

In This Issue

- ⊗ **NEW!!! LINKS Procurement Management Simulation** 1
- ⊗ **About LINKS Online** 2
- ⊗ **Bookmarks in the Manuals** 3
- ⊗ **LINKS Services Management Simulation in a Retailing Course** 4
- ⊗ **LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminar** 8

New @ LINKS



LINKS Procurement Management Simulation

When you don't have time in your introductory operations management, supply chain management, and logistics courses for a "larger" simulation but you'd still like to include a team-based, competitive simulation experience in your introductory undergraduate, MBA, and EMBA courses, we invite your consideration of our newest LINKS simulation:

LINKS Procurement Management Simulation

- LINKS firms manage procurement, manufacturing, and forecasting for their firms during a four-round simulation exercise
- Traditional financial statements and operating reports provide an information-rich environment for analysis and decision making
- Performance assessment is via a balanced-scorecard of financial and operating metrics, with performance judged relative to within-industry competitors
- Value priced @ \$20/student for a four-round simulation event



Each of the recommended four simulation rounds is approximately equivalent to a smaller "Harvard" style case study in terms of analysis, individual preparation, team meeting and discussion, and student-time requirements. Estimated outside-of-class student working time is 1.5 hours per simulation round.

[Continued on page 2](#)





About LINKS Online

Here are four things I learned offering LINKS in online MBA courses. The students to whom I refer are adults who are working as managers in various types of companies throughout the world.



Nancy Stephens (Arizona State University) is a long-time user of the LINKS Services Marketing Simulation in the first-year MBA marketing course.

1. At the beginning, emphasize reading the manual. I posted a quiz about key points in LINKS and most students ignored it, so you probably should make it a requirement.

Teams who have members who haven't read the manual operate at a severe disadvantage for the first few rounds and perhaps for the entire simulation. I suppose this is a problem with on-ground students as well, but somehow, it seemed more acute in the online course.

2. Assign the marketing plan and do it right away. In my most recent online course, I decided to skip the LINKS marketing plan assignment because another assignment seemed more important to these particular students. That was a mistake. Teams were never forced to seriously consider their

[Continued on page 3](#)

LINKS Procurement Management Simulation (continued)

Like all LINKS simulations, the LINKS Procurement Management Simulation is **competitively dynamic** (LINKS supports industries with between 2 and 8 firms; simultaneous, parallel LINKS industries accommodate larger class sizes), **web-based** (no software to download/install), and **fully-administered by LINKS-simulations.com** (instructors teach; we run LINKS for you according to your schedule).

Full details about the LINKS Procurement Management Simulation are accessible via the LINKS website.

Randy Chapman (Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com), the LINKS author, welcomes the opportunity to converse with LINKS instructors to provide assistance in selecting the most appropriate LINKS simulations variant for courses of all types, lengths, and levels.



LINKS strategy and they seemed to approach the simulation more as a game. They started a price war and made decisions that they would never make with their own company's money.

3. Be very available for “meetings” with teams. Depending upon the characteristics of your students, you may want to insist on one or more regular meetings during the simulation. The first meeting should be held right away, just after the first set of results when the teams are floundering and trying to find their way. Plan on spending an hour on the call.

Be willing to have meetings at times that are convenient to your students, such as on weekends, early morning and late at night. Students in other time zones will really appreciate this. I have successfully used conference calls and Skype for meetings with online teams all over the world. (Skype with multiple users is voice only.)

4. Post short video commentary after each quarter if you can. Offer your observations along with some advice or reminders. Make it short and simple. The goal is not only to give them the substance of your remarks but also, and perhaps more importantly, to remind them that you are there, guiding them and caring about what they are learning. In online courses, this is crucial.

If you have a webcam, make a very short video of yourself – no longer than two minutes – and post it, either to your school's website or to a third-party service. (I used Jing from www.techsmith.com and it worked fine.) There are some good websites on making your video look professional (e.g., lighting, background setting), so use them.

Did You Know?

Bookmarks in Manuals

All LINKS manuals, including the LINKS Instructor's Manual, have bookmarks throughout their pdf files. In each manual, this initial bookmark page permits convenient instant access to all chapters in a manual with a single mouse click.



Using the LINKS Services Management Simulation in a Retailing Course



Kyle Huggins (James Madison University) is a long-time LINKS user, although mostly of the product-oriented LINKS Marketing Strategy Simulation in marketing management/strategy courses.

You use the LINKS Services Management Simulation. Why do you use a simulation when teaching a retailing course?

I am a huge fan of simulations in general. In the simulation, students make changes on a regular and consistent basis. This changes the complexity of the case, changes the outlook and changes the outcomes. The students get immediate feedback on their decisions and can see how their competitors are doing which changes their next decision.

With a case, or something that comes out of a book, it gets a bit repetitive. You look for the same thing over, and over, and over. In the age of the internet, things get posted online, so you worry about answers being there on cases and the students not really doing the work. The simulation is a good way to keep the students honest, and for them to critically have to think through what they are doing. There is some level of peer pressure when it comes to using a simulation in a class because you have a couple of firms that are doing well, and a couple that are not doing well, and then some in the middle. The students think “I compete for a grade with this person out here, and they are doing a million dollars better than I am doing so I am going to have to pick up my game.” There is a level of accountability that I like to keep in a class.

Specifically for retailing—I like to use the simulation just to give the students a little different feel to what a retail environment would look like. All they really think about is the product side of retail management—Wal-mart, Lowe’s, Macy’s, Nordstroms—all of those shops are what they consistently think about on a retailing perspective. They go to banks, and doctors, lawyers, but it is hard to break down that mentality of everything being a physical product—something tangible that you can touch, taste, or feel. LINKS Services Management Simulation is effective in doing that. It gives the students a different perspective to look at—other business models that are intangible.

How do you teach with the LINKS Services Management Simulation?

Within my retailing class, I take the first three-fifths of the class, and I teach using the book. We study financial strategies, how to account for buyers and how they work under category managers.

Most of the text book examples are about the product side. Every once in awhile you might get a blurb at the end of the chapters about how a service company might be a bit different.

I tend to focus specifically on the product in class for the first three-fifths. Students have three exams over that material and then the last two-fifths of class I bring in the LINKS Services Management Simulation. I tell them from the get-go that the class will be very product-oriented at the beginning and very service oriented at the end. We are going to compare these two industries and see what we think are the primary differences between running and being a part of these two different industries.

In the last seven to eight weeks, they spend the first week reading through the manual to get comfortable with the LINKS environment. I go over what decision making the students have to make. Then the students get into making their decisions. At the beginning, they make only one decision a week. I lecture them on how to configure their service products, how they would set up a cost structure based on their configuration, when they can launch those services and in what regions, and look at customer preferences—ultimately what they choose as their services configuration—all of those things that make up the marketing mix including having a good strong strategy in place.

Once they get both of their services configured, designed, launched, and get about a week's worth of feedback, we advance to two decisions a week. Then, it comes down to strategy. What we see from the services side is a huge difference from what we expect product costing measures to look like and what we expect service costing measures to look like. Specifically, the difference between variable and fixed costs in these industries. They always start out with product-orientation from a fixed-cost perspective. They don't pay much attention to how well they are utilizing their employees. On the service side, it is so extremely important that you manage your employee utilization. If your CSRs are sitting there twiddling their thumbs for 50% of the day—that's money that you are paying them whether they are making service calls or not. You are paying them a straight salary which is a huge fixed cost especially if 50% of the time they are not bringing in money.



To get the students to change their perspective that employees are now the ultimate resource rather than the service design takes a little while. By the end of the services simulation, they realize that they have to be completely focussed on utilizing their CSRs, and if they are not utilizing them they are really going to have trouble being profitable.

It is a very good application of hands-on experience for the students to specifically see the area of cost measures. Some of the students get it and some don't. Putting them in firms with other students helps when one student gets it and another doesn't.

At the very end they do a final presentation. They report on what their best decision was, and their worst decision, and if they could do it over again, what they would change and how they might be more profitable. Most of the time when they finish the presentation, I believe the students have a very good understanding of the process. I don't do a paper because everything is happening so quickly with the services operations that to add a 10-page paper to their responsibilities is probably more than they could bear.

Is there a special method you use to put the students into groups?

I ask two questions to help me with my group assignments. They are "who do you want to be with?" and then "give me one person that you don't want to have in your group." I feel that most students ultimately know the other students better than I do and this method leads to reducing the level of group conflict.

Each team has to decide who is going to be their CEO and then assign some level of responsibilities to every person in their group. They may break it up by region, or they break it up by services, or they break it up by job responsibilities. They also must determine what it would take for a person to get fired from their job, but that has not come up very often.

How do your students feel about the LINKS experience?

LINKS is a competitive experience. If you are at the bottom of the list, obviously your grade is going to reflect that—you should be graded on performance. Also, as the student moves along academically, they get more and more experience working with simulations and may even have been given practice runs which lets them see the effects of their decisions and their competitors before it counts. I don't agree with that philosophy. In this world, we make decisions and have to live with the consequences all the time on a real-time basis. This is true for both our personal life and our business life. When you are running a simulation in a very short time and there is such a steep learning curve, the students sometimes feel that they were not as successful as they wanted to be.



In the end, the light goes off and they see the difference between the service and the product orientation, especially in a variable-cost versus fixed-cost perspective, and they appreciate the service environment and the problems and strategies that come with it. These students may possibly go into a career in the services environment somewhere because so much of the management orientation towards products is being shipped overseas that the services sector is exploding. They will need to know this information, and they appreciate what they were taught.

What advice and suggestions would you give other potential LINKS instructors about using the LINKS Services Simulation and how to be successful at it?

From the very beginning, students have to focus on what the CSR utilization ratios actually do to their overall level of profitability. Also, set up some type of structure for their firm so the students know the responsibilities for each member of that group. Each member in the group needs to be productive, and feel that their opinions are being listened to. I feel a peer evaluation process is important, one that is completely confidential and only my eyes will see. They can evaluate their peers on how much they contributed and how well they worked together in the group and also that they can evaluate the simulation and what changes they would like to see done for future students.

The key to success for the professor is when the student points out what needs to be stressed more, and at times I have gone to Randy about what controls the students would like to have added or modified.

Randy was great about working with me. The students felt that a decision they needed to make was in conflict with their strategies and what they wanted to do. In less than 24 hours Randy had adjusted the simulation and created a solution so we could get past that problem. I think that is the key to success for the LINKS instructor. They learn over time what things they need to tweak in the simulation and Randy is so very good about understanding and then adjusting the simulation to how it works specifically in your class. I have such good and immediate gratification on changing small things here or there, or adding price that fact to all materials or changing whatever limits that have been originally set up. That's fantastic. It's ultimate customer service and we appreciate that.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

As an instructor, I am a firm believer in the simulated environment. I have used LINKS in my Marketing Management class and my Marketing Strategy class. I am a firm believer in simulation especially when you can break it down over an entire semester. That is key to having the students think through the process, which is valuable to them. LINKS is unique in its approach and its perspective and LINKS stands out when compared to its competitors.



LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminar

July 6-8, 2010

LINKS Simulations Immersion Experience

Five Teleconferences and a Four-Round LINKS Simulation Event

Registration is available for the next three-day, intensive-mode Train-The-Trainer distance-learning seminar for the LINKS simulations. Randy Chapman, the LINKS author, leads these distance-learning events for academic faculty interested in learning more about teaching with LINKS. This intensive-mode seminar format includes 5-6 hours of work per day during the three days of the distance-learning seminar.

LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars are offered for the enterprise management, marketing, services, and supply chain management LINKS variants.

Current LINKS instructors are invited to pass along this announcement to faculty colleagues and

advanced doctoral students who might be interested in learning more about teaching with LINKS.

Experienced LINKS instructors sometimes participate in a LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminar to refresh their memories of LINKS details just prior to teaching with LINKS or to explore another LINKS simulation variant for a future teaching activity. Such experienced LINKS instructors may elect just to participate in the TTT's four-round simulation event, ignoring the public teleconferences included in the LINKS TTT program. (PowerPoint decks are e-mailed to all LINKS TTT participants before each teleconference, so such experienced LINKS instructors may freely choose to participate in all, some, or none of the teleconferences as per their availability and interest.)

Details about LINKS Train-The-Trainer seminars may be accessed via these URLs:

- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/EMttt.pdf> [Enterprise Management]
- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/MSttt.pdf> [Marketing]
- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/SMttt.pdf> [Services Marketing]
- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/SCttt.pdf> [Supply Chain Management]



Reminders

LINKS Passcode Retrieval:

Convenient LINKS passcode retrieval for a LINKS participant (student or instructor) is possible via the “Retrieve LINKS Passcode” link on the main LINKS webpage (<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com>). Executing the “Retrieve LINKS Passcode” operation e-mails the firm’s passcode to the participant’s official e-mail address as currently recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database.

E-Mail Address Management:

LINKS instructors submit their students’ e-mail addresses (grouped into teams) as part of the information-set provided to initialize a LINKS industry. Often, these are institutional rather than personal e-mail addresses. Since some participants prefer to use a personal e-mail address rather than an institutional e-mail address for LINKS, it’s possible for participants to update their official e-mail address as recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database.

Participant updates of official e-mail addresses as recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database are possible only after initialization and publication (via e-mail to all team members) of each LINKS firm’s passcode. Using their LINKS firm’s passcode, LINKS participants may change their official LINKS e-mail address after LINKS initialization via the “E-Mail Address Management” button in the LINKS Simulation Database. Confirmations of e-mail address changes are e-mailed to the old and new e-mail addresses.

Student Payment Timing:

The published LINKS price (the discounted price) is in effect until the first round of LINKS is complete. Then, the price is increased 25%. This means that we can initialize your LINKS simulation event (and advance LINKS through to its normal starting point) and students can continue to pay at the discounted price until the first scheduled round. Before initialization can occur, we do need to receive your game-run schedule and the students’ e-mail addresses (grouped into teams).

It is not necessary for your students to pay before LINKS begins to have access to the discounted LINKS price. Students must only pay before the first official game run on your game-run schedule to receive the discounted price. Thus, student payments can occur simultaneously with the beginning of your LINKS simulation event.

Student payment with a personal credit card is via the “Pay For LINKS” link on the LINKS webpage.

As a practical matter, a final warning/reminder will be e-mailed to those students who haven’t paid by the first game run, before implementing the non-discounted price.

LINKS Resources:

- **LINKS Website Resources:** LINKS website (<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com>) links provide convenient access to all LINKS simulation variants, to the LINKS Simulation Database, to passcode-protected instructor resources, and to user interaction contact points such as "Pay For LINKS", "Payment Questions?", and "Retrieve LINKS Passcode"

- **Printed Manuals:** LINKS manuals are freely available for download via the LINKS website. However, some LINKS instructors prefer to have publication-quality printed manuals provided for all of their students, rather than relying on their students to individually download/print the participant's manual from the LINKS website. We're happy to provide this service for LINKS instructors. The all-inclusive additional cost for participant manuals varies from \$18/student to \$28/student depending on the LINKS simulations variant. We normally need three weeks advance notice to arrange for production and shipping (to the instructor) from our on-demand printer.

- **LINKS Instructor Resources Access:** You may access the evolving LINKS Instructor Resources via the LINKS webpage. Contact Randy Chapman (Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com), the LINKS author, to obtain the relevant access parameters (username and passcode).



The LINKS-Simulations Newsletter is a monthly newsletter for current and prospective LINKS instructors and for LINKS friends. Please e-mail questions, comments, suggestions, and other contributions (e.g., LINKS teaching tips) to Winkler@LINKS-simulations.com.



Editor: Cyndy Winkler

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Access previous edition: <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/newsletter-previous.pdf>



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