

Generic Data Storage with Blaise 4.8 Datalink

*Arno Rouschen
Statistics Netherlands
aron@cbs.nl*

Because database software and servers have become more and more powerful over the years, many organizations tend to store their data in relational database management systems. This has several advantages, among others that data is not stored locally on disk, can be secured and is not proprietary and thus accessible from all kinds of third party software.

From Blaise 4.6 / BCP 2.0 on it is possible to store Blaise questionnaire data in relational database management systems (RDBMS), like Oracle and Microsoft SQL Server. We name this concept Blaise Datalink. Datalink uses so-called Blaise OleDb Interface (BOI) files. Within Blaise you can use such a BOI file in the same way as a native Blaise database file. Blaise OleDb wizards are available to create a BOI file and the corresponding database tables for your Blaise questionnaire. The BOI file contains connection parameters and information about available tables and how to retrieve field data from these tables.

Although it is already a nice feature that you are able to store Blaise questionnaire data in an RDBMS, we had some ideas and also had some requests from clients to make the storage more generic; it would especially be nice if we could share database tables between questionnaires. In previous Blaise Datalink aware versions, BOI files were tailor-made for a particular survey and each Blaise questionnaire had its own set of database tables.

Blaise 4.8 Datalink has been extended and can define, next to the custom-made BOI files, so called generic BOI files. Generic BOI files use a common primary key in order to store the data in a generic way, but this works completely transparent to the user; you just need to define, as usual, primary and secondary keys in your Blaise data model. By using generic BOI files, the number of needed Blaise tables in your RDBMS decreases, because tables are shared and less tables means less database administration. Also it will be easier, from an architectonic view, to integrate Blaise data in your production environment, because all Blaise questionnaire data lives only in a few tables in your RDBMS, and the data itself can be accessed in a generic way, for example by your case management system or other parts of your software environment.

Blaise 4.8 BOI surveys are registered on your database server. This gives us the possibility to do some survey administration on the server, for example to insert a new survey, delete an obsolete one, show the state of a particular survey and to query Blaise questionnaire data. Blaise 4.8 ships with a new OleDb client tool especially developed in order to support these features.

The presentation demonstrates how to set up generic tables with help from Blaise 4.8 BOI files, explains a little bit of the inner workings of Blaise 4.8 Datalink and also shows you how to administer the server with the new Blaise 4.8 OleDb client tool.