

a checkbook, to graph a process, or to privately brainstorm. The issues associated with using application-specific, stand-alone programs for Knowledge Management include having to learn multiple interfaces, duplication of data entry, and the associated errors.

## **Simulations**

Perhaps the most powerful class of KM tools is simulation—programs that mimic reality by animating complex processes. Simulations are especially useful to convey complex relationships to a knowledge worker who has difficulty understanding to tables of numbers or equations. Simulations are an excellent means of exploring what-if scenarios in an interactive format because they can display complex processes in an easy-to-understand way.

Consider how the simulation package Extend, from Imagine That, Inc., shown in Exhibit 5.5, allows the observer to view and manipulate the parameters involved in determining the staffing and equipment requirements for a hamburger stand. The user can manipulate the process in the kitchen and observe the effect on customer wait time. By aiding in visualization, simulations increase the odds that the user will comprehend more of the subtle relationships in a process, compared to a simple table of data or equations.

## **Decision Support Tools**

Decision support tools are software tools that allow managers and other knowledge workers to make decisions by reviewing and manipulating the data stored on a PDA, on one extreme, to a data warehouse, on the other. Many of the technologies discussed here can be applied to some form of decision support.

Decision support tools are one way to disseminate best practices, using technologies such as expert systems, simulations, and statistical