

# Decision Explorer NEWSLETTER



Issue 1 Spring/Summer 1998

## Welcome!

Welcome to the first issue of the Decision Explorer Newsletter. This is a publication which we hope will, in the course of time, help to disseminate ideas and information about the theory and practice relating to the different uses of Decision Explorer. We hope that all users of Decision Explorer will benefit from it, and that those who are interested will feel moved to contribute to it as well!

Decision Explorer (formerly known as Graphics COPE) has a long history of helping people to structure and evaluate qualitative information. It is an interactive and flexible piece of software, for which different methods of structuring and analyzing data have been and will continue to be developed. The user is able to tailor the use of the software to their particular needs. Decision Explorer is a very powerful aid when working with 'messy' and complex information. With this newsletter as a forum, we hope to show you some of the power of Decision Explorer, to exchange ideas about applications and possible future developments.

If you want to learn more about Decision Explorer, there are a variety of sources available to you. Apart from the User's Guide, Reference Manual and Getting Started Tutorial which are provided with the software, there are also training courses, user meetings and an email discussion list to help you. You can find out more about training activities and the email list in this newsletter.

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## News

### Email Discussion Lists

Email lists can provide a useful (and open) forum where people can get in touch with a group of individuals with similar interests. Banxia has now set up two new Decision Explorer email lists, a discussion list and an announcements list. The DE-discuss list is for general discussion about Decision Explorer, cognitive/concept mapping and other related issues. It is an open, unmoderated list.

To subscribe to the Decision Explorer discussion list send an email message to [listserv@banxia.com](mailto:listserv@banxia.com), leave the subject line blank and, substituting your name, write the following in the body of the message:

subscribe DE-discuss your full name

Banxia has also set up a moderated list called DE-announce. This list is for announcements relating to the software, training activities and other relevant events. Decision Explorer users can ask Banxia to post relevant announcements to this list, as well as posting to the public discussion list. If you just want to be kept informed of news and events you should join this list.

To subscribe to the Decision Explorer announcements list send an email message to [listserv@banxia.com](mailto:listserv@banxia.com), leave the subject line blank and, substituting your name, write the following in the body of the message:

subscribe DE-announce your full name

Full information on the lists supported by Banxia is available on the web at <http://www.banxia.com/bxlists.html>, or send an email to [autoinfo-lists@banxia.com](mailto:autoinfo-lists@banxia.com) (leaving the subject line and body of the message blank). You will be sent details of the other options, including how to unsubscribe and how to set your list email to digest mode, so that you will receive list email once a day, rather than in real time when it is posted.



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## Scenarios and their effect on organizational learning

By Brian Cox, Woolwich plc and University of Strathclyde Ph.D. Candidate.

Essex County Council IT Services Division was the subject of a study which aimed to establish whether scenario planning increases organizational learning within a management team. Decision Explorer was used, in conjunction with one-to-one interviews, to identify and to analyze changes in individuals' understanding of the organization's current and future strategic situation.

The approach involved interviewing individuals before and after a one-day scenario building and half-day scenario implications workshops. The cognitive maps produced from these interviews were then compared and contrasted, in order to establish whether organizational learning had increased within the team. For example, was a view or opinion (perhaps in terms of a threat or an opportunity) as perceived by one individual before the workshops, transferred to others following the workshops.

Feedback since the exercise has been very encouraging. Essex County Council like all local authorities has had to change the way in which it operates, in order to comply with the requirements of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). Prior to CCT, the various departments within the council all supported one another, with very little formality in terms of contracts, service level agreements and so on. Information about a department's plans, budgets etc. were all, in the main, freely available. With the advent of CCT this 'soft-split' between departments was replaced with a somewhat 'harder-split', where departments tender for work and offer their services to both internal and external providers - in other words they behave like commercial suppliers, with the award of a contract or project being based on competition and value for money. As a result, barriers have tended to go up between the client-side functions - those acquiring services - and the provider-side functions - those supplying the services. Information was no longer freely shared and staff tended to associate with others within their own domain, rather than more widely, as had been the case prior to the introduction of CCT.



Len Graves, Corporate IT & Financial Services Officer, thought that within the current operating environment adopting a 'softer-split' was probably the right decision, although against the backdrop of local government's very uncertain future, he was less sure of its success. His team also seemed to be very divided as to whether the current hard-split or the old soft-split was the best approach. Communicating the 'softer-split' ethos and getting buy-in from his management team, and later from the whole department, would be quite a challenge. Although it is arguable that the actions resulting from the existence of a softer-split may play some part in the outcomes of any plan, how the 'softer-split' approach would be implemented and its success were also very dependent upon factors that neither Len nor his department could or can influence. The decision was therefore taken to test-out 'moving to a softer-split' using the scenario planning programme.

Decision Explorer and the interview/mapping exercise helped Brian to understand the current situation within the Council and were also a necessary part of the process of establishing improvements in organizational learning. Knowledge of the current situation, as represented in the Decision Explorer maps, was used to provide a focus for the scenario planning workshops. These workshops focused on topics which an analysis of the maps had revealed as key issues and concerns for the managers. Feedback from Essex County Council since the workshops and on the exercise as a whole, has been very encouraging with Len Graves commenting that the scenario planning programme allowed his management team "to obtain a common and, to a large extent, agreed understanding of the need for and direction of change" ... "The process helped management and staff develop an action programme that was more robust against the uncertainties prevailing within local government"

Brian had found that paper-based mapping exercises had a tendency to be oriented towards the interviewer rather than the interviewee, making it difficult to jointly develop the map. Decision Explorer made the capture and manipulation of the information in the maps far easier and more efficient. Brian also found that "interviewees seemed keener to participate in the creation and development of the maps" when using Decision Explorer, because the computer maps were something that both parties, interviewer and interviewee, could see, discuss and control. Inter- and intra-map comparisons were also far easier to perform using Decision Explorer and, as an added bonus, the maps were of a far higher presentation quality than was previously possible with pen and paper!

If you would like to discuss this case study or Brian's work with him, then he can be contacted by email at [bcoc@dial.pipex.com](mailto:bcoc@dial.pipex.com)

### As at March 1998 - A footnote - can you help?

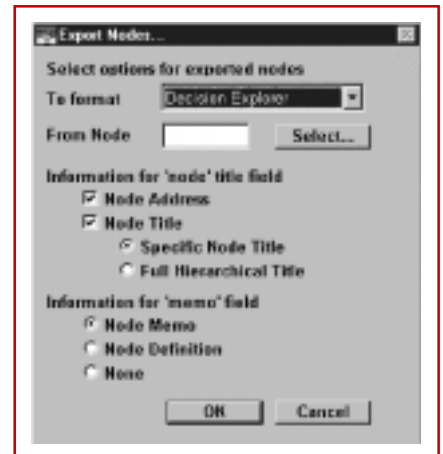
Brian is urgently in need of organizations to act as potential case studies. He is at a fairly advanced stage in his research and is now looking for a further three organizations to participate as case studies. There is no charge, except for at-cost expenses, for the whole programme. References from previous work are available on request. If you are not familiar with scenario planning and its benefits then Brian would be pleased to discuss the approach with you. If your organization or one that you know of is interested in becoming a case study candidate, please contact Brian by email at [bcoc@dial.pipex.com](mailto:bcoc@dial.pipex.com). If you do not have access to email then please call 0181 298 4748 (direct line) or (0181) 298 5000 (switchboard) or fax (0181) 298 4512.

## Decision Explorer and QSR NUD.IST 4

The first of the planned links between Decision Explorer and QSR NUD.IST 4 is now in place. Decision Explorer allows you to import concept data from a variety of disk file sources. Plain text can be imported using the same options that are available when pasting from the clipboard. Decision Explorer will automatically detect plain text, and you will be shown the paste dialog. As well as plain text, other applications can generate files that can be imported with link and memo information. One such application is QSR NUD.IST. NUD.IST was developed for managing and analysing non-numerical unstructured data (which can come in very many forms, but most commonly in text) by indexing, searching and theorising (again by many means, in a range of qualitative methodologies in social sciences, education, health sciences, business studies etc.), hence the acronym.

The NUD.IST qualitative data analysis software is quite different from Decision Explorer, it was designed with a different purpose in mind. Rather than being a mapping tool, NUD.IST was developed as a toolkit for indexing and information management with emphasis on flexible interpretation of data, and multiple ways of searching text and the coding of text for patterns.

Working with the Decision Explorer/ NUD.IST link is simple. When you have built up your NUD.IST node tree (the indexing system which you have deduced from the raw data), select the export tree item in the NUD.IST IndexSystem menu. The Export Nodes dialog will appear. You then have a choice of using the default options or you can adjust them depending on the information that you want to export. The export options are illustrated in the picture on the right.



Having selected OK a file selector will appear, suggesting a default filename of "export.nde". You can change this to whatever you want, but the .nde extension will make it easy when importing later. The directory suggested is usually the NUD.IST Reports directory, but again you may change this as you wish. NUD.IST will complete the export, and you are back at work in NUD.IST.

To import the file that you have just saved into Decision Explorer, open Decision Explorer and create a new model. Although you can import into an existing model, a new model makes things easier. Select the File menu Import item and the file selector dialog will appear. In the File Type selector, choose QSR NUD.IST Export and then use the Directories and File selector items to locate the file you exported earlier. When you have it selected, click OK. The import/paste dialog will appear. The default options, all check-boxes on and Ensure Separation are best for NUD.IST import. Fast mode is much faster for operation, but if you do not select the map option later you end up with a pile of concepts to be manually sorted. The import will start, and a short while later, you will be asked if you want to map the tree. We recommend that you select Yes! Decision Explorer will arrange the concepts in a tree map. To see the whole tree better, you may now wish to select one of the alternative view sizes (half size or fit-to view). You can now use Decision Explorer functions in the usual way. You can view the memo cards by right-clicking on a concept and selecting the View memo card item.

If you modify the Decision Explorer model, you may want to re-map the model. To do this select a concept then select the Analysis menu Map concept item. In the map dialog, select "Tree" mode and switch to the Tree options page. You can choose the map orientation and whether to map the tree from the currently selected concept, or to have Decision Explorer find the root for you. Full details are in the Reference Manual and online help. The default options used by import are left to right, outward links, auto-peek root.

Decision Explorer has a finite limit to the size of map it can display (note this is not a limit on the underlying model size, but the map height and width). In normal Decision Explorer operation this will not concern you. However, with large tree maps there may not be enough space to accommodate the full tree. If Decision Explorer cannot display the map fully, it will tell you and suggest that you change the orientation or try to map less. The horizontal (left to right) modes can fit in more than vertical (top to bottom) modes.

NUD.IST is distributed worldwide by Scolari, Sage Publications Software. For information please contact: *In the Americas:* Scolari, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320, USA. Tel:(805) 499-1325 Fax:(805) 499-0871 Email:info@scolari.com WWW: <http://www.sagepub.com> *In the Rest of the World:* Scolari, 6 Bonhill St, London, EC2A 4PU, UK. Tel:+44 (0)171 330 1222 Fax: +44 (0)171 374 8741 Email:scolari@sagepub.co.uk WWW: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk>

### Hints and tips

Do you want to attribute concepts to styles as you type them in?

Set up the required style e.g. MyActions. Enter the concept text on the command line and follow the concept text with \MyA. So, the complete command would be: =Order new computers\MyA. You need only type the first few letters of the style name, just enough so that Decision Explorer can recognise the style that you are "aiming" for.

### Feedback

We would very much welcome comments from readers of the Decision Explorer Newsletter and suggestions about the articles that you would like to see in future editions of the Newsletter. If you have a suggestion or would like to contribute an article then please contact Jenny Brightman, at Banxia Software, either by telephone on (UK +44) 0 141 552 3082 or by email to [News@banxia.com](mailto:News@banxia.com). Thank you.

## Recent publications

If you have had any articles, case studies or papers published recently which deal with cognitive/ cause/ concept mapping issues and/or the application of Decision Explorer then please let us know and we will publicise them here. With permission we will also add the reference for your publications to the bibliography which will be maintained on our web pages.

### Some 1997 publications:

Smits, M.T., C.A.T. Takkenberg, A.H. Vermunt (1997). Effects of GDSS and cognitive mapping in an experimental set-up. In Galliers, Murphy, Hansen, O'Callaghan, Carlsson, Loebbecke (eds) Proceedings of the 5th European Conference on Information Systems. pp 427-440. ISBN 1-86076-952-7.

Hofstede, G.J., M.T. Smits, A.H. Vermunt, N. Noorderhaven. (1997) Wired International Teams: experiments in strategic decision making by multi-cultural virtual teams. In Galliers, Murphy, Hansen, O'Callaghan, Carlsson, Loebbecke (eds) Proceedings of the 5th European Conference on Information Systems. pp 321-336. ISBN 1-86076-952-7 .

Ackermann, F., Eden, C. and Williams, T. (1997), "Modelling for litigation: mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches", *Interfaces*, 27, 2, p48-65.

Verstraete T (1997). Cartographie cognitive et accompagnement du créateur d'entreprise. *Revue Internationale PME*, vol.10, n 1

## Quick quiz

- 1 What are the names of the three built-in sets that allow you to manipulate the currently selected concepts, the concepts on the current view, and all the concepts in the model?
- 2 What does the LSS command do?
- 3 Which key combination brings concepts connected to the current selection onto the map?
- 4 Which command finds concepts with no links?
- 5 What does the command 'SC + L -10' do?
- 6 In which three places can you have messages displayed?

- 1 SC, ONMAP, and EVERY. They allow you to manipulate the map with ease.
- 2 It lists the similarities between two sets, allowing you to see overlaps between areas of interest.
- 3 Ctrl + B brings concepts linked to the selected concept. Ctrl-I and Ctrl+O bring just the ins and outs respectively.
- 4 Orphan reports concepts with no links.
- 5 'SC + L -10' puts the first ten concepts (those numbered 1 through 10) and selects them by putting them in the selected concepts set.
- 6 Messages can be displayed in a message box, the title bar or the command line, to help reduce distractions in group use.

## Announcements - Training courses

In the UK Banxia Software Limited organises workshops which are intended to provide an introduction to mapping and to the software (Decision Explorer) which is used to support it. The first of the 1998 series of events were held in Manchester on 16th February and in London on the 2nd March. If you are interested in future events then please register your interest with us and we will keep you informed. We are also planning two joint Decision Explorer/ NUD.IST workshops. The first is a 2 day event to be held on 29th and 30th June 1998. The other will be a 1 day event, held on 7th October 1998, as part of the CAQDAS Networking Project.

The Decision Explorer workshops all cover the same course material. This includes: the theory behind and practice in a particular technique for structuring qualitative information (cognitive mapping); discussion of individual and group applications of mapping; hands-on sessions with Decision Explorer - covering concept entry, editing, linking and display styles; looking at sample models; building, exploring and analyzing models; discussion and explanation of some of the features of Decision Explorer; dealing with information from multiple sources, and merging models.

The workshops are intended as practical, hands-on sessions where discussion and debate are encouraged. You do not need to have had experience of the software to be able to attend one of the workshops. We take you through the basics and get you off to a flying start! If you already own Decision Explorer, but feel that you have never really "got into it" and would like to know more or to improve your mapping technique then attending one of these courses would also be of benefit to you.

The combined Decision Explorer/NUD.IST workshops are still being finalized, so full details are not available at present, but again, if you are interested please register your interest with us and we will keep you informed as the programme develops. Thank you.

Our intention is to develop a network of trainers throughout the world and we are already taking the first steps towards achieving this. Please check our web pages at <http://www.banxia.com> for up to date details of trainers and courses both in the UK and abroad. Please contact us if you would like to become a Decision Explorer trainer.