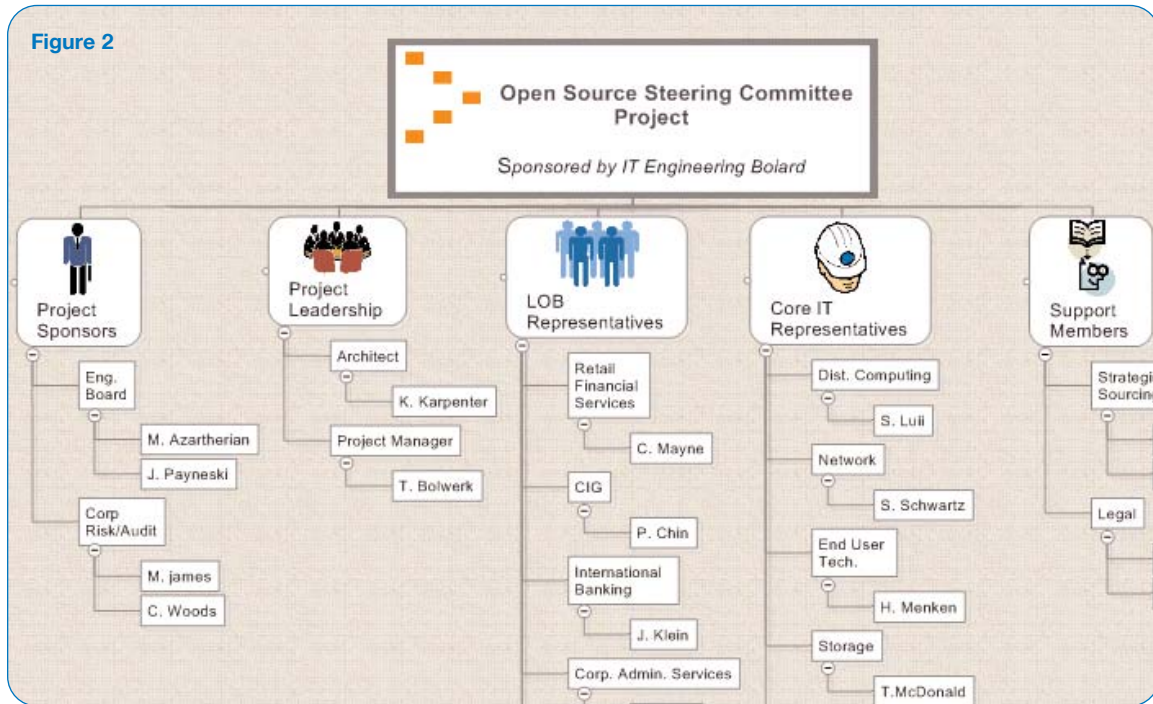
The ability to visualize the ways in which business needs connect to the project product(s) makes this a more efficient, higher quality process than traditional charter creation.

Equally important, MindManager helps you communicate the project charter to all key constituencies. You can send it to stakeholders as a visual map or export the map into a PDF, PowerPoint, or MS Word – whichever format your stakeholders prefer.

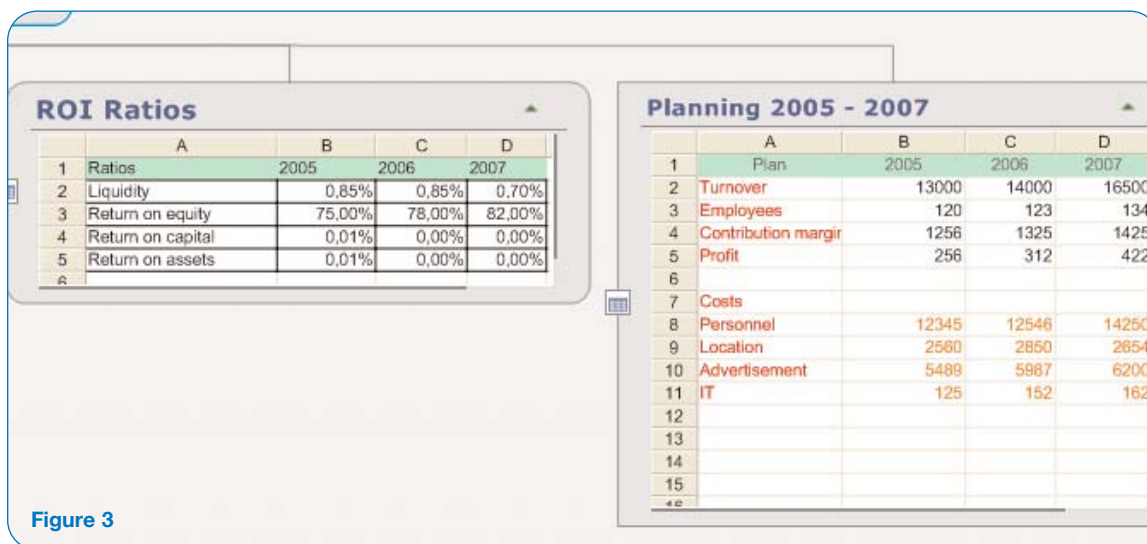
In the Planning Process: The PMBOK associates a full complement of project deliverables with the planning process. One of the first is a strong scope statement, which defines in more detail than the charter what,

exactly, a project must accomplish. As with the charter, the scope statement often emerges from a brainstorming effort, this time by the planning group under the supervision of a project manager. With MindManager, you can follow the brainstorming process detailed above and, once again, by visualizing connections you have a more efficient, higher quality process.

In addition, in the process of creating a scope statement you can develop a visually compelling organizational chart that you can later hyperlink with the work breakdown structure (WBS) as seen below, allowing you to begin associating people with various aspects of the project.



You also can begin to define costs by using spreadsheets that you create by simply going to the MindManager Topic menu and clicking on "Spreadsheet". The currently highlighted topic becomes a spreadsheet within which you can do simple calculations.

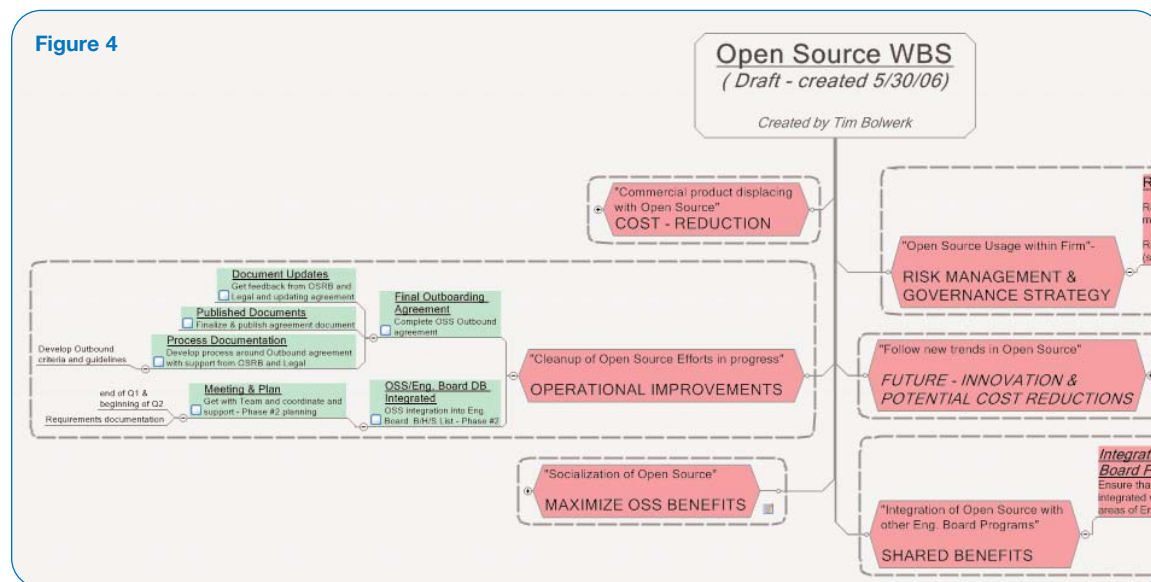


Conversely, if you've done the original calculations in Excel, you can import those into your map by highlighting and copying a range in the Excel worksheet; with one additional click you add the spreadsheets as a new topic or subtopic to your map. Then, using an intuitive interface, you can work with that spreadsheet within MindManager.

The scope statement, however, is but one piece of the planning process. Ultimately, you must flesh it out as a work breakdown structure. The WBS subdivides the major project deliverables and project work into more manageable components in order to accomplish the project objectives and create the required deliverables. It can include everything from risk assessments to initial budgets, human resource plans, communication plans, and schedule – and it is absolutely critical to project success. Many believe it is the single most important planning deliverable for improving budget estimates and scheduling.

Without MindManager, a planning team typically begins WBS creation by entering activities and deliverables directly into a Gantt chart in MS Project, a Word document, or post-its and a flip chart. Those brainstorming sessions reflect a lot of valuable thinking, but once the meeting is over, it's the project manager's job to organize this jumble of ideas, prioritize them, and put them into a form that the entire group recognizes as a WBS. Unfortunately, because this can be onerous work, too often it is either left undone or some thoughts – as well as connections between thoughts that seemed obvious at the time of the meeting – get lost.

Contrast that process (e.g., in the Gantt chart, indentation is the main way to understand the different levels of your WBS) with the type of clear picture you can create with MindManager. As you integrate the many PMBOK knowledge areas – such as time, cost, human resources, procurement, communication and risk assessment – within this initial WBS, everyone on the team can see and gauge the planning assumptions you are making. Because the entire team is present, they can test the connections among various project pieces and make adjustments where necessary. Bad ideas can disappear via consensus. Strong ideas can be teased up. And in the end, you wind up with a more complete WBS, with a minimum of missed items.



Even if you have created a draft WBS in MS Project, you can easily import that into MindManager to make it easier to see and understand. And through MS Outlook®, you can readily share the WBS you create in MindManager with all participants as well as those who have not been able to attend the initial brainstorm meeting.

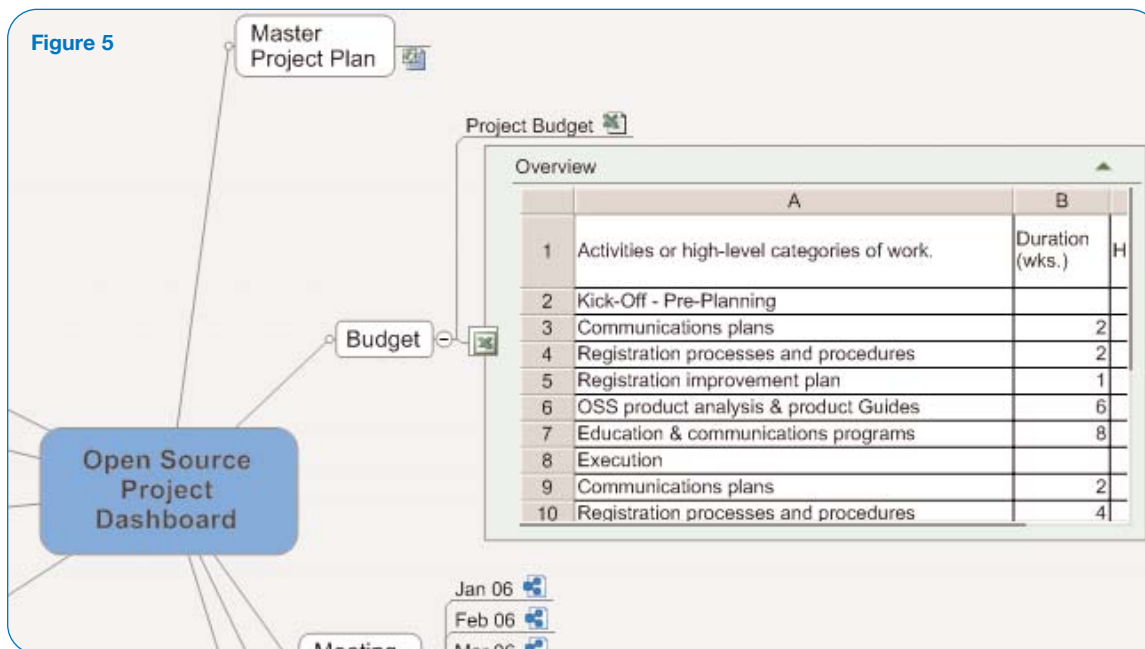
In short, creating a map or series of maps facilitates a powerful planning process rooted in the PMBOK's best practices. The scope statement and WBS are two excellent examples: the integrated visuals allow the planning group to see more clearly the way various knowledge areas interact; in turn, there is a much smoother pathway to project success. Moreover, you can move from initial brainstorm to a near final draft before people actually leave the session. Consequently, you are not only more efficient, you ultimately produce a higher quality WBS and, in turn, a higher quality project.

In the Project Execution and Monitoring and Control Processes: The execution process is where all of the real work of creating the product of the project occurs, whereas the monitoring and control process tracks project progress against the project plan and implements corrective or preventive actions to improve project performance.

One key component within these processes, where MindManager can be especially valuable, is in directing and managing a project. This role demands that a project manager collect information on the status of project deliverables and use that information to report out performance and project status. To serve this role, MindManager enables you to create one easy-to-absorb map that functions as a project dashboard.

There are a number of advantages to this approach. You can bring your existing project map to meetings and capture insights, as well as changes as they are reported. During those meetings, you can also use the map to drill down and explore areas that require deeper discussion; simply mark areas of similar concern and then, using a filter, pull up those areas into one document. You can keep an updated scorecard of things like issues, action items, and deliverables and their associated status, due date, owners, and risks. And in today's world of conference call meetings and remote staff, you can roll up action items from multiple meetings and hyper-link to meeting notes to create accurate reports that everyone can see.

The dashboard can be especially powerful in update meetings with senior management. The ability to track all deliverables or how you're doing with costs or schedule compared to the original plan – and to drill down into the map to answer specific questions in a visually compelling way – is ideal for keeping senior management fully informed of project progress.



A number of specific functions are worth highlighting when using a MindManager map as a project dashboard. First, from within your dashboard you can link to all files associated with the project, whether they were created in MS Project, Word, Excel, or other applications. Second, to track project costs, you can use the appropriate links to Excel as detailed above. Third, you can archive all emails associated with this project, simply by selecting them in Outlook and clicking on the Export selected items to Mindjet MindManager button on the Standard toolbar. Or you can click on an Outlook folder and then click on the Export folder to Mindjet MindManager button on the Standard toolbar.

As part of directing and managing a project, project managers must distribute information to project teams, clients, and senior management in a timely manner. Here again, MindManager can be a valuable resource.

For example, as noted throughout this paper, you can import and export information from MS Project, then communicate it to the appropriate parties in an easy-to-understand map – again as described above. You can also catalog emails and meeting notes and then export them all to a format that meets the needs of your audience, from email to MS PowerPoint, Word, and the web.

The bottom line is that by functioning as a very efficient dashboard for project execution, as well as an extremely effective communication tool, MindManager can be invaluable in a high-pressure project environment where the amount of information can feel overwhelming. At the same time, it can be coordinated with dedicated project management software when more complex scheduling, estimating, or budget calculations are necessary, thus giving you the best of both worlds.

In the Project Closure Process: Project closure is the process of finalizing all activities completed across all project process groups and formally closing the project. Typically this is where the project manager wraps up all appropriate paperwork.

Though this is important work, for most project managers it's also tedious because it involves a host of administrative details, including gathering and archiving all project documentation for future use and reference. Consequently, any tool that will help successfully and efficiently conclude a project is more than welcome – and MindManager is an enormous help in this regard. Throughout the project, you can make sure that all maps you create have hyperlinks to all project documentation. This allows you to use MindManager's pack and go feature, which with one action can gather up that documentation and store it in a ZIP file. You can name that ZIP file "Project Archive" and hyperlink or embed all maps and project documents into a Project Archive map.

Another advantage of MindManager during project closure is the way it facilitates the gathering of lessons learned, which according to the PMBOK is one of the key internal deliverables during the closing process.

Too often, however, lessons learned get lost in the course of a typical project. Perhaps you don't want to open a new MS Word document at the time – or perhaps your habit is to jot down handwritten notes that more often than not get lost. Using MindManager as the dashboard we've described above, you can jot those notes down as they occur to you throughout the project and use map markers to tag them in applicable parts of the map. Those markers make the lessons learned easy to find when reviewing the project during project closure. Using a filter you can compile those lessons and either export them to a Word document or create a separate map of lessons learned for organizational use.

Ultimately, by using MindManager to ease the process of archiving and documenting lessons learned, you can enhance the best practices in the PMBOK by explicitly tailoring them to your organization's particular projects and needs.

A Vital Solution

This paper provides a window into how MindManager visually organizes and communicates project information in simple and compelling ways. For specific project tasks and deliverables – e.g., a charter statement during initiation, a WBS during planning, a project dashboard during execution – it can be a vital solution as well as an excellent bridge to other project management applications. For these reasons, Mindjet MindManager makes it easier to implement the best practices that the PMBOK identifies and can help any project manager drive considerable improvement in project efficiency, costs, and quality.

For more information, please visit www.mindjet.com