



## EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING USING MINDGENIUS

### What is Decision-Making?

We always seem to be faced with making decisions, no matter which way we turn.

Some decisions can be hurried, whereas others require careful deliberation. Some can be based on logical deduction, whereas others are based on instinct or gut feel. Often, decisions are a mixture of both.

Decision-Making is an essential part of daily life. As individuals, teams and organisations, we are constantly challenged to make and take the right decisions. Good Decision-Making sets direction, objectives and targets, and results in actions aligned to achieve desired progress.

Good Decision-Making provides leadership and inspiration.

### Traditional Approach

Traditionally, Decision-Making is often based on hunches and gut feel, due to the poor quality of information on which the decision would be based. When decisions are made based on information provided, the former are usually poor, due to insufficient confidence in the latter.

The key to good Decision-Making is good, well-thought out information which considers all viewpoints, takes account of risks, and justifies assumptions.

However, currently flipcharts or whiteboards are used by many as the main method of compiling and analysing the information on which decisions are based. Manually, this typically runs into many pages, all of which need to be pored over in detail to be properly interpreted and understood. This is an extremely arduous task that can take weeks to conclude. As a result, many Decision-Making processes fail to achieve their objectives.

Unfortunately it is all too common for an excellent in-depth thinking session prior to Decision-Making to become bogged down, resulting poor or no decisions.

This problem, as we will show, is overcome totally with MindGenius.

### Decision-Making with MindGenius

Decision-Making with MindGenius is simple and straightforward. It requires a meeting room with computer projection capability and a PC with MindGenius installed.

The Decision-Making session requires a facilitator to ensure that all areas are covered equally and ideally a scribe to type the thinking directly into MindGenius.

If a scribe is not available, the facilitator would typically log the thinking. Typical questions used by a facilitator are available the Decision-Making sample map directly from the help menu.

Logging the thinking required to make good decisions is simple, as can be seen from the instructions below:

You are more likely to make a good decision if you carefully consider your options and the ramifications they have on yourself and others. It helps if you follow a specific process to ensure that you take a well-rounded view and make your decision based on the best information available to you within the timeframe that you have to make the decision.

Such a process is as follows:

1. **Question** - Identify what exactly is the decision that has to be made, what it is seeking to achieve and why it is needed.
2. **Explore** - Check out your alternatives. What are your options/alternatives, risks, assumptions, success factors?
3. **Rank** - Understand the pros and cons of pursuing these alternatives. Prioritise the alternatives based on how they achieve the intended objectives of the decision required. Which alternative(s) best achieve(s) the desired result.
4. **Decide** - Are you happy with the best ranked option(s)? How do they fit with the success criteria, risks, assumptions previously identified? Decide which one to go with.
5. **Communicate** - Communicate the decision to the appropriate people.

To let you see how MindGenius can help you with the decision making process, let's use the following scenario.

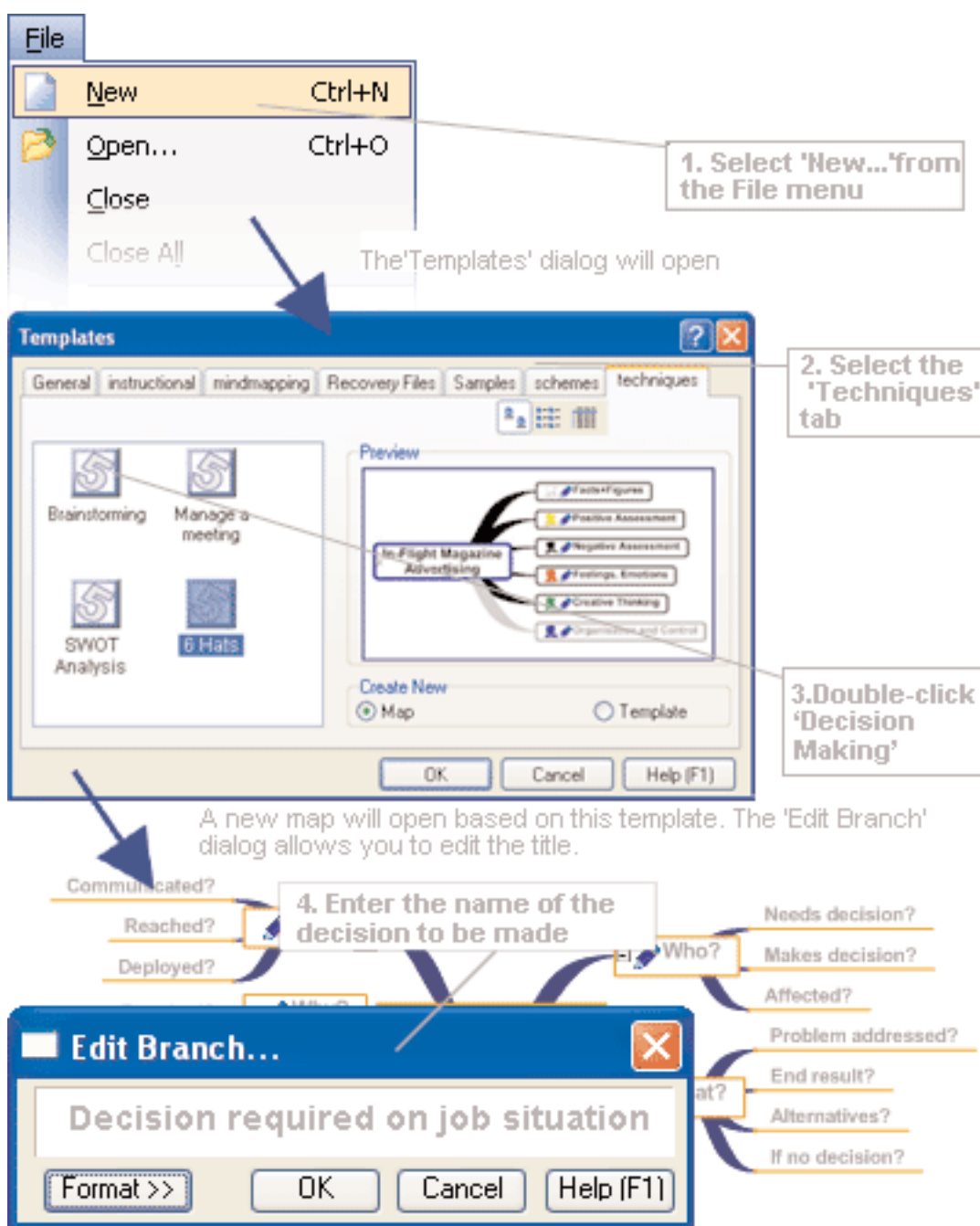
*You are becoming disenchanted with your current job. You have been doing the same job for the past two years. You are repeatedly doing the same things over and over again. There is a lack of new challenges in the work you do, so you are becoming bored. You have taken on other tasks to attempt to alleviate your boredom but you don't feel that you are getting any reward or recognition for this. The outlook for promotion is limited. Your immediate manager has been in his current position for ten years and does not appear to have any ambition or prospect of progressing up the promotion ladder. In fact you believe that he is under performing in his current role and your suggestions on ways of introducing performance improvements have fallen on deaf ears. So much so that you are now starting to have arguments with your manager and a fellow worker who wish to stay in their comfort zone and maintain the status quo. So what are you going to do? Have you a decision to make?*

Now let's go through the decision making process using MindGenius

## Step 1 - Question

All too often people make decisions without truly understanding whether or not the decision was really required or why it was needed. To make a good decision you need to understand the background to the decision and what it is seeking to achieve. You need to have answers to questions such as:

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>WHO?</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who needs the decision?</li> <li>• Who has to make the decision?</li> <li>• Who is affected by the decision?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>WHAT?</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the 'problem' you are seeking to overcome?</li> <li>• What is the desired end result?</li> <li>• What alternatives are there?</li> <li>• What would happen if no decision was taken?</li> </ul> |
| <b>WHEN?</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When does the decision have to be made by?</li> <li>• When does the outcome of the decision need to be implemented by?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>WHERE?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where has the decision to be made</li> <li>• Where has the decision to be announced?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>WHY?</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is the decision required?</li> </ul>  |
| <b>HOW?</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the decision to be communicated?</li> <li>• How will the decision be reached?</li> <li>• How will the decision be deployed?</li> </ul>   |



MindGenius provides you with a Decision-Making template to help you question whether or not you need to make a decision. Select 'New...' from the File menu to launch the templates dialog. Select the 'Techniques' tab and double-click 'Decision Making' template the following map will appear.

When the template opens you will be prompted to enter a brief description of the subject matter you need to make a decision on.

In this case, you would type in "Decision required on job situation" which would overwrite the text 'Decision'. Clicking OK - or pressing the Return key - results in the root branch of the map being set to 'Decision required on job situation'.

You can now use the template questions as a prompt for your thoughts.

*Tip: If you wish to insert a line break (carriage return) in the Branch text, open the Edit Branch dialog box, select the point that you wish to insert a line break and press {Ctrl}+{Enter}*

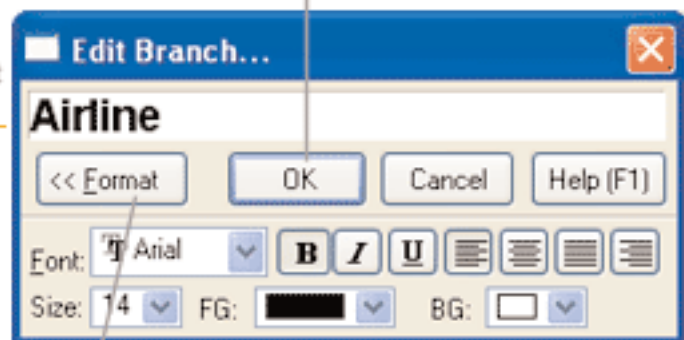
MindGenius incorporates a special branch text entry method to minimise any intrusion into your thought process. Click on any branch. You have now selected the branch (parent) you wish to add a sub-branch (child) to. Type in the child branch title - the 'Add Branch' dialog will automatically appear in response to your keyed input. Pressing the Return key will add the branch.

1. Select the (parent) branch to which you wish to add information and start typing



3. The new information is added as child branches

2. The 'Add Branch' dialog will appear, complete the title of the new branch and press the return key or 'OK'



Tip: Press the format button to change the look of the text in the branch.

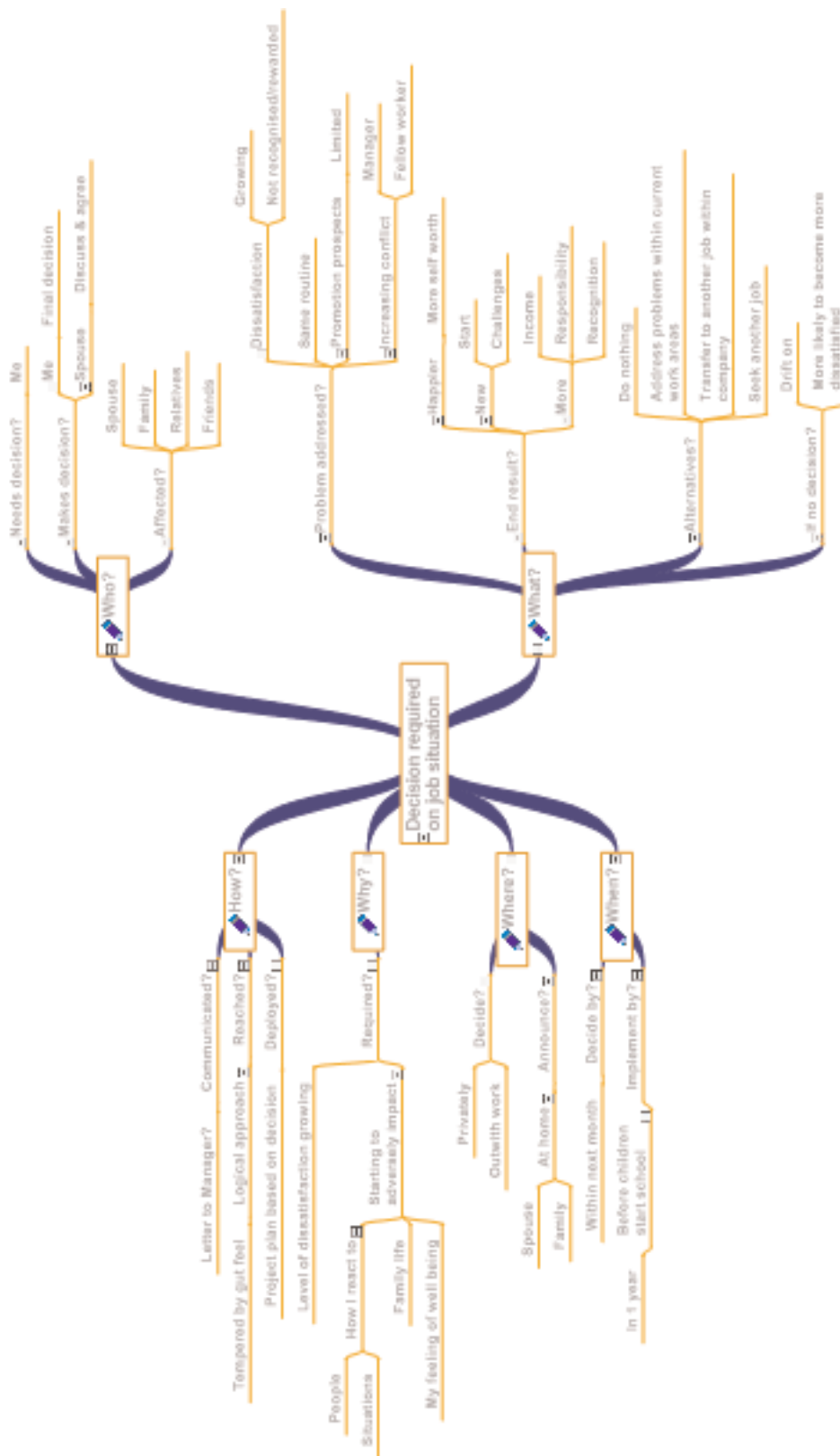
You can continue to 'type-and-return' and more child branches will be added to the parent branch, or select a different parent branch to add child branches to.

The first step is to understand the need for a decision to ensure that unnecessary decisions are not taken. So you click on a branch and start recording your thoughts using the 'type and enter' method.

In some cases you will need to brainstorm some ideas. For example you don't need to make a decision if you do not have at least 2 alternatives to choose from. So if you click on the 'alternatives' branch then you can add some potential approaches. Your map could develop as shown below:



Your map will rapidly grow:



There may be areas within the workmap that you might wish to add more detail to remove any ambiguity or doubt on the meaning of a branch when you revisit it at a later date. You can add this detail, whilst preserving the visual summary of your map by inserting text as a note to a branch within your map.

To Do this:

1. Select the branch you wish to add a note to.
2. Click on the Notes Pane icon and the Notes Editor Tile will appear. You can now enter a text description. The Note will be attached to the branch but the visual summary of the branch will be preserved - only the Notes symbol will appear on the branch.

**Map Explorer**

- Decision required on job situ.
  - Who?
  - What?
  - When?
  - Where?
  - Why?
  - How?

**Notes Editor**

I would want to ensure that the decision was implemented and that we were in a stable home environment before the children start to attend school so that their education would not be adversely affected by any change resulting from this decision.

**1. Select the branch to add a note to**

**2. Open the Notes editor by selecting the blue pencil icon**

**3. Enter notes by typing directly into the editor**

**4. The notes symbol appears in the branch to indicate the presence of a note**

You can use this technique on any branch within your map.

From the above map it is evident that you need to make a decision. The situation will get worse if you do nothing and you are already being adversely affected. There are alternative approaches that you could pursue.

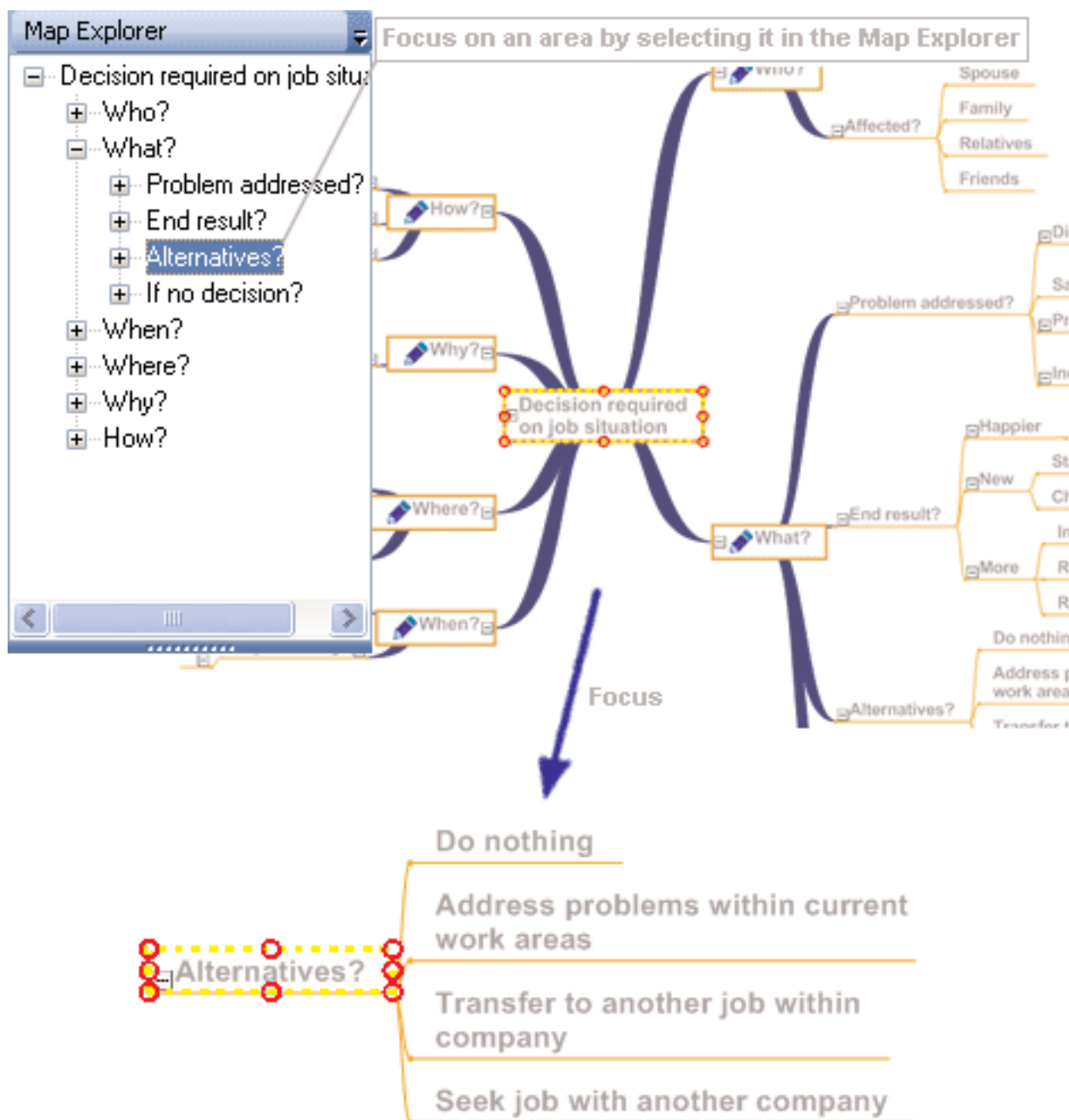
You are clearer in your own mind why you need to make the decision and what you are seeking to achieve. So you would proceed to the next step in the process.

## Step 2 - Explore

Having confirmed that a decision is required, you need to start exploring your options/alternatives, risks, assumptions, and success factors in order to gather and understand the information that you will need to base your decision on.

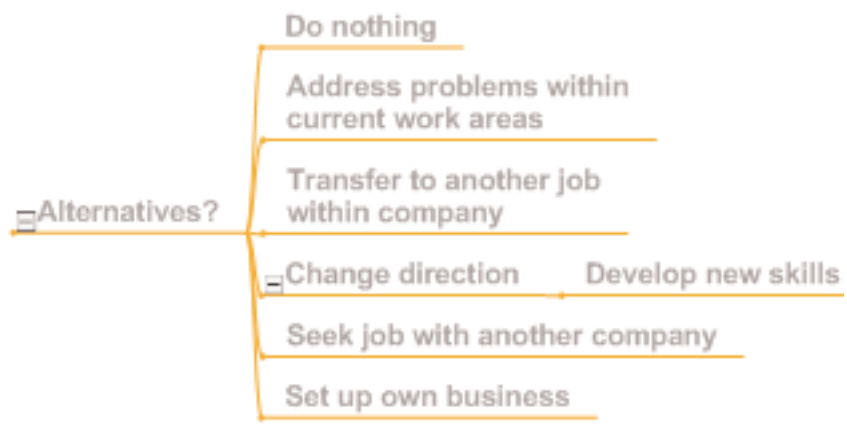
First, let's explore your alternatives further.

Your map has already grown in size and complexity. MindGenius has a Map Explorer feature that gives you powerful navigation capabilities and allows you to 'walkthrough' your map and to focus in on specific areas.



When you click on a branch in the Map Explorer, MindGenius automatically redraws the map to show the selected branch as the root branch with its child branches and structures displayed.

You can now explore your alternatives. Let's say you identify that there are some additional options:



- You could learn new skills and move into another discipline or type of work
- You could become your own boss and start your own business

Simply type and enter to add these options. The MindGenius workmap will simply flex and grow to accommodate them.

The sequence of the branches might not be correct. MindGenius lets you quickly re-arrange your thoughts by drag-and-drop within your map. For example, your 'Alternatives' could be rearranged as follows:



So using Map Explorer, type and enter and drag and drop you can flesh your 'Alternatives' out. You can also add new branches for 'Success Factors', 'Risks', and 'Assumptions'. This could result in the follow

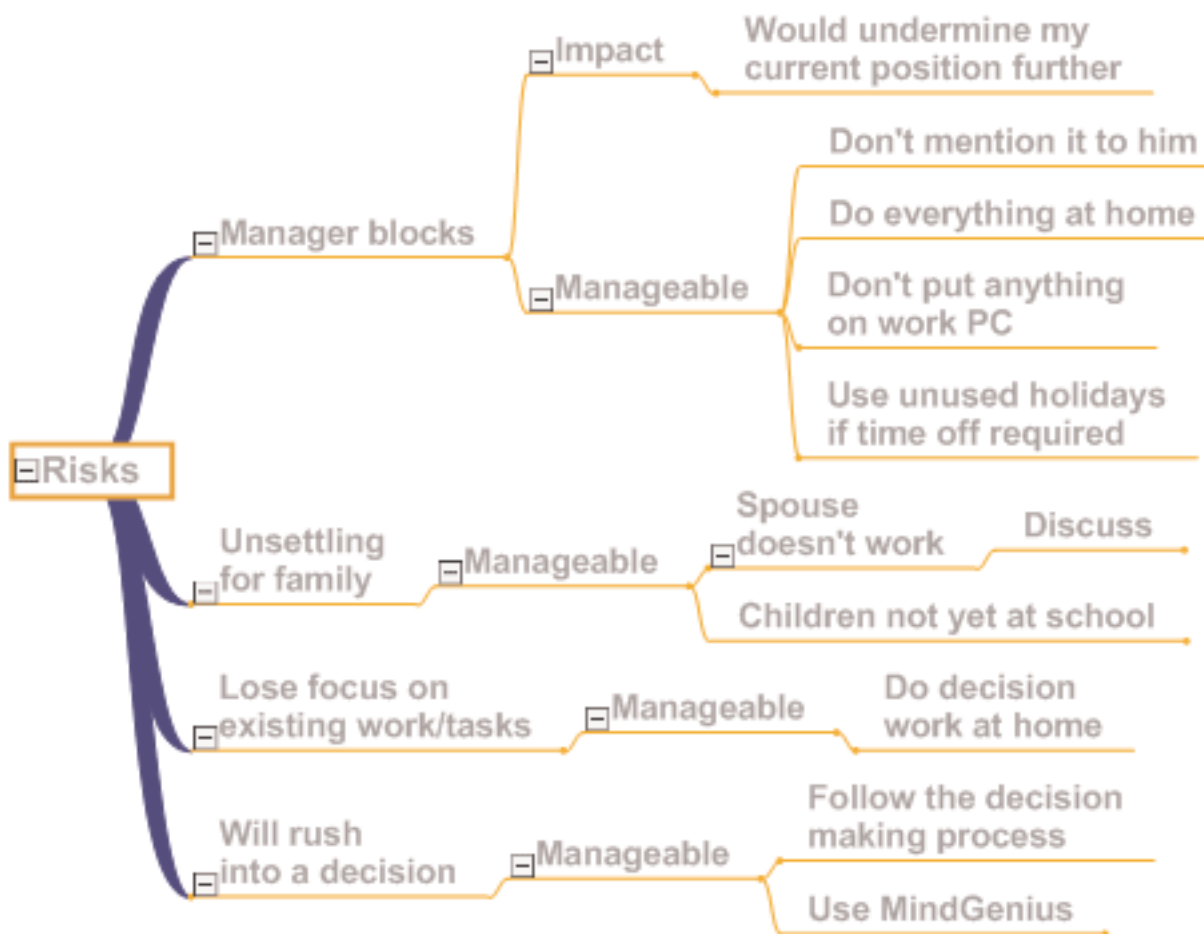
Alternatives



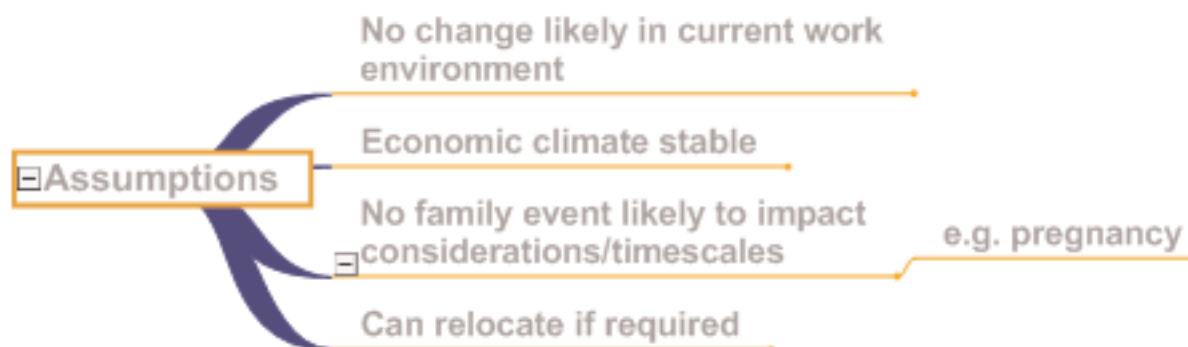
Success Factors



### Risks



### Assumptions



You've explored the options, considered the risks, clarified your assumptions and identified key success factors that need to be met.

So now you are ready to move to the next step in the process.

## Step 3 - Rank

Not all of your options have an equal chance/probability of realising your desired outcome. You need to rank them based on specific criteria. What is the likelihood that you will be able to successfully complete a specific option? What is the likelihood that a given option will realise the benefits that you desire?

A simple way is to classify them in one of the following boxes:

	High	Medium	Low
Likelihood of success			
Likelihood of desired benefit			

MindGenius provides you with the capability of assigning key words (categories) to branches. You can use them to visually indicate the likelihood of success and the likelihood of achieving the desired benefits.

Using the MindGenius categories you can assign the appropriate key word to a branch. In the case of the above matrix we will use the following category symbols:

	High	Medium	Low
Likelihood of success			
Likelihood of desired benefit			

You can add additional branches to indicate potential reasons for your rankings (or add explanations in the branch Notes:

The image shows the MindGenius software interface. On the left is the 'Map Explorer' showing a decision tree with nodes like 'Who?', 'What?', and 'When?'. Below it is the 'Categories' panel with 'My Categories (available)' including Rank (High, Low, Medium), Query Number (3, 2, 1), and Filter tiles. On the right is a decision map with branches such as 'Do nothing', 'Address problems within current work areas', 'Transfer to another job within company', 'Change direction', 'Seek job with another company', and 'Set up own business'. Each branch is annotated with a filter tile (High/Low/Query Number) and a number (1, 2, 3). Three callout boxes provide instructions: '1. Select the Category tile' points to the Filter tile icon in the Categories panel; '2. Select the branches to apply a category to' points to the 'Do nothing' branch in the decision map; '3. Double-click on a category to apply it' points to the 'Query Number 1' category in the Categories panel.

MindGenius provides you with the capability of filtering your map.

You are interested in alternatives that have a high likelihood of success AND a high likelihood of achieving the desired benefits. To show this information, use the Filter Tile to filter on these two categories:

**Map Explorer**

- Decision required on job si
  - Who?
  - What?
    - Problem addresser
    - End result?
    - Alternatives
    - If no decision ?
  - When?

**Filter**

Show actions due by: 08/01/2004

For these resource(s):

In the following categorie:

With this Keyword:

1. Select the filter tile

2. Select the filter criteria

3. Press the update button to apply the filter

Map Explorer Content:

- H 1 Do nothing
- L 1 Address problems within current work areas
  - Transfer to another job within company
    - H 3 New division opening abroad
    - L 2 Move to a different department
  - Change direction
    - Develop new skills
    - Go back to college
      - 2 Full time?
      - 1 Part-time?
  - Seek job with another company
    - Are similar firms advertising?
  - Set up own business
    - L 3 Consultancy
      - Long timeframe
      - Potentially high
      - Risky

Note that this results in a filtered map view of your alternatives as follows:



There is only one alternative that matches these criteria, the option of transferring to another job within the company and specifically to a new division opening abroad.

The next likely option would be to seek a job with another company (M, 2), as all the other options included at least one of the lowest likelihoods (L or 1)

So having ranked the alternatives you can proceed to the next step in the process

## Step 4 - Decide

Although there seems only to be one real option, it is still worthwhile checking that it meets your original criteria and that you would be comfortable proceeding with that option.

So how does it stack up? Create a new level 1 branch in your map titled 'Preferred options' Add a child branch titled 'Transfer to new division opening abroad'.

Copy the 'Success Factors', 'Risks' and 'Assumptions' branches as children of the 'Transfer....' branch. To do this:

1. Select 'Success Factors'
2. Hold down the Ctrl key and select 'Risks' and 'Assumptions' too, all three branches should now be shown as selected
3. From the Edit menu, choose 'Copy' (or use the shortcut keys Ctrl + C)
4. Select the new branch you added 'Transfer to new division opening abroad'
5. From the Edit menu, choose 'Paste' (or use the shortcut key Ctrl + V)

Group edit all of these branches to have rounded box shapes in order to visually differentiate between the original branches and your analysis against them. To do this:

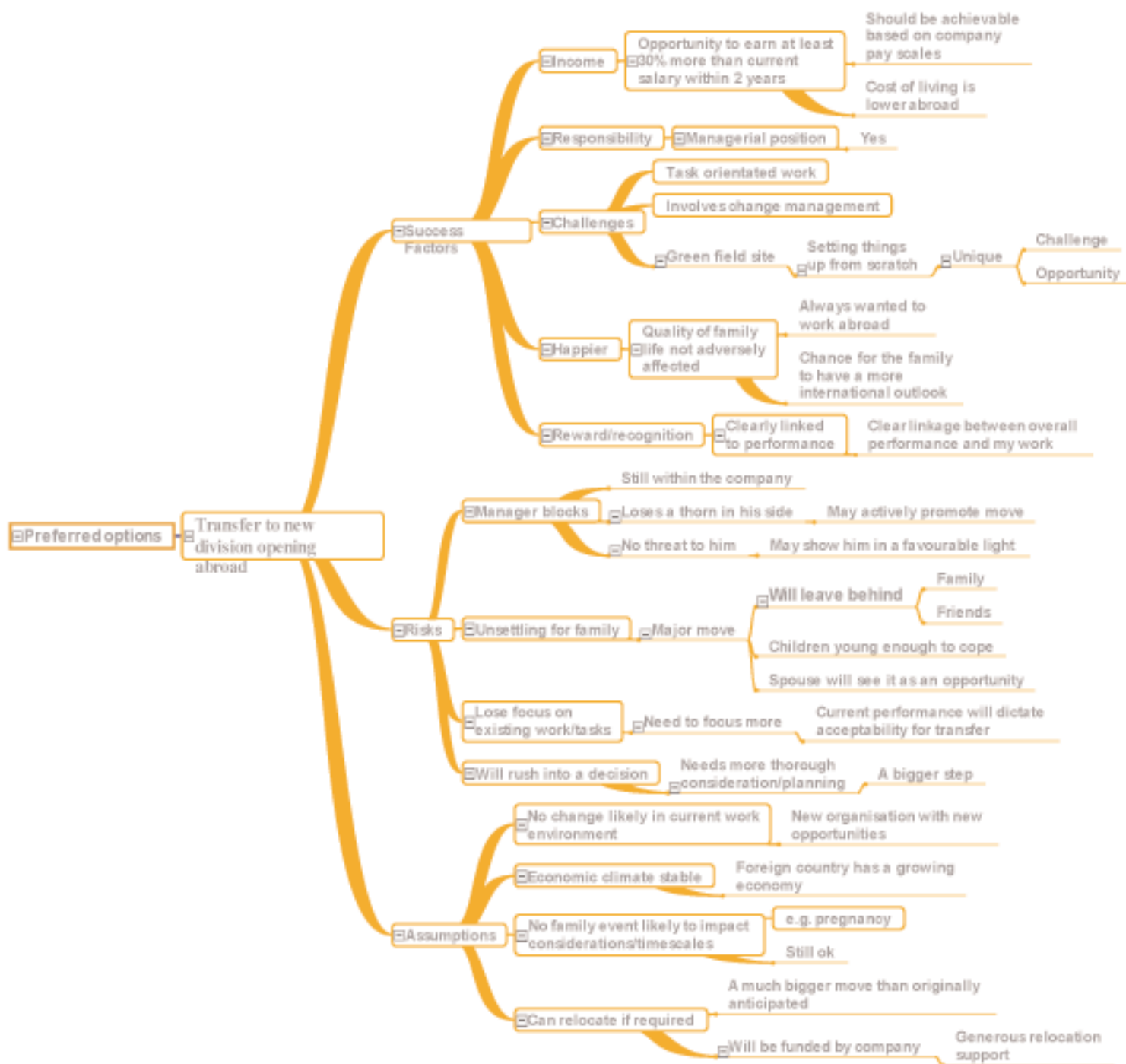
1. Select 'Transfer to new division opening abroad' by holding down the Shift key when you click on the branch with the mouse. This will select this branch AND all it's children
2. From the Branch Menu, select 'Branch Appearance...' (or press F3)
3. On the 'Branch Shape' tab, set the Shape Style to 'Round Box'

This section of the map will now look like the following:



Now you can use Map Explorer to focus on each viewpoint in relation to your preferred option.

This could result in the following. (Note that your comments/analysis is differentiated by not being enclosed in a rounded box shape)



The overall picture appears to be very favourable so you would probably decide that the preferred approach is the one that you would like to go with. Your decision is made and you can move on to the next step in the process.

## Step 5 - Communicate

Going back to the 'Who?' part of your map, you will see that although you have made your decision, it still needs to be discussed and agreed with your spouse. You can walk your spouse through your map to explain how you arrived at your decision and hopefully convince them to support your decision. If your spouse raises any points, you can add them to the map and explore them together. Assuming such changes do not have any significant impact you will both be in agreement, the decision is made and you can proceed to formulate a plan to implement your decision.

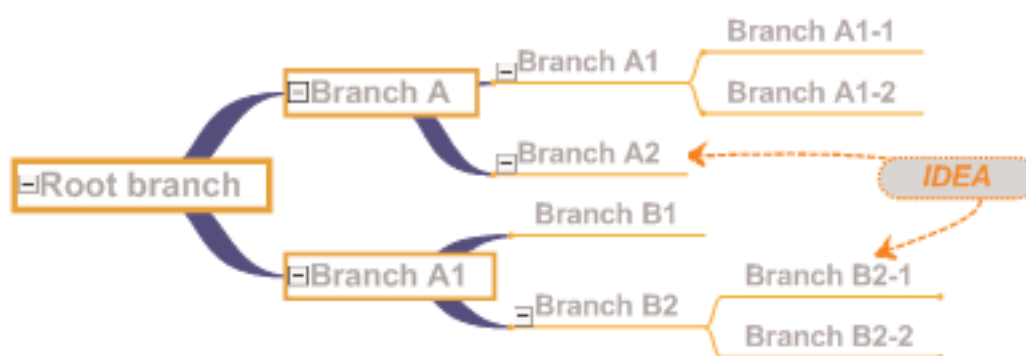
## Some of the extras you get?

### Workmap structure and hierarchy

As you record information on the decision making framework provided by the template the sequence and hierarchy of branches you generate in relation to their parent branch are automatically created and numbered as you add the branches. The numbering system associated with this sequence/hierarchy can be made visible to aid understanding.

### Mental Connections

There will be times when you see a connection between two branches that cut across the structure and hierarchy of your workmap. They are likely to lie in two entirely different avenues of thought. It is from such linkages that breakthrough thinking and novel, innovative ideas originate. You can mark this link using the Mental Connection feature within MindGenius and then generate a new workmap to flesh out this new avenue of thought.



### Attachments

Any number of electronic files or hyperlinks can be assigned to a branch. These can be opened from within the workmap and you have instant access to a host of supporting information and research. This is particularly useful if there is data available in electronic format to support any research you have carried out in support of your decision.

### Different views

Normally the decision making process is carried out using the MindGenius 'Map' diagram. There may be occasions when this is not the best way to present the material, to make best use of screen space and to 'see' linkages/connections between branches that cut across the hierarchical structure. At the click of a mouse you can transpose your workmap into the following diagram types with specific usages:

- Output Tree ((for identifying solution and effect relationships)
- Outline (list view)
- Input Tree (for identifying cause and effect relationships)
- Affinity diagram (for grouping)
- Organogram (for hierarchical structures)

### Resources

As well as categories, you can also assign resources to specific branches. Helps you identify who does what. There may be particular activities you want a specific individual to perform and you can use the resource feature within MindGenius to visually indicate this.

### Actions

When used in conjunction with resources you can designate a branch as an action and assign it to a particular resource (individual). You can then send the action request to the specified person via MS Outlook.

### Creating new maps

MindGenius will automatically create a new workmap based on groupings of the category or resource codes that you assign to the branches. View your workmap from a completely different perspective.

### Customising your decision making approach

As you continue to use workmaps for decision making you are likely to identify specific areas that you should consider that may be personal to either yourself, your work activities or your organisation. Simply edit the template to add/edit or delete branches as required. You can also personalise the 'look' of the template to give it a more corporate or organisation specific look (colour, map background etc).

### Sharing the thought processes on which your decision has been made.

You can share the reasoning behind your decision with other people to communicate it to them, or to solicit their opinion, comments and feedback in a number of ways:

- In face-to-face situations you can walkthrough your maps during a review session using the Map Explorer navigation features within MindGenius You can use full screen mode {View}, {Full Screen} to maximise the screen area used for the map.
- You can run MindGenius on web conferencing applications such as WebEx to communicate your maps to people in different geographical locations.
- Send them the workmap via e-mail from within MindGenius
- Package up the files into a single file and send it as a file attachment
- Send them the MindGenius files along with a viewer so that they can view the files even though may not have MindGenius on their PC
- Save the maps as HTML files and people can access them and view them over the internet/intranet.

## SUMMARY

MindGenius allows you to gather and understand the right information, and think through the Decision-Making process.

With MindGenius, decisions are thought through in a highly effective and practical way, and the operational difficulties associated with the traditional way of managing and understanding the data generated become a thing of the past.

Finally, by using MindGenius, the correct decisions are made, and decisions which are well-thought out and supported by the right information become the norm in an organisation.

Whenever we make a hurried decision, in any area of life, we are often asked by those close to us if we have really thought things through.

The process for really thinking through your decisions before you make them follows a common framework when working with MindGenius, as detailed below:

1. Information is **GATHERED** from a range of sources and people
2. This information goes through a process of being analysed and **UNDERSTOOD** before decisions are taken as what it means and how we progress forward
3. Our findings and recommendations from the Understand phase is **BOUNCED** off any colleagues who could conceivably add value to by tapping into their collective knowledge, experience and creativity and in doing so avoiding any difficulties encountered previously
4. Finally, with everyone in agreement on what needs to be done an action plan is produced to **DELIVER** the necessary components to ensure objectives are met

*Sample maps explaining the gather, understand, bounce and deliver phases are available directly from the Help menu.*