Mind Mapping 101

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Summary

In the following post we look at the usage of mind maps for various testing activities such as test design, test planning, session reports, requirements analysis, self-organisation, and so on.

Background

Ajay Balamurugadas dropped me and Lisa Crispin a message on Twitter yesterday asking for some examples of how and where we use mind maps as this was something he was keen on experimenting with. Happy to help, I responded with some example descriptions of how and where I use them. I’d like to follow up on the descriptions I gave with some actual examples of mind maps and their usage; you can call this my mind mapping 101.

Test design

Mind maps can be fantastic tools to aid designing test cases for new or existing requirements. If done correctly, you’ll be able to produce higher coverage and better test conditions. My post on lean test case design, demonstrates first hand how to produce rapid, lean, higher coverage and more efficient test cases using mind maps.
Test planning

When planning scope for a new project, test phase or an extensive task I find mind mapping it gives me a platform to generate ideas more efficiently. From discussing the scope of the mind map with other key stakeholders the map will quickly evolve, with new tasks being added and unneeded ones being de-scoped. Finally once the scope has been agreed the map will either stay as-is, or be converted into a plan, or list of tasks on a task management system.
My post on lean test phase planning covers my approach to using mind maps when planning test phases.
The mind map below demonstrates another test phase being planned with actual de-scoped tasks included for later reference.

Collaborative mind mapping

We all know the benefits of collaborating on plans, ideas, analysis and so on with others. Mind mapping is no different. In fact by discussing topics that require group thought with the aid of a whiteboard and some pens you can quickly draw up thoughts or ideas on a mind map. In fact you’ll quickly find by mind mapping it, the process of developing new thoughts or ideas will come more easily.

As I don’t photograph these, I can only provide one recent example provided by my boss Michael Johnston. This map displays our attempts to draw up our testing debt going from one release to the next.
Session Reports

Mind maps can also be useful for feeding back test results or the progress of a testing task.

An example of a testing session report using a mind map is provided below, from when I attended a weekend testing session and was asked to test a text to mind map tool.
You might even just want to feedback the progress of a testing task in an understandable format, without having to write extensive reports. The map below is an end of day report on a late test phase task inclusion for a telephony provider sanity check.

**Simplifying feedback to management**

Many often find the process of reporting information back to management types difficult. I’m no different, I spent a long time trying to find a method which worked for all. After time I found that by simplifying information feedback into a mind map with levels of importance highlighted on it I’d have much better outcomes from these meetings with management.
One example was a low bandwidth test we’d done with our Indonesia-based test team. I was playing the role of a call centre agent and they were acting as customers. In a 60-90 minute session we managed as a by-product to get some performance and usability feedback. This was communicated to management in a quick fifteen-minute meeting using the mind map below. All but one item was followed up on, which is much better results than normal.

**Simplifying feedback to groups**

Sometimes you might have quite extensive information that you’d like to feedback to a group of people. Mind maps can be fantastic for this as they allow you to simplify that information and convey it in an understandable format that others can digest quickly.

One example I can provide was from a recent usability evaluation I did. The information had to be conveyed to three different teams and management. It had to illustrate what had happened with the feedback provided from that usability evaluation in a simple understandable form.

You can see from the mind map below that I did manage to achieve that and even got responses from a few people later - including the product manager - thanking me on the use of a mind map to convey this information.
Self-Organisation

In the past I’ve used many tools to manage my schedule and tasks (my to-do list essentially). None every suited my needs fully, and required either too much time to maintain, or provided poor visibility of my scope.

It dawned on me that mind maps are not only easy to maintain, but also provide high visibility. As such I converted my todo list over to a mind map, and have never looked back. I can add or remove nodes quickly when new items come into scope or old are complete. I can also highlight and mark dates on my priorities to aid visibility.

You can see my todo list in the mind map below.

Others

There are other things I use mind maps for that I don’t currently have examples of.

- Requirements Analysis
  - Gaining a quick understanding of proposed requirements
  - Pin pointing gaps, conflicts.
• Throw away
  o Quick analysis of a feature
  o Determining if an idea is achievable or not.
  o Test coverage for a feature
• Mentoring
  o Using mind maps collaboratively to design tests with others.
  o Generating test ideas with others.

Most mind maps in this document were created using the free edition of XMind.

Thanks for reading.