MIND MAPPING
Is Essential for Leaders

Help people see how to reach your vision with this powerful tool.

By Hilary Jane Grosskopf

Your role as a leader is to help your team move toward your vision. You must be a great collaborator to motivate your team every day.

How can you make that daily connection? Your e-mails are easily overlooked. Your words can be forgotten right after the conversation. To give clear direction, you must communicate in a way that's engaging, efficient, and enduring. The solution is mind mapping.

So, what is a mind map? It's a visual diagram that displays information about a central topic. Mind mapping cultivates focus. It's different from other ways you communicate because it's a visual, lasting means of giving direction and collaborating.

Zoom Out to See the Big Picture

The visual quality of a mind map lets you zoom out to see the full scope of your role or the full picture of the team's work scope. Seeing the big-picture vision on one page enhances memory and conveys information quickly. The branches of a mind map develop the context around the central topic and bring the map to life.

The central topic goes in the middle of the map. To create a role map (which will clarify the full scope of your own leadership role), place your position title in the center, as shown in Figure 1.

Next, branch out from that center. Branch by creating your first layer of sub-topics around the central topic. The first layer contains all the essential aspects of the role. Continue

Figure 1: Role Map Template from *Awake Leadership*
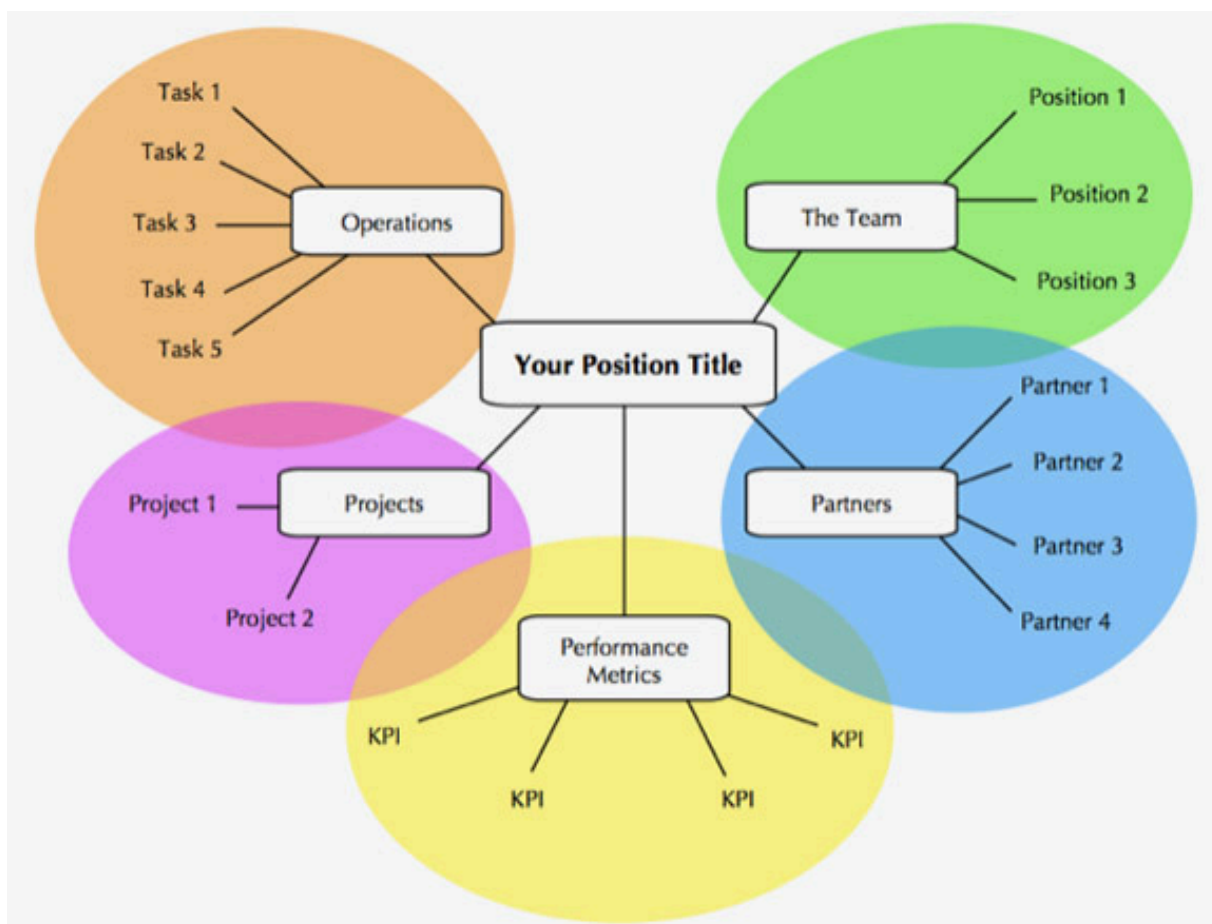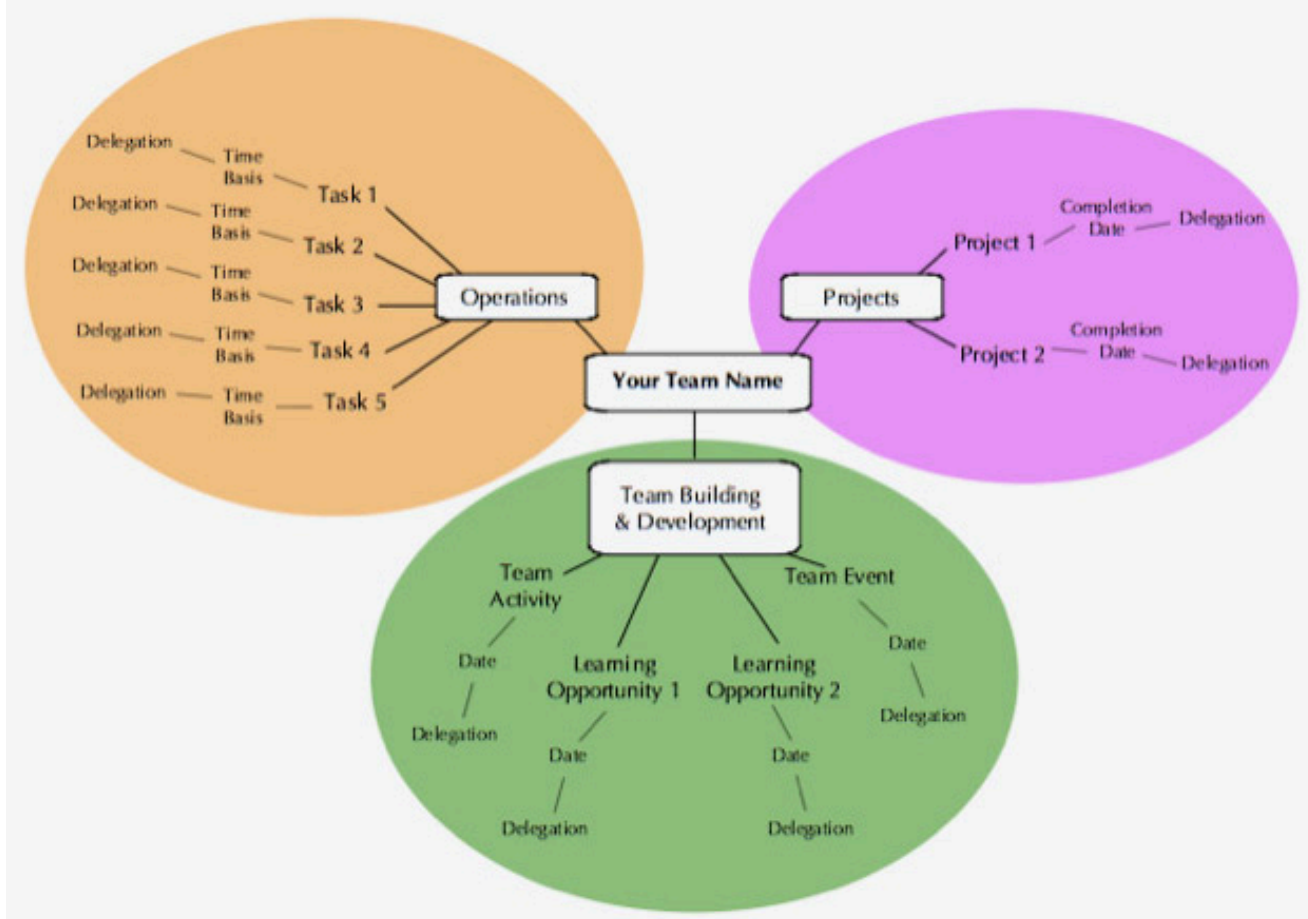
branching the second layer of the map by detailing the tasks and responsibilities of the role.

Organize & Prioritize Your Work Scope

Mind mapping also helps you organize and prioritize. It's more efficient than creating a bullet list or holding a long meeting. Preparing a role map before a one-on-one meeting makes the review much more efficient and gives the meeting structure.

After branching to develop your role map, it's time to organize. Take a look at your map and note what you find. Could you add, remove, or combine any tasks or ideas?

Once you've completed your role map, review it with your team and enjoy the clarity of a singular, organized view of your work scope. Use color to prioritize tasks.

Collaborate & Communicate

Mind mapping can also be used for collaborative efforts. You can use a mind map in team meetings and one-on-one meetings to give direction and articulate the vision. The engaging visuals and simple format help people understand and remember the content.

> **Seeing the big-picture vision on one page enhances memory.**

Figure 2: Team Vision Map Template from *Awake Leadership*

An example of collaborative mind mapping is the team vision map (see Figure 2). With this map, team members can easily see the tasks they must achieve to move toward the vision.

To create a team vision map, begin with your team's name as the central topic. Place it in the middle. Add the three essential components: Operations, Projects, and Team Building.

Continue by adding tasks, projects, and events to each branch. Use this map in team meetings and reviews to show how your vision translates to specific tasks.

Align the Team

Team alignment may be the most satisfying aspect of mind mapping. Alignment helps the team understand how the overall vision is broken down into individual contributions. Mind mapping is a great way to delegate and set timelines.

After you've created the team vision map with your tasks, projects, and events, assign tasks to team members and set timelines. A mind map's expansive nature allows you to delegate and set timelines so team members can see what they're responsible for, when it needs to be completed, and what others are working on.

Put Your Mind Maps to Use

Mind mapping is a simple yet profound tool for leadership and collaboration. The visual quality enhances focus and

memory. The central focus point makes it easy to return to the core purpose to organize information relevant to the topic. The expansive nature lets you modify the map over time.

Mind mapping is accessible no matter what resources you have. You can create your maps with paper and pen. You can map on a white board. There are also many digital resources online for mind mapping.

Leaders are more productive when they use mind mapping to clarify their role and align their team around the vision. Teams often find mind mapping more engaging and effective than tools that consume more time and create complexity. Lead with clarity and fuel collective progress with mind mapping.

Hilary Jane Grosskopf is a leadership strategist, writer, and founder of Awake Leadership Solutions (awakeleadershipsolutions.com). She is the author of two interactive leadership guidebooks, Awake Leadership: A System For Leading with Clarity & Creativity *and* Awake Ethics: A System For Aligning Your Actions with Your Core Intentions.

> "**Team alignment may be the most satisfying aspect of mind mapping.**"

Find Out More

Useful Exercises

In her two insightful books, *Awake Leadership* and *Awake Ethics* (awakeleadershipsolutions.com), Hilary Jane Grosskopf provides concrete exercises that will help you guide and motivate your team. For example:

Use field notes to find and fill gaps in knowledge. Ask people to write down three questions each week as they go about their work. These questions can be about the organization, its systems, or anything else related to how they and the rest of the team function throughout the day.

On Friday, discuss these questions as a team and work together to answer them. It's helpful to buy people field-note journals or notebooks to make the activity official and structured.

Do this exercise three weeks in a row, and if it seems helpful, continue forever! Examples of field-note questions:

• Why do we send out promotional e-mail on Mondays and Fridays?

• Who decides what training is offered? How can we give input about the training we'd like to have?

Hold immersion trips to help people understand different areas of the organization and connect with people they don't work with every day. For instance, ask staff, board members, and volunteers what areas of the organization they're curious to learn more about. Have people shadow others for a day or try switching tasks.

Plan to spend an hour mentoring each of your team members one-on-one. Ask them questions like these:

• What new skills or areas of the organization would you like to learn more about?

• What's a challenging, time-consuming process you do? How could we reduce the time and effort it takes without lessening the quality of the result? Would you like to research new tools that could make the process easier or more efficient?