

## Visual Thinking Methods

Have you ever thought of planning, brainstorming and problem solving as tough, dull and serious office tasks? Have you ever had so much work that you wonder how to structure it and get it done? Well, in this additional newsletter, **Step4all Consortium** would like to share a technique which will turn these unpleasant tasks around so that you can start enjoying them. This is called **visual thinking** or **creative thinking**. Why, how and when to use it, is described below.

**What is visual thinking?** It is a **brainstorming method and presentation style** which helps the performer to better understand, structure, present and retain information. The method is based on associating ideas, words and concepts with images and/or feelings, combined with color coding. Thanks to diagrams, shapes and plots, large amount of information is displayed clearly by revealing connections and data patterns and thus making it more comprehensive. Some common visual thinking strategies include graphic presentation of concepts, diagramming, mind mapping and empathy mapping among others.

**How does it work?** Through the process of visualization on a sheet of paper, the ideas are presented into geometric shapes and mapped out to associative string words and colours. In such a manner, the “left brain” linked with the logical and sequential thinking and the “right brain” responsible for the intuition and pattern recognition are simultaneously used to enable efficient and creative thinking. By using colours, associative words and shapes, the performer does not only think creatively, but is also enabled to describe the subject easily, to relate it to other ideas and to rapidly memorize and recall it.

**What is the application area?** Visual thinking has a broad application area, including problem solving, decision making, planning, project management, presentation and implementation of ideas, brainstorming, innovation, strategic thinking, taking notes at a meeting and preparing a resume of a book among others. Generally, visual thinking can be used to creatively and effectively structure any large volume of information and present it into appealing and memorisable manner.

**What are the benefits?** The simple and effective process of visual thinking helps unleash people’s imagination and use their entire brain potential. By jotting down colour-coded thoughts and drawing their respective associative pictures, the ideas are better connected and patterns of relationships between them are easily grouped and organized. Additionally, the usage of associations effectively links new information to prior knowledge, which helps

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The Leonardo da Vinci sector programme links policy to practice in the field of vocational education and training. One of its main aims is to facilitate the development of innovative practices in the field of vocational education and training other than at tertiary level, and their transfer, including from one participating country to others.



LINKS:

- [TonyBuzan.com](http://TonyBuzan.com)
- [MindTools.com](http://MindTools.com)
- [MindMapping.com](http://MindMapping.com)
- [Mind Mapping Software](http://Mind Mapping Software)
- [Free Online Brainstorm](http://Free Online Brainstorm)

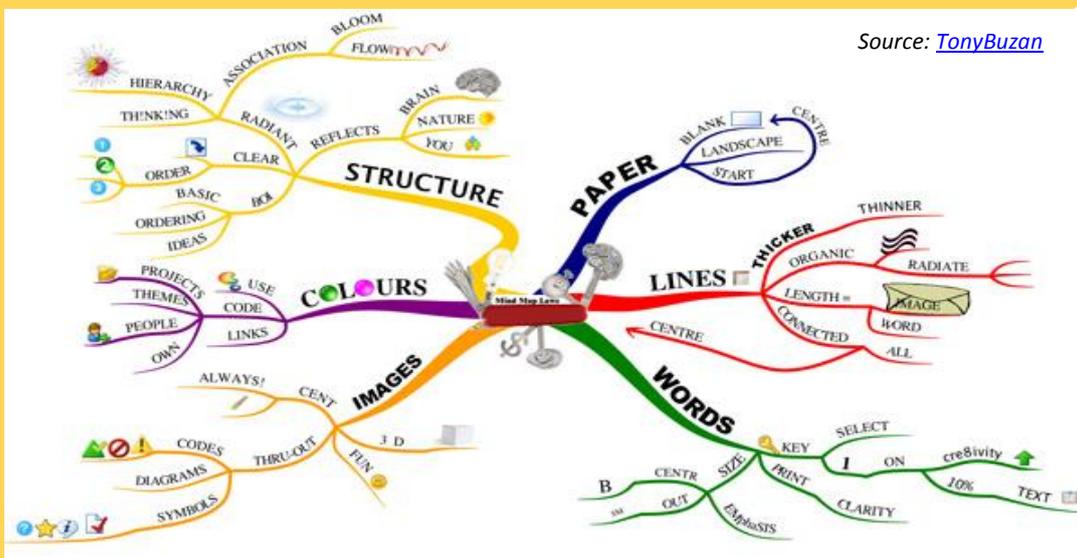
grasping new concepts thoroughly and easily. Last but not least, using colour pencils to draw down ideas is an interesting and meditative method of conceptualization. It aids concentration on a theme while avoiding the trap of triviality and routine of common presentation methods.

One of the most efficient visual thinking methods is the **Mind mapping**. The latter is created by Tony Buzan at the end of the 1960's, in his search for more effective ways of using one's brain potential, faster learning and easier memorizing. Mind maps have been used by large companies and institutions, such as Toyota, Microsoft, Rolls-Royce, Boeing, Walt Disney, IBM, U.S. Air Force, NASA and the United Nations, among others.

## MIND MAPPING: The Effective Method for Problem Solving

Mind mapping is an **intuitive graphic technique**, which aids effective concept presentation and thus, supports and enhances creative problem solving. Additionally, the Mind map can help one learn faster and memorize a bulk of information, as their specific format facilitates development of structured resume and easier recall, similarly to the way a song may bring back distinct memories of events, conversations and feelings.

Tony Buzan's method logically links together key words with associative drawings, colors, symbols, numbers and space to hierarchically present concepts and ideas. A Mind map on mind mapping guidelines is presented below:



Source: [TonyBuzan](http://TonyBuzan)

**You Tube**

LINKS:

- [TEDxTalks: Tony Buzan](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6111111111)
- [How to design Mind maps](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6111111111)

While creating the map, the subject is hierarchically broken down into easily identifiable sub issues. In such a manner, the performer can effectively structure the information on a particular topic, which helps to better analyze, comprehend, synthesize, recall and generate ideas.

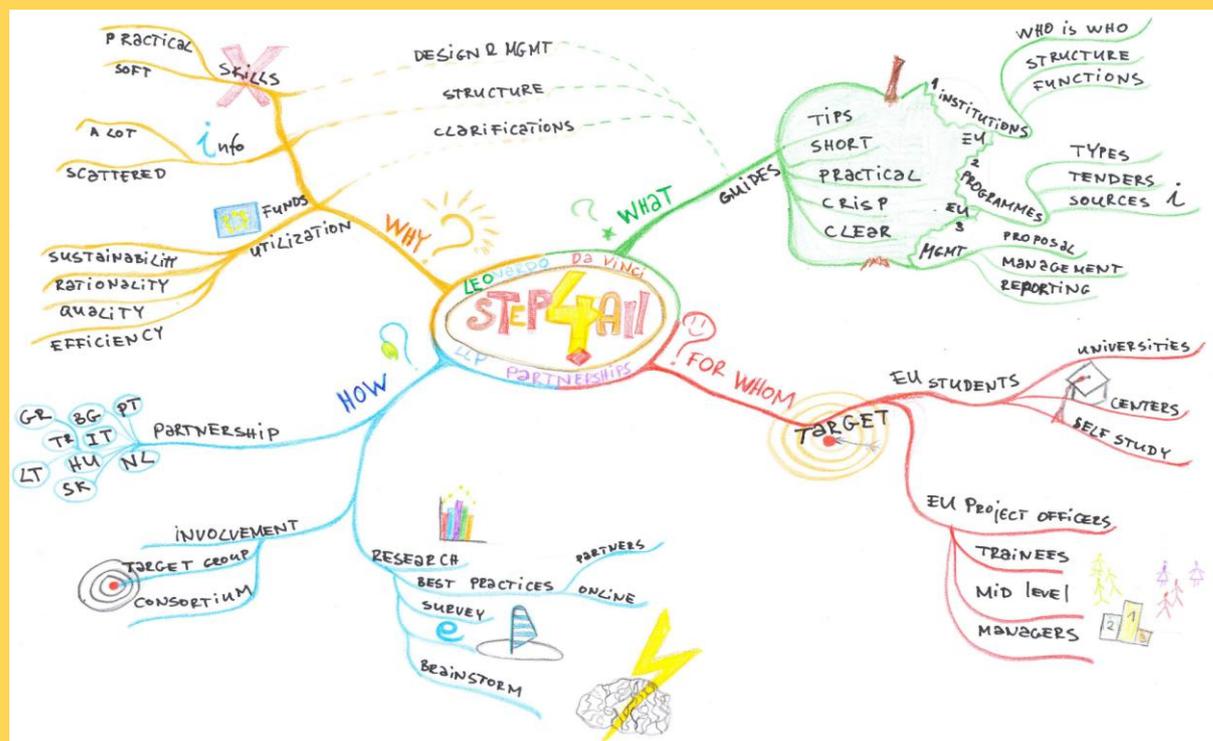
### Why Using Mind Maps in Problem Solving?

Usually the word "problem" triggers negative connotations such as panic, fear and stress. These unproductive emotions are often to be blamed for blocking one's creative thinking. In such situations Mind mapping can be really helpful. The technique is meditative and resting exercise, which has a very relaxing effect. Furthermore, it helps the performer to easily distinguish the little elements part of the "big issue", to define all problem aspects and to analyze them productively. Last but not least, Mind maps engage both the left and the right brain. This could be very useful for solving a particular problem since the effective combination of "logical" and "creative" thinking usually results in new ideas and associations.

## How to do a Mind Map?

1. Write the problem in the centre of a sheet of paper, and draw a circle around it.
2. Think of the main problem aspects and add them as different branches to the circle:
  - a. Each line should be in a different color, which enables better structuring and associating of each problem category.
  - b. The problem aspects could be the problem causes and/or the potential solutions. For instance, if you are stuck in generating a new idea for EU project, the branches could be: industry needs, organization strategy, and similar projects. Once the project need is identified a new Mind mapping could be performed with branches such as relevant EU programmes, internal resources, potential partners, target groups and planned activities among others.
3. Dive deeper into each problem categories and break them down into further particles through sub branches:
  - a. Continue using one and the same color for each branch; this enables better categorization, concentration on the topic and recall.
  - b. Avoid straight lines; better use forms resembling the shape of the brain threads. This stimulates further the thinking process.
4. Avoid using sentences when labeling the branches; rather explain the issue with the most meaningful string word:
  - a. Single strong words and short phrases convey better the ideas in a Mind map.
  - b. Print letters are easier to read, in comparison to handwriting.
5. Link some of the issues with associative drawings, symbols, shapes, colors and etc. The drawing activates the brain's creative potential.

A Mind map on Step4all project rationale, goals and results is presented below:



Mind mapping is not only easy and fun to use, but it has also proved to be an extremely successful creative thinking method in many different industries. Therefore, it could be used at each stage of the EU project management process, as well as when taking notes, preparing for a meeting, scheduling and planning. Try it and unleash your entire creative brain potential.



# STEP4All Newsletter

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## STEP4All Consortium



**Eurocrea Merchant Srl**  
ITALY

Besides offering management consulting and advisory, Eurocrea Merchant is also involved in providing training courses and in EU-Project management. Part of the team is constantly involved in searching the best funding opportunities offered by the EU Commission, and in designing and managing projects for themselves or for Italian SMEs.



**AVACA TECHNOLOGIES**  
GREEK

Avaca Technologies S.A. is an independent software development house and IT integrator that provides consulting, informatics and engineering services. AT is a fast growing company which currently employees 17 persons and has developed a significant list of clients across many industries and market sectors.



**HDI Consulting**  
HUNGARY

HDI Consulting is a consulting company, which gained expertise in the project development in the framework of EU funded development programmes, preparation of projects and tenders for submissions, professional help during the project implementation, preparation of call for tenders for development agencies, strategic planning, evaluation, monitoring.



**SPIS Regional Development Agency**  
SLOVAKIA

Spiš Regional Development Agency, is a non-profit organization supported by Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic that acts in the concept of integrated network of RDAs, and is focused on boosting economic development in the region via institutional cooperation and support to investments.



**Associação Temática Positiva**  
PORTUGAL

Tematica Positiva promotes social cohesion and competitiveness in socio-economic sectors with the aim to link the needs of the population to the economy. Since the territories in question have favorable characteristics in different areas The training of local human capital becomes of key importance.



**Stichting Business Development Friesland**  
THE NETHERLANDS

Business Development Friesland is a not-for-profit foundation positioned within the triangle of SMEs, knowledge institutes (VETs and Univ. of Applied Science) and governmental bodies, which initiates and participates in projects aimed at knowledge transfer and development. BDF provides training and support to start-up companies, SMEs and other organizations.



**European Leadership Institute, Ltd**  
LITHUANIA

European Leadership Institute is an international training company that develops programmes, organizes and delivers seminars and courses, internal trainings, and conducts research seeking to become a corporate partner that meets today's challenges of labor market and personal effectiveness.



**Kocaeli EU Project Coordination Center**  
TURKEY

Kocaeli EU Project Coordination Center was founded under responsibility of Governorship of Kocaeli and provides consultancy services and information in order to accelerate Turkey's accession and enable Kocaeli fully to get benefit from EU education programs, within the frame of LLP, FP7, central finance & contracts unit.



**Bulgarian Construction Chamber (BCC)**  
BULGARY

BCC is the Bulgarian representative federation of Construction industry, representing 2285 SMEs company-members, and 7 associated specialized member-federations. It is involved in Social dialogue, collective agreement, supporting to the VET system development, national legal framework, EQF, lists of Construction professions, partners network of sectorial training institutions.



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