

Decision Explorer®

NEWSLETTER



Issue 8 Winter 2002/2003

Welcome!

Welcome to the Winter 2002/ 2003 edition of the Decision Explorer® Newsletter. This is the first newsletter to be published since our relocation from Glasgow, Scotland to Kendal, in Cumbria on the edge of the English Lake District. While the move was something of a major upheaval for Banxia, we have heard from customers that many of you didn't even realise that we had moved. From our point of view that's good, since it means that our service to you wasn't affected.

Our new location hasn't affect the development of our products and we have continued to pursue one of the themes in the development of our software, that of inter-operability with other products (that is inter-operability both within our own product range and with other, third party, products). The provision of import/export via XML (see previous newsletter or our web site for details) is now complete and released in Decision Explorer® version 3.2. We have released two new demos for Decision Explorer® (to keep up with hardware developments - the existing demo was becoming unworkable on some systems) and we are also working on Banxia® Publisher™

Publisher™ is a new XML-based map publishing tool, designed to read information from any suitable XML source, it will allow you to produce high-quality graphics from any other analysis software with structured data in XML format. We will keep you posted about the development of Publisher™.

Please remember that we are always interested in hearing from you, so if you have any comments or contributions which you would like to make, please contact us.

Jenny Brightman, Banxia® Software Ltd

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News

On the move!

Banxia® has now relocated from Glasgow, Scotland to Kendal in Cumbria. We tried to make the move as seamless as possible. This move gives us a central location in the UK, with good communication links north and south, it has also given us more office space for expansion.

Working with Windows® XP

A regular question now is: "Is Decision Explorer® compatible with Windows XP?" The answer is "Yes". You shouldn't have any problems, but you may need to install the software using the "Run As..." option on the right-click menu if your login does not have administrator rights. Most users will not need this, but if you have a particular problem, please email us for assistance.

The Frequently Asked Questions section of our web site also contains other technical and usage information to help you.

Global reach

Decision Explorer® is now used in over 40 countries worldwide.

If you are a university or college lecturer, **teaching lab licenses** are available (although not advertised in our brochure). There are two options (with different model capabilities). Please email us for details of prices and functions.

Decision Explorer®, version 3.2

Decision Explorer®, version 3.2, providing the completed XML import and export (with COM interface) has now been released. It also allows up to 8 models to be open at once, and has a few other improvements. Check our web site for the details on how to download the update.

BANXIA®
SOFTWARE

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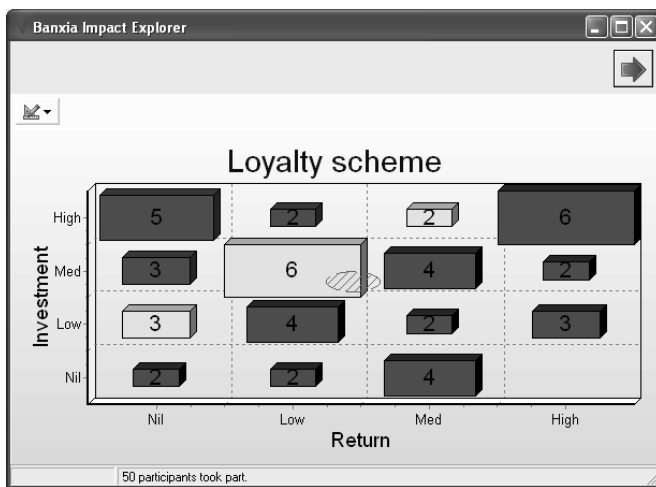
New software

Two new products from Banxia® Software may be of interest to Decision Explorer® users.

Impact Explorer™, version 2.0

A major update to Impact Explorer™ has now been completed, and is available as a free upgrade to existing users. Impact Explorer™ will be of interest to anyone who already uses Decision Explorer® with groups or who, as part of a facilitated decision making workshop, needs to quickly gather the opinions of a group.

The original software was designed to be a tool that was easy to use in ad-hoc meetings. The new version uses the same radio-based response keypads but enhances not only the core facilities, but the whole experience of using the software. The



list of items to be voted on (loaded from file, typed in, or imported direct from Decision Explorer®) can now be spell checked. You can store items with the options for an activity (vote, ranking or a 2-dimensional matrix) as a preset for quick operation during a workshop. The results graphs are now configurable, and you can review them at any time during the workshop or later back at your base where you can also use the “export to Word” facility to build a template record of the workshop. PowerPoint® inter-operation is also new so that you can flip easily back and forth using a single click in each application - auto-starting a preset in Impact Explorer™ as you do if you wish.

For full details of Impact Explorer™ 2.0, please visit our web site where a working demo is available.

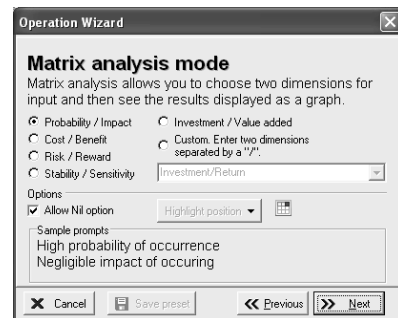
Banxia® Publisher™

Banxia® Publisher™ is a new software tool designed to make high-quality graphics and reports from qualitative data sources. Publisher™ will take data from XML files and allow you to create great looking graphics and text reports. The XML data can come from Decision Explorer’s export format, or from any other package that outputs data in XML (preferably with links like a map). It will transform the data using a technology called XSLT, and then present you with a map layout display where you can set styles for each item and with each style have a graphic. The links can be styled too, and are automatically, or manually, curved. You can also add graphic items such as lines and boxes to enhance the visual appeal, and they can be “smart” too to enclose a particular set of items as a group.

The layout you have designed can then be printed, or copied into other software. XSLT also allows the generation of text-based reports, so you can have coloured text listings too and then export them to Word (via Rich text), HTML, or to printer.

Publisher™ has none of the power of Decision Explorer® (no analysis or command line, none of the “facilitator orientated” features such as dialog suppression). Publisher™ is a graphic layout tool that can be used to present Decision Explorer® maps, and also data from other software that outputs XML.

Publisher™ is not yet available, but we will be updating our web pages with news of its development. If you have any questions or suggestions, please email us.



Hints and tips

Did you know that you can assign any command to a toolbar button? Customise the toolbar (using Insert Item) and add a button from the custom controls section. Then just click the button to set it up, and type the command you want. Next time you click the button, the command is actioned.

The toolbars also contain a few other gems that aren’t well known. There is a button available that will take a copy of the current map and save it as a bitmap on disk. Perhaps more widely useful is the continuous listing button, which allows you to stop the text view auto-clearing between commands and therefore allows you to build up a more complex display.

Speaking from experience ... errata

In the last issue, we published an article by Fran Ackermann giving views from an experienced user of Decision Explorer®. Due to space constraints we accidentally omitted her acknowledgement:

“Whilst this paper is written in the first person and reflects my own experiences, many of the ‘tips’ noted have come from working with Colin Eden either through conversations on workshops or observation. I am therefore grateful to his contribution albeit an implicit one.”

Our apologies for omitting this.

Smart Linking

In Decision Explorer® training we often say that learning how to use the command line and taking advantage of it will enhance your use of Decision Explorer®. One facility, which is often overlooked, is the ability to create chains of links in one action.

The simple command “1 + 2” creates a single (positive) link between concept 1 and concept 2. This is very useful when using Decision Explorer® in meetings because when someone says: “I think that there should be a link between concepts 207 and 513”, you don’t have to find or display concepts 207 and 513. A simple command puts in the link for you and the technology doesn’t get in the way of the progress of the meeting.

Sometimes it is necessary or desirable to create more than one link at a time - a chain of linked concepts.

The command “1 + 2 + 3 + 4” creates three links, in a chain, from concept 1 to concept 2, 2 to 3, and 3 to 4. This is useful for connecting a line of argument that is obvious on the screen - particularly after doing a brainstorm where the facilitator just used the rapid entry mode and typed ideas as they were suggested.

A more advanced linking option allows you to enter multiple links to a single concept - not in a chain. To do this, add a

“greater than” to the link command thus: “1 > + 2 + 3 + 4”. This again creates three links, but not in a chain this time. Here, all the links are connected to concept 1 because the > link modifier has been used. Concept 1 is linked “outward” to concept 2, concept 3, and concept 4.

If you want to link the concepts “inward”, use the “less than” character (you can imagine that the link direction is the same as the way that the > or < modifier is ‘pointing’). Thus “1 < + 2 + 3 + 4” creates three direct links. Here, all the links are again connected to concept 1 but this time in the opposite direction because the < modifier was used. The links created are from concept 2 to concept 1, from concept 3 to 1, and from 4 to 1.

Mixed link types

In the command “1 > + 2 - 3 t 4” there are multiple link types being defined, mixed into the same command action. This command creates a positive causal link from concept 1 to concept 2, a negative causal from 1 to 3, and a temporal link from 1 to 4.

Using the command line does speed things up and it is very flexible. Perhaps you will find yourself making more use of it in future for entering links.

Copying and pasting explained

There has been a specific request for this item, and its message is worth repeating (since if one person is having difficulty, there may be others). The question is: “how exactly does copy and paste work?” - sometimes it doesn’t behave as people expect. The Windows® clipboard is a way of transferring data from one application to another and within the same application. What you may not realise is that when you copy something to the clipboard an application often makes more than one type of data available. The data formats that Decision Explorer® uses depend on what you are doing.

If you are editing a concept or the command line, then the copy/paste is done using plain text, and is exactly as you would expect. If you have a map visible in the current view, then copying to clipboard will make available two types of data: a picture of the current display (either as a “metafile” or as a screen-grab bitmap) and a private data format containing details of the concepts on the display. This private data is limited to the currently selected concepts, or if there are no

concepts selected, then all those on the map view. If you have a text display visible on the current view the clipboard contains a plain text version of the text display, and private data containing details of the currently selected concepts, or if there are no concepts selected, then all those on the text view

For both of these, the private data contains *all selected* concepts, if any are selected. So if you want to transfer concepts to another model, the view contents do not actually matter, just the current selection. To select all concepts in the model either use the command SC=L or hold the **CTRL** key down when selecting the Edit menu Select all item (otherwise it just selects those on the map view). Also note that you don’t use the clipboard to transfer concepts from one view to another - that duplicates the concepts in the model. Use the View menu Bring layout from item if you want a layout transferred from one view to another or map the concepts that you want.

Feedback

We very much welcome comments from readers, news of publications, suggestions about articles that you would like to see in this newsletter and any articles that you would like to submit for publication.

If you have any suggestions or would like to contribute an article then please contact Jenny Brightman, at Banxia Software Ltd, by telephone on **+44 (0) 870 787 2994** or by email to news@banxia.com. Thank you.

Recent publications

“Cognitive mapping: A tool to support strategic management”. Tyler, D. Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management. Vol 5 (4). 2001. pp353-357

“Facilitating Knowledge in Soft Operational Research Practice: Purposeful Cases of Professional Operational Research Groups”, Ian Yeoman, PhD. Napier University 2002.

“Cognitive mapping”. Jenkins, M., (2002), In D Partington (Ed), “Essential skills for management research”, Sage. 2002. pp181-198

Events and training courses

If you would like more information about any of the events listed below, please contact either ourselves (Banxia® Software Ltd) or the appropriate event organiser. If you are not sure who is the right person to contact, then please just call us or email to training@banxia.com, we will be able to help you. Please check our web pages for the most up to date information.

Thursday 31st October 2002. London, UK.

Academics “Come & See” day.

A free event for an invited audience of lecturers, researchers and research students. Two sessions, repeated during the day, where you are invited to come and talk about and try out Decision Explorer®.

Friday 1st November 2002. London, UK.

Advanced Decision Explorer® workshop.

One-day workshop, tutored by Prof. Fran Ackermann, concentrating less on the mechanics of using Decision Explorer® and more on the wider picture of how you would use Decision Explorer® and cognitive mapping in a workshop setting, as part of a decision support intervention.

Thursday 16th December 2002, London, UK.

An introduction to Decision Explorer®

One-day, hands-on workshop, run by SdG Associates, taking you through the theory and practice of cognitive/ ideas mapping and the use of Decision Explorer®.

Tuesday 4th February 2003. London, UK.

An introduction to Decision Explorer®

One-day, hands-on workshop, run by SdG Associates, taking you through the theory and practice of cognitive/ ideas mapping and the use of Decision Explorer®.

Friday 28th March 2003. London, UK.

Commercial users “Come & See” day.

A free event for an invited audience of managers and management consultants. Two sessions, repeated during the day, where practitioners are invited to come and talk about and try out Decision Explorer®.

Wednesday 21st May 2003. London, UK.

An introduction to Decision Explorer®

One-day, hands-on workshop, run by SdG Associates, taking you through the theory and practice of cognitive/ ideas mapping and the use of Decision Explorer®.

Wednesday 16th July 2003. Boston, MA, USA

An introduction to Decision Explorer®

One-day, hands-on workshop, run by SdG Associates, taking you through the theory and practice of cognitive/ ideas mapping and the use of Decision Explorer®.

From the bookshelf

Mapping Strategic Knowledge £21.99 (0-7619-6949-7)

Sage Publications, London, UK. 2002.

This book outlines a number of different tools for mapping strategic knowledge, and thus making knowledge more accessible. Anne Sigismund Huff and Mark Jenkins have brought leading academics together in this work:

- to provide informed analysis and theory
- to illustrate the contribution of knowledge mapping to central issues in strategy and organization theory
- to consider the contribution of these studies to management practice

- to address practical theoretic and methodological limitations of these tools, including several software tools now available to facilitate mapping.

Each section of the book provides a table which charts the chapters' main contents, key findings and implications for knowledge management. An annotated bibliography is provided at the end of the book as a resource for readers who may wish to become more familiar with relevant and existing literature in this area.

Mapping Strategic Knowledge is relevant to those interested in knowledge management, primarily academics and consultants in the area of strategic management, but also academics in the area of organization theory.

Training contacts

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www.banxia.com/training/

Reseller contact details

If this newsletter has been sent to you by one of our resellers, their contact details will appear below, otherwise the space below will be left blank. If you are in any doubt as to who your contact is or who your local reseller is, then please contact Banxia® or visit our web pages.

Reseller contact details: