



LINKS in Africa



Ike Ehie (Kansas State University) recently returned from a sabbatical in Nigeria where he used LINKS for a supply chain management course.

First of all, I wanted to extend my appreciation to Dr. Randy Chapman for allowing me to use the LINK SCM simulation at the American University of Nigeria in Yola, at Adamawa State, Nigeria at no cost to the students. That was really a big help in incorporating the LINKS simulation in the first-ever supply chain management course taught at the university.

What is your experience in teaching and your continued link to Nigeria?

I am from Nigeria and came to the United States more than 30 years ago as a student. I am concurrently the principal investigator of a USAID grant that was awarded to Kansas State University to assist the University of Lagos in Nigeria to strengthen their business curriculum both at the undergraduate and MBA programs. As a result of this grant, I make frequent visits to Nigeria. This has given me the opportunity to understand the educational system in Nigeria, especially with the tertiary institutions. I was invited by the dean of the school of business and entrepreneurship at the American University of Nigeria in Yola to come and teach courses in project management and supply chain management and I honoured his invitation. With my interest in supply chain management and my desire to teach such a course in a Nigerian university, I decided to do my sabbatical at the American University of Nigeria in Yola which occurred in spring of 2010.

What course were you teaching?

I taught two courses, one in project management and the other in the supply chain course management to mostly management students who were in their final year at the university. These students had the requisite academic background for the course since they have all taken both the introductory operations management course and the decision analysis course.

What made you decide to use LINKS as part of this course?

For the three or four years that I taught the supply chain management course at Kansas State University, I used the LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation and it worked very well. I



was quite impressed with the product. With LINKS you can look at various performance metrics—financial, operational and customer-oriented metrics. Besides understanding the intricacies of supply chain management, the effect of various SCM decisions on the numerous performance matrices was a big factor in choosing the LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation. With LINKS, you have a whole list of metrics that you can use to evaluate the impact of your decisions. It gives you a good picture of supply chain with an understanding of how to manage a supply chain

from the raw material, to manufacturing, to distribution, and to retailing. It provides students with good metrics to evaluate the performance of the supply chain—looking at financial, operational, and customer perspectives.

How did LINKS fit into the course?

The students ran the simulation for nine consecutive weeks (months of operations). The simulation accounted for one-third of the final grade and was integrated in the course from beginning to the end. Students were able to learn the various decisions in affecting a company's supply chain and immediately apply the decisions in the simulation.

Did the students enjoy LINKS?

The students really appreciated the opportunity to use the LINKS simulation in the course. This was probably the only simulation they were exposed to. The fact that they could link their decisions with their performance in the simulation raised their understanding and confidence in the supply chain topic. These were graduating students that were getting ready to get into the real world, and some of the issues that we were discussing were things that they knew they would be getting into when they got into the business world.

One of the students in the class was going to study in Sweden for his master's program in telecommunication, but after he went through the course, he has now changed his mind to study supply chain management and had applied for admission in Kansas State University for the spring 2010 semester.

Were there any technology problems you had with the students in this program?

I knew that LINKS was a web-based simulation, and the university has a reliable internet connectivity. It was been reported that the university is the most-wired campus in all of Africa. The university provides every incoming freshman with a laptop computer. The university has 24/7 wireless



access to the internet for the laptops and in the labs, so it was easy for me to use LINKS and internet access was no problem whatsoever.

The students actually outperformed the company that they competed against which Randy created. At the beginning, the students did not perform very well, but as they learned the material and were able to make better decisions, they actually outperformed their competitor, which was very good. They improved on their forecasting and applied different methodologies looking at the short-term as well as the long-term results. Based on the material covered in class, they were able to apply the knowledge gained to improve their performance.

Did you have a CEO and did the students work themselves into a structure in their team?

Yes, the student I mentioned that has applied to come to Kansas State University in spring of 2010 emerged as the leader (CEO) of the group. The student was able to organize the group and led discussions about the decisions being made and held the group together. In the final presentations for which the dean was present, we were all very impressed with the performance of the students.



Was there much involvement with the rest of the faculty?

There were no other faculty members involved in the course. The university lost their key factor member in the area and they in the process of recruiting a replacement.

Do you have any advice for anyone who is teaching in a remote location?

First of all, they have to have a reliable internet access. This is key. The other advice I would give is to teach this to either graduating seniors or MBA students who have some business courses in operations management and decision analysis.

The dean mentioned that this is the first supply chain course that he is aware of being taught anywhere in Nigeria. It was nice to have the experience to teach this course in Nigeria and I would like to see more coverage of supply chain management in the business curriculum in other Nigerian universities.

