



The president of Microsoft, Bill Gates and Dr Tapani Savolainen brainstorming with the IDEGRAN++ software.

then brainstorm to generate a few solution ideas. The program then goes on to help users evaluate the ideas generated. Afterwards it sorts the results, and displays them on the screen or prints them out on paper, detailing the path taken to arrive at the final ideas.

GROUP USE

The program can be used by both individuals and groups of people to help stimulate them to work together and come up with creative ideas. For group use the program can be customized by, for example, inserting standardized evaluation questions to help a group of users keep the ultimate goal in mind. This makes it possible to generate and distribute standard question lists which incorporate the specific methodology used by a given company to encourage all group members to think along the same lines and share knowledge. For group brainstorming sessions, idea files generated by individuals can be combined for use by the group.

A TOOL AND A TEACHER

Aside from acting as a tool to help users brainstorm and evaluate ideas, Idegen++ can also teach. "Idegen++ teaches different methods of problem solving," says Dr Savolainen. "After using Idegen++ for a while, you might well find yourself using the brainstorming methods without the aid of the program. It improves your skills in creative thinking."

USERS

The range of users is wide. "If we look at our customer base," comments Dr Savolainen, "we see that the program has been bought by a wide range of industrial users, including government and other types

of administrative departments. In fact, the Prime Minister of Finland has a copy. The program is used in large companies, including major European telecommunications organizations and banks, as well as in small enterprises run by just a single person. Even unemployed people have been buying it, to help them come up with new ideas for earning a living."

Several thousand copies of the program have already been sold in 20 countries. The program was awarded the CeBIT Innovation Award for software innovation and development in Europe in 1993, and was commended for extending the use of computers into a new area. CAC-Research Oy have also been awarded the prestigious Finnish Engineering award in 1994 for innovative engineering.

ECONOMICAL IDEAS

Although the program was designed mainly with companies in mind, it is priced low enough to bring it within the range of schools and home users. Because the real program "runs in your brain", the computer hardware required is modest. Versions are available for Macintosh computers and for IBM compatibles running DOS or Windows 3.1. The software requires only 2 Mb of disk space and the DOS version can be run from two floppy disk drives.

Versions of the program are available in a number of languages including Finnish, Swedish, German, English and Dutch. A French version is in the pipeline.

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