



Cloud Mapping Site Exmoor

Map Project Plans to Build Understanding

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If you and your colleagues have to prepare and share plans for business or major projects this case study can help you create a Solution Focus platform



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Introduction

Driving to the coast with my children, I played over in my mind thoughts about a course design.

Arriving on a cold but sunny day I found myself pointing at the sky, using the fluffy cumulus clouds as virtual "Post It" notes to construct my course. With startling clarity I "saw" the course; "The approach there, creative styles there, Solution Focus at that end...", I mumbled.

Onlookers would have seen a lunatic waving his arms at the sky but my children provided the perfect excuse for lunacy. My impromptu "cloud mapping" worked well, it allowed me to get a sense of how the course would fit together and I was able to design it quite quickly.

Now let's track forward in time to a meeting with a client of mine, a Programme Director with a FTSE 100 company. He had taken on the challenge of turning around a failing, multi-million pound, transformational change programme.

Project managers were developing new plans for ten different areas of the project and he needed to be assured that the plans would integrate. In addition, he wanted to ensure that the plans were robust, took into account key dependencies and that the plan owners' colleagues would endorse them.

On the team, many people were new and those with a longer history were low in energy from "fighting fires". Some team building would be beneficial. We planned a two-day workshop to tackle the situation.

Workshop Outcomes

We agreed the Group would have:

- Developed a high level integrated plan to implement the System that identifies why this plan is different to previous plans
- Provided recommendations to individuals so that they may adjust their detailed plans
- A sound awareness of each plan

Workshop Design Challenges

Challenge One - need to build team

Though it was not an outcome, it was important to build the team to ensure a successful planning review. Consequently, the client agreed to dedicate three hours to run a Solutions Focus workshop.

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The focus would be on how the team would be working when the project was on track and achieving milestones.

Challenge Two - How to achieve Outcomes

A common way to share plans is to have people present them and others feedback, but I envisaged that people would be dozing in the first presentation and comatose by the tenth. We needed something participative and collaborative so, stealing a trick from my beach exercise, I decided to use mapping.

Mapping is a technique I use often [I am a Buzan certified instructor]. For this workshop I decided it would be a collaborative and enjoyable exercise to have the teams create individual maps of the plans and then pool their knowledge, building these in to a giant integrated map. I used the type of mapping that Buzan calls "Mind Mapping"

To understand Mind Mapping please see:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_map

Challenge Three - how to ensure constructive feedback

As the project had a history of issues, we needed to ensure that participants would review each plan in a considered and constructive way. To this end, we used a tool I call "multiple perspectives".

Run the Workshop

The group of fourteen convened at a hotel near St Paul's in London. The room was not ideal, having no natural light or fresh air but the group was keen and open-minded about the workshop.

Prepare for Mapping

You may ask, why map? Why not just list the plans on a sheet? Our experience shows that creating maps enables people to think more broadly, helps visualise relationships between different aspects of a topic and is more interesting than compiling lists.

To form the integrated plan, the group had to draw their individual maps on a flipchart. As it is crucial that the integrated map fits together, I prepared a map framework on the wall before the workshop. See Figure 1 for a part drawn framework.

This framework consisted of two sheets of flipchart paper on the wall and ten further sheets of paper around them. Use 3" x 5" Post It notes to work out the right configuration of the paper.

Next, I drew a central image and name for the map on the first two

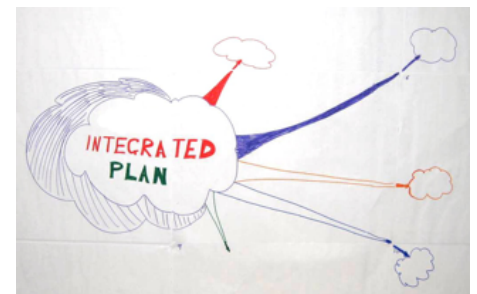


Figure 1 Starting Point for Map

sheets and plotted broad lines from this to each of the ten sheets. It's best to use a large marker pen.

Try and make the map attractive with colour, shading and thicker lines. The teams use these “marker lines” as the point from which to start their map.

This framework also provides a good illustration of what the final map will look like.

Prepare the Team

We warmed up with a “focus” session of around thirty minutes’ duration. This enabled the group to relax, review the purpose, clarify objectives, see the workshop outline and set the rules for the two days. Through this exercise and the earlier Solutions Focus session, the group generated a great deal of energy to carry forward.

Review and Map Plans

We arranged the review and mapping into three sessions. In each session, the group split into teams, each team reviewed a plan from different perspectives, provided constructive feedback to the owners and mapped the plan.

To ensure uniformity and ease of sharing information, you should have a standard format for the plans people bring. Brief the plan owners on the format in plenty of time to allow them to prepare it. It could be PowerPoint or Word format.

In the first session I explained the end goal of an integrated map to

the group, using the map framework to illustrate this.

Next, I briefed the group on their review actions. (Ensure that you record the brief on flipcharts or on briefing sheets so that people can review them when needed. Chaos can ensue if you don't!)

With a question template (below) I explained that they should:

1. Review the documented plan (verbal report and / or reading)
2. Complete question templates
3. Feedback to plan owner
4. Prepare two flipcharts and record on flipchart 1:
 - A brief summary of the plan
 - Benefits of the plan
 - Why this plan is different to previous plans

QUESTION TEMPLATE ~ EVALUATING THE PLANS

1. *What benefits does this plan provide over what has been done before? To whom?*
2. *What makes this plan different to what has been done before? Why will it work now?*
3. *What issues must we manage if we are to implement the plan successfully?*
4. *What additional data does the plan need to ensure we can implement it successfully?*
5. *Who/what is this plan dependent on? How feasible is this?*
6. *What ideas do you have to overcome the issues you have noted at “3 - 5”?*



Figure 2 Example Map

On flipchart 2 record:

- The issues the project team must manage to ensure the plan works
- Further data / information that is needed to ensure the plan can be completed
- On whom or what is the plan dependent
- Ideas to overcome issues

Review the plans

The group split into four teams to review a plan each and had 90 minutes to achieve this.

Map the plans

Following the review, I briefed the teams on preparing the maps and how they should format them. Each map had the name of the plan in a “cloud” at the point where the map started, to make it easily identifiable.

Be prepared, they won't all follow the format suggested, but the starting point (the “cloud”) is crucial – see Figure 6 “Training”.

Ideally, everyone would be experienced in this type of mapping but this is unlikely so a few tips on map preparation are helpful. They had thirty minutes for this exercise.

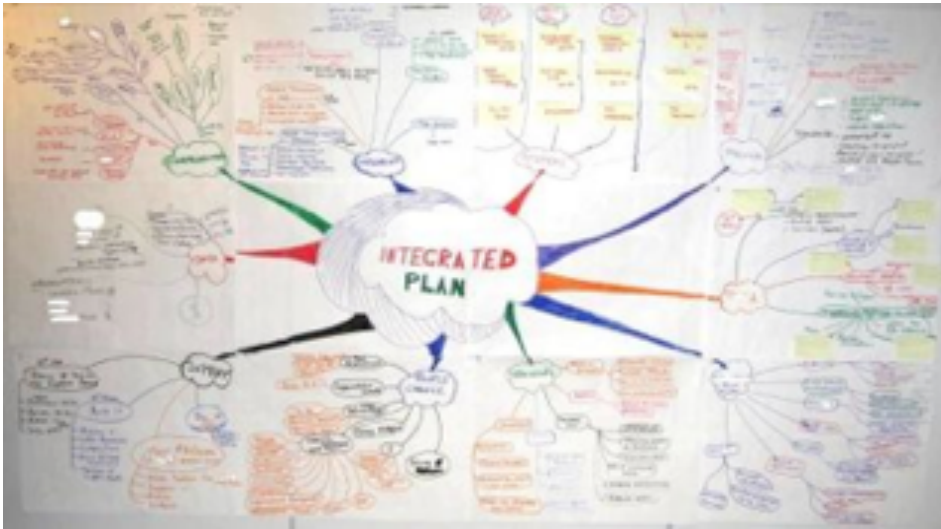


Figure 3 Final Plans

Whilst the teams compiled their maps, they discussed the plan in greater depth and further enriched their understanding of it.

It is essential that people record plan information on each map at a high level, identifying only the key aspects of the plan. This enables the group to absorb information and compare information across ten maps. Too much detail makes it too complex.

See Figure 2 above, for an illustration of this point.

For the first session, we split the review and mapping stages to avoid overloading the participants at the briefing stage. Once they had carried out one review and prepared one map, we combined the review and mapping of each for the next two

Group feedback on plans and maps

Each team placed their individual map on the integrated map framework and presented it to the group along with the review flipcharts. They had five minutes to

feed back and then ten minutes to discuss the plan with the group. Allow an hour to feedback three plans.

Each plan owner was able to see where others were dependent on them, common issues and ideas to overcome them. They also received useful feedback from others in the group.

Plan owners took away their feedback flipcharts to help them revise their plans.

Integrating the Maps

As the group added more maps to the framework, they began to see the overall picture of the integrated plan.

The rest of the workshop consisted of reviewing the final six plans in two sessions. As people became more confident with the process, they speeded up and we achieved the review, mapping and discussion in 2.5 hours.

Plan owners took away their

feedback flipcharts to help them revise their plans.

Capturing the Data

When the integrated map is complete, take digital pictures of each map and use mapping software (I use iMindMap Software) to make a hard copy map that you can share with the project team.

Conclusion

Group Mapping is a very useful tool you can use to share information, prompt discussion and increase understanding.

It encourages participation, engages people and can be done in a relatively short time. As seen in our examples, people can use words, figures and pictures to express their message and the map provides a basis for rich group discussion.

As one delegate said in feedback:

"The enthusiasm of delegates and the output of a two day workshop impressed me."

With the information you have here, time and some facilitation skill, you can conduct a Group Mapping session yourself.

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