Pat Foltz

Professional Trainer, Speaker, and Teacher
Pennsylvania, USA

Industry:

Professional Training

Location:

Lancaster, PA, USA

Challenge:

Teach people a new way to manage large projects.

Toolkit:

ConceptDraw
MINDMAP

Solution:

Use ConceptDraw MINDMAP to break large projects down into smaller, manageable tasks.

Benefits:

ConceptDraw MINDMAP provides users with a visual format that is easy to understand, easy to change, and that allows people to follow their own thinking process in approaching a large, complex project.

Coaching the Coaches

As a professional business trainer, Pat Foltz sees a lot of people in pain. Not physical pain, but the pain of feeling overwhelmed by projects. Her advice? Don't try to eat the whole elephant at once. The problem, she says, is that business people in general, and teachers in particular (she does a lot of work with colleges) use computer applications that make it hard to break down big things into small, manageable pieces. Her solution: ConceptDraw MINDMAP.

Small Steps Overcome Inertia

"For a lot of the teachers I train, the thought of building a new course is just too much to think about," she says. "They ask me things like 'How do I even begin when I'm going to build a new course? How do I take all this information that I have—all these ideas in my head, and put them in some sort of order? How do I make sure I'm covering every detail?"

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They think it would take weeks to make sense out of all this, and they just don't have that kind of time. So what do they do? Nothing. That's not fair to the students. And it keeps the teachers stuck in an unfulfilled rut."

So she teaches teachers how to mind map.

"Let's say there are twelve major things my students have to learn. I make each one a main branch of my map. On one branch, for instance, I identify the components of the transactional model of communication. OK. So that's one. On the next level of that branch—a sub-branch, I identify the components of the model.

I go another layer deeper and think about how I want to teach each component. Maybe I want to do a podcast that breaks down the different pieces in the model. I just keep following this process, planning and problem solving—jumping from topic to topic as ideas come to me."
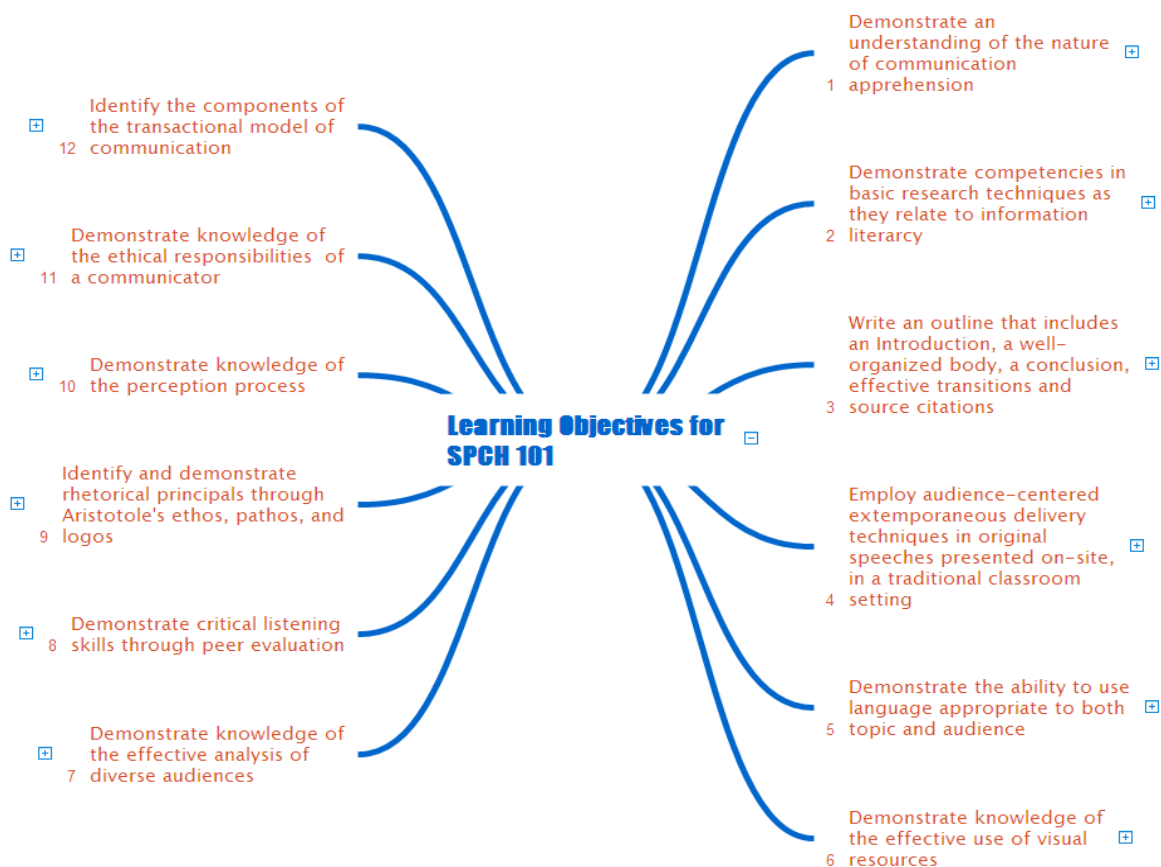
Foltz continues this process, breaking down each element of the class into small tasks. What seems insurmountable at first suddenly becomes possible.

Use Tools that Work Multi-dimensionally

Now, of course, it's possible to do this kind of breakdown using any number of business applications. The distinct benefit of mind mapping, Foltz says, is that it doesn't constrain your thinking. Outlines and spread sheets are linear. They tend, by their very nature, to force people to follow a single line of thinking at a time. And this is not how most people tend to think.

During a typical training session, Foltz says she will ask how many people were told in school that they had to write an outline before they started a paper or presentation or whatever. A lot of hands will go up. There will be lot of groaning. Then she'll ask how many people wrote the paper first then worked backward to create the outline. Everyone will nod their head. Then she introduces the idea of mind mapping and how natural a process it is precisely because it doesn't force people to think in terms of ordered lists, of firsts and seconds, of Roman numerals.

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Identify the components of the transactional model of communication
12

Demonstrate knowledge of the ethical responsibilities of a communicator
11

Demonstrate knowledge of the perception process
10

Identify and demonstrate rhetorical principals through Aristotole's ethos, pathos, and logos
9

Demonstrate critical listening skills through peer evaluation
8

Demonstrate knowledge of the effective analysis of diverse audiences
7

Learning Objectives for SPCH 101

Demonstrate an understanding of the nature of communication apprehension
1

Demonstrate competencies in basic research techniques as they relate to information literacy
2

Write an outline that includes an Introduction, a well-organized body, a conclusion, effective transitions and source citations
3

Employ audience-centered extemporaneous delivery techniques in original speeches presented on-site, in a traditional classroom setting
4

Demonstrate the ability to use language appropriate to both topic and audience
5

Demonstrate knowledge of the effective use of visual resources
6

"One of the learning objectives of class I teach on speech is to show people how to write an outline that includes an introduction, an organized body, effective transition, a conclusion, and citations. I capture some ideas on how I can teach that—including teaching people to use mind mapping to create an outline. But thinking about what to say reminds me that what you say depends on who you're talking to. And that makes me think about showing them how to use the Platinum Rule to analyze an audience. So I jump over to the 'Know Your Audience' part of the map and write 'Platinum Rule.'"

For most people, Foltz says, an idea about one thing can trigger an idea about something completely different. And she is adamant that people who think for a living need tools that allow them to jump from topic to topic—but in an organized way. It's all about creating the conditions that encourage innovation and creativity, she says, but in a manageable and cost-effective way.

Creative Thinking… Innovation—it's too Valuable to Waste

Foltz describes how one trainer just did a presentation for other trainers at her company's annual meeting. He started by asking how many seminars, workshops, and business meetings people had attended to solve some business problem.

Typically, he said, a group of well-paid people put aside their normal work load, assemble in a conference room, and start brainstorming. They run around from flip chart to flip chart, thinking of all these great ideas. But when he asked people what happened to the flip charts—and the ideas—after the meeting, he got answers like, "I don't know," or "They're on somebody's desk," and even, "They threw them away."

For Foltz, the real crime is the loss of all these ideas, and the money it takes to generate them. And she is determined that this will not happen to the people who attend her training sessions. There will be no lost ideas: They are the lifeblood of any activity, and expensive to create.

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Create a Productive Working Environment

She describes how she will often start her training classes by asking people what they expect to get out of the class. She opens up ConceptDraw MINDMAP and projects a map onto a screen and, as people share their expectations, she keys them into the map for all to see.

"Let's say we do that for five minutes. Then we'll work together to put all of the ideas into some sort of order. We drag and drop them into groups until they make sense. And boom, they're creating an ordered plan of what they want to accomplish. And that's a great tool for me as a trainer, because I can refer to the map during the day to make sure people are getting what they paid for."

Foltz uses mind maps to manage large projects and manage meetings. But she understands that people who are more linear thinkers like to see ideas and tasks in more of a step one-step two-step three display. She shows them how simple it is to export or view the map as a standard outline, project plan, Gantt chart, or spread sheet. That keeps everybody on the page.

Turn Mountains into Mole Hills

"You can't do a project, "Foltz says. " You can only do tasks. So, if that big project is out there, it's just this huge, monstrous thing for me to avoid. But the minute I can put it in the middle of a circle and start saying, 'OK, let's see, how I develop my class is…' then I'm moving forward."

Foltz counsels people to put the elephant right in the middle, and then say, "OK, what do I have to do here? What do I have to think about?" You begin a project, she says—whatever that project may be—by using mind mapping to break it into big tasks. Then you break the big tasks into smaller tasks, and then even further down until you have those discrete, doable things you can take action on to move toward your goal. Then, she says, "You just take it one bite at a time."