



# HARVARD MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION LETTER

A NEWSLETTER FROM HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PUBLISHING

TOOLS, TECHNIQUES, AND IDEAS FOR THE ARTICULATE EXECUTIVE

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## Chart the Course of Your Negotiation

by Andrew Rosenbaum



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# Chart the Course of Your Negotiation

*Mind mapping has long been used to communicate complex topics. Now it's increasingly being used by negotiators to gain an edge.*

**A**JAY GUPTA, CEO of Astrum Sercon, a Mumbai-based consultancy, was having trouble negotiating a complex deal for a conference and training project. Because the project involved several different services and a complicated fee structure, Gupta worried that his proposal wasn't going to be understood as easily as the bids from competing consulting firms.

Gupta's solution was to use mind mapping to chart the conceptual obstacles that were keeping him from winning the negotiation, and then draw up the entire offer on a single page.

"Mind mapping allowed us to communicate the 'big picture,' to focus our negotiations on the aspects that mattered most to the other executives," he says. "And we won the project."

*Mind mapping*, sometimes also called *mental mapping*, has long been used to translate elaborate systems of information into easily manageable form. In the center of a typical mind map is an image representing the main topic. From that central image spring subtopics, section headings, main ideas, key words, and associations to form a colorful and comprehensive interrelated web of information.

Mind maps are used in business to analyze information, manage projects, and structure communications. And now they are increasingly being used as a negotiation tool, allowing negotiators to clarify options and compare strategy and background between potential partners.

"The mental map is a tool for persuasion. If you work to understand your negotiating partner, and then map out the strategy he or she is likely to use, you find it far easier to keep negotiations on the track you want them," says Deborah Kay, a marketing and management consultant based in London who regularly uses the technique when pitching her services.

Clive Lewis, managing director at the training company Illumine, in Windsor, United Kingdom, says mind mapping is a powerful tool for negotiators because it succinctly lays out the players, their goals, and their strategies.

"First step back and look at the complex relationships between all the different actors, to grasp how all these are related," says Lewis, "Then map your own preferred outcome for the negotiation, your bottom line, alternative acceptable and unacceptable outcomes. Then you map out the same (as well as you are able to) for your negotiating partner, so that you have a very clear idea of what his priorities are."

When the map is shared across the table during a negotiation, Lewis says, potential partners can quickly spot stumbling blocks and take steps to move around them.

This may sound like an enormous effort in time, research, and possibly emotional stress when you are face-to-face negotiating, but mental mapping specialists insist that the opposite is true. "When you negotiate, you have to think in terms of dynamics," says Robert Wood, a visiting profes-

sor of management at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. "Mind mapping enables you to do that easily."

Wood teaches mind mapping in classes on problem solving for managers, and he recommends it both for bringing teams onto the same page as well as for negotiating complex deals.

For instance, he recently worked with a top management team that was fumbling decision making and negotiations in the fast-moving mobile phone market. The division, part of a former monopoly, had been losing market share and revenue for months. The team had a poor understanding of the overall market dynamics, which made it difficult to negotiate, says Wood, but they also were hampered because they didn't all think the same way about the dynamics of competing.

Wood used software to create a common mental map of the competitive dynamics for the mobile telephone market. The map helped the management team focus data gathering, test the relationships identified, plan and monitor specific decisions, and ensure that senior managers (and, later, their teams) had a common understanding of competitive dynamics during negotiations.

"Most people think in terms of their behavior (or decisions) in a given situation. Some think more dynamically and will consider what they will do depending upon reactions to their initial action," says Wood. "Few people ever think about a strategy that includes several possible steps in the process."

Kay uses mind-mapping software when she negotiates contracts for her consulting services. In one such case, the managers she was talking with had a strong product but little market focus, and had trouble seeing things from the customer's viewpoint.

“They were a team of highly skilled functional specialists that had no vehicle for grasping the information that could impact their marketing plans,” says Kay. “Their problem was how to be more effective in closing deals and building a business pipeline. But they hadn’t acknowledged the need to invest in more rigorous understanding of the target market in order to build the pipeline.”

Kay first built a mind map of the different questions that arose from the company’s marketing problem. The map connected in a single graphic the seemingly different ideas. This made it easy, for example, for a nonmarketer to see the relationship between a bundle of different observations on competitors and positioning issues.

The mind map then became the basis for the group to build a marketing plan together. They tested, evaluated, and accepted or rejected ideas and connections that Kay had drawn up and replaced them with their own. “Using the map, we won the negotiation and convinced the firm to undertake a full-scale marketing program,” says Kay.

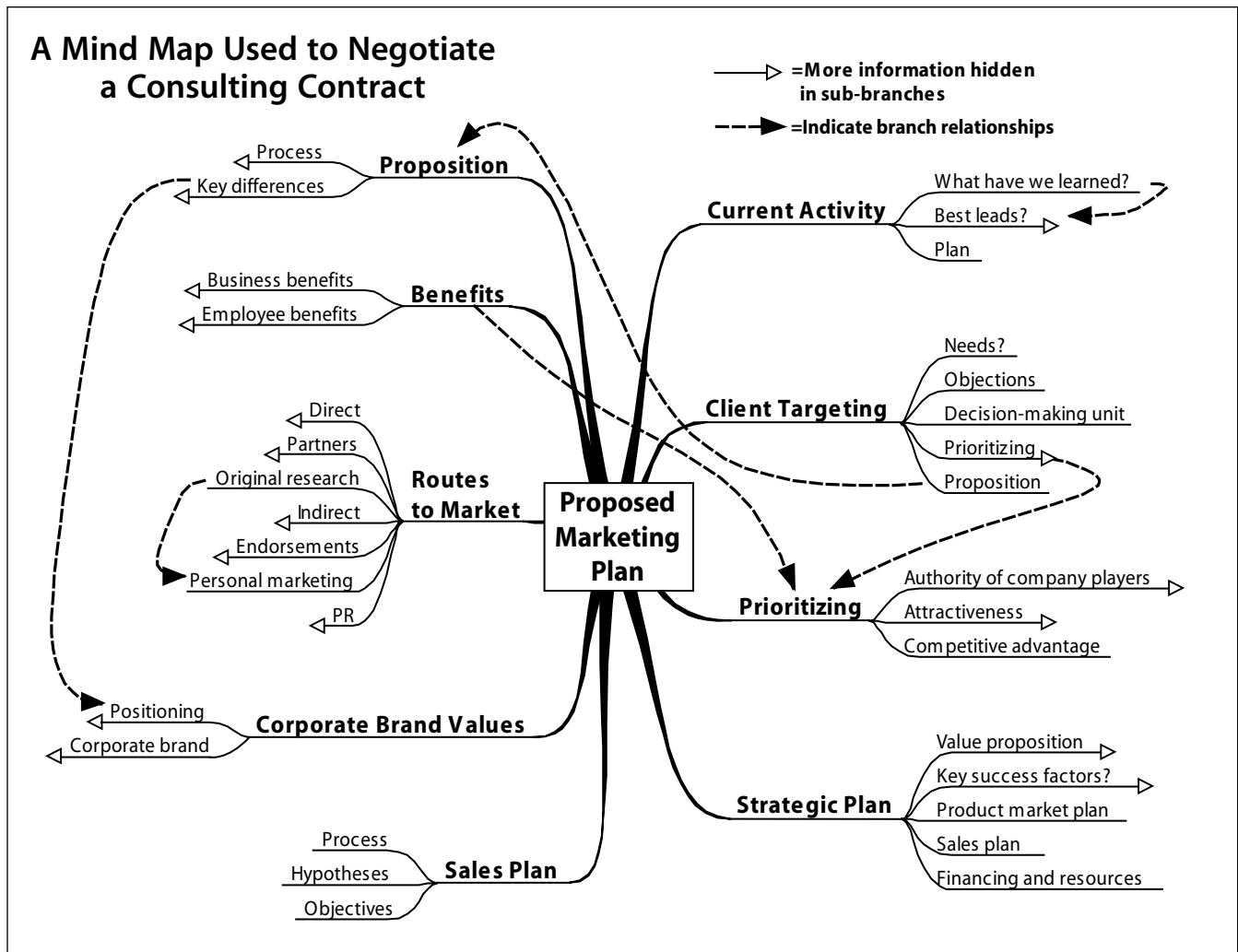
Why is creating a mind map different from simply drawing up a list of ideas?

Experts like Lewis say that mind mapping is effective because it presents information in a way that closely corresponds to how the mind actually organizes information. One of the main distinctions between information and knowledge, says Lewis, is that knowledge is arranged in net-

works with meaningful connections between clusters of information. While information can be transmitted as is, knowledge needs to be constructed as a web of meaningful connections, he says. Mind mapping creates a representation of such a web.

“Few processes are more complex than negotiations, but there is no better way to model a negotiation than with mapping. All this complexity becomes accessible,” says Lewis. □

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Mind map courtesy of Mindjet LLC.