



Corporate Executive Education

Darin White, a member of the LINKS Instructor Hall of Fame from Samford University, is the only instructor who has taught with all four variations of the LINKS simulations and also participated in university-sponsored executive education programs with LINKS.

Do you find a different result when you compare what students learn to what executives learn? Is there less of an “ah-ha” or do the corporate participants learn as much as the students with the simulations?

I found that in the corporate executive education environment you are dealing with folks in their early 30's to early 40's, who have been in the company for about 10 years, mid-level managers who are being groomed and examined to go to that next level. The companies that employ these folks want this experience to help them evaluate these people in light of who should be pushed up the ladder and who wasn't quite ready yet.

Even with 10-15 years of experience, these people are sufficiently challenged and still come away having learned lessons. If you watch college-level baseball you see a lot more errors and the game is less predictable than with professionals. You are dealing with amateurs. When you teach LINKS to undergraduates, the exact same game is being played at a completely different level than when you are playing with executives that have been in the workforce for the last 10 years. Are they still sufficiently challenged? Of course they are. There is plenty of complexity there to challenge the most advanced business individual. As long as they are competing against people who are qualified to the degree that they are. The outcomes are still there.

Another major advantage of LINKS, particularly in executive education, is when a client tells me that there is a certain trend or something going on in their industry and it is really important that they get their people trained in this area. It could be something like change management that could be important or how to deal with a crisis situation, or they may need to make sure their people understand how to deal with disruptive technologies—when a new industry comes in—and how that is going to impact their customers and how to take that disruptive technology and use that as an opportunity to reach out and be on the cutting edge rather than a follower. LINKS is very flexible and can be changed to reflect a certain problem and what is going to be going on in a few years or under different circumstances. With Randy's help we were able to develop a game run that involved a disruptive technology coming into this service industry. Through the event happening in the game itself, it raised the student's awareness of the issue. We talked

about it, looked at case studies, and taught them about disruptive technologies and how to handle them.

Anything that the client comes up, with Randy can figure out a way to embed that into the game environment and teach through that.



In the executive education environment, we sit down with them and get an understanding of what the major learning outcomes they want to gain from this experience are. Then I go back to the drawing board and talk through that with Randy and we ask ourselves “can we deliver on this?” 90% of the time we are able to craft a game environment that brings out that specific element into it and are able to teach through that. It is so much more robust than just doing a case analysis. These executives are competing for their lives with all their pride on the line. They have been running their companies, and they want to win this challenge for their company. They think about how to process and deal with problems at a completely different level than they would if we were talking about this theoretically.

What reaction do you get from the companies that chose to use LINKS to educate their employees?

We have never had a single time that we have had a company that was not pleased. The majority will end up being repeat customers.

What is the most popular program for corporate executive education simulations?

The shorter three to five day programs are the most popular. It is hard to get busy executives to be able to give you more than three to five days. I have them do their pre-reading prior to coming to day one.

I have also been successful with having companies give me half a day— say from 8 am to noon every week for eight to ten weeks. From a learning perspective, this is really a better model because they have longer to contemplate their decisions and think about things.

What major benefits do companies get from using simulations in corporate executive education?

Companies usually consider it an honor for individuals to be chosen to compete in these programs. The companies try to raise the bar when they are competing.

One of the huge selling points of using LINKS in an executive environment for a new employee training program, or and also for the mid-level executives to move on to a new level. It gives the company the ability to understand and learn more about the personalities of the people involved

and how they handle stress and how they handle decision making under uncertainty and how they work together as a team.

It is often critical for a company to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of these individuals in a short amount of time. They need to learn as much as they can about the people. If you put these folks through a simulated competitive environment, you will learn so much more about the people involved.

Because we put them through the LINKS environment, participants are put into a real business environment and companies learn things about their employees that they would not be able to learn otherwise. There is no better executive training platform that can do this. At the end of these sessions, I can provide a detailed analysis of every individual that goes through the simulation experience. We can measure them on a number of different traits, from team-building skills, to leadership skills, to ability to operate under pressure to all the things we are able to evaluate them on because we put them into that environment. Once the companies get this information back, they can make much better decisions as to where to place these individuals. This is valuable to a company. If companies succeed in getting the right people into the right spot in the first place they are likely to retain a much higher percentage of these people for a longer time and the individuals should have a more successful career since they are initially put into the right spot.

