LINKS newsletter

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http://www.LINKS-simulations.com




# Compressed LINKS

***Cliff Defee (Auburn University) is a long-time LINKS user and member of the LINKS Simulations Hall of Fame.***

## *Will you explain what Compressed LINKS is?*

Compressed LINKS is essentially changing from the traditional one-decision per week event to two decisions for the students each and every week. We compress the amount of time it takes to complete the entire LINKS event and compress and reduce the amount of time between each decision cycle.

## *What is the main reason for making this change?*

I went to this approach about a year ago, when I began working with one of our sponsor companies to create a custom case activity for the class. I needed to insert a rather substantial amount of casework into the class and so I needed to reduce the amount of time that I had allocated to LINKS. Traditionally, I had run the LINKS activity across the entire semester. I didn't want to have LINKS assignments crossover with the complex case that I was giving them. So I needed to shorten-up the LINKS window in the semester and that's what drove me to do this compressed format.

### *Did you find strengths and weaknesses of LINKS to doing it this way?*

An obvious strength of LINKS is the ability to complete the LINKS event more rapidly, allowing time for other activities like this case example I'm talking about. The greatest strength I have heard directly from my students has been the shorter time between decisions keeps them more connected and more into the simulation itself. They have a better feel for where their team stands and what decisions they made during the last period. In the once-a-week decision schedule that I had used previously, I believe the students put the simulation on the back-burner for four or five days between decisions and then they had to bring themselves back up to speed and re-learn where they were regarding some of these decision elements in the game, time and time again.

### *Do the students like compressed better?*

The feedback I've gotten has been overwhelmingly positive. I surveyed the students this semester at the end of the LINKS event and 70% said that they preferred the twice-a-week decision cycle.

My students are all seniors. As far as their feedback regarding weaknesses of this approach, they typically have multiple team-based activities across the other senior level courses that they are taking in the college of business. A lot of these courses have once-a-week assignment activity cycles and they get together with their teams. They are used to meeting this way and scheduling across with all their various teams. As I've gone to the multiple-times-a-week decision cycle, it has forced them to find multiple times during the week to meet with their LINKS team for my class. Some of them have complained that it is a complex scheduling problem for them because they feel they don't have enough time to get it all in ... which is nonsense, but that is the feedback I have gotten.

The thing I tell my students is that "you are more in control of your free time today than you will ever be once you start to work. Just remember what you are telling me because you are going to look up six or twelve months from now and say 'gosh I wish I had that much time in my schedule'."

### *What did you need to do to set up the program in this way?*

I always do a number of what I call "up-speed activities" early in the semester to help students come up the learning curve. These activities help them understand all the ins-and-outs of LINKS and be prepared to start making decisions. I've added a number of these things over time as I've done LINKS more and more. A couple of these assignments generally take place during the first few weeks of live-decision making.

With the compressed schedule, in an eight-decision simulation, the game would be halfway through while you were still trying to reinforce some basic concepts. It really forced me to be

focused on my early schedule in the semester and get these learning curve activities done before launching in to making LINKS decisions.

There's always that "ah-ha" moment that I get from my students when they say "it's all starting to come together for me" and I'm doing these things early in the semester to make that happen in the first couple of decision rounds rather than the last couple when it's too late to have an impact.

***Are there any other challenges, except for the scheduling problems, that the students face because of this change in format?***

There are a couple of assignments that they have to do in conjunction with LINKS in the middle of making all these decisions. One of them is the competitor analysis, where they have to gather data from the research studies and attempt to determine what a key competitor is doing. They then try to figure out what that competitor's strategy is, and why are they successful. And then decide how that knowledge should impact the way this team is making decisions.

That takes a lot of forethought and effort, to gather reports over multiple decisions cycles, and analyze it properly.

In the compressed schedule this is a little more difficult to accomplish, just because there is less downtime to actually focus on doing that kind of analysis.

***So there may be several that get chosen to be analyzed and some that don't get analyzed, is that right?***

Absolutely. Each team gets to choose the competitor to evaluate. You might have a dominant firm that runs away in an industry and most of the teams will pick that team. "They're killing us all, so let's look at that one", they say. Sometimes there will be two or three teams that are neck-and-neck at the top in the industry. In that case you'll see the students pick more of a variety of competitors.

***Does the team that's being analyzed get a chance to look at the results of this report?***

We have a discussion when the activity turned in and spend class-time talking about what each team found. That's interesting. You have all the teams talking about each other's strategy. That's where some of the best learning actually occurs. Students have to keep up with what's changing in the industry. That's one of the fun things that happens. Because a team will say that Team One was doing X, Y, and Z so we're going to follow their lead, and Team One says "oh yeah, we did that for the first two periods but we changed a little bit." So the analyzing team then realizes they were not really up to date and they didn't know as much as they thought they did.

### *Do you feel this compressed format works better for you?*

I was full of trepidation, the first time I did this. A few of years ago, when I was still doing all of my decisions once-a-week, I had some challenges with the way that the semester was laid out. I had a couple of hard dates that I had to work around so I knew I could either reduce the number of decisions in LINKS to allow for some of the special activities that were going to happen or I could compress some of the decisions and reduce the time between decisions.

I took a couple of weeks and put two decision dates in there. I thought I was going to get a lot of complaints. But to my surprise, I got a lot of positive student feedback saying they liked that. They were able to stay in the middle of LINKS and not have to restart it on the once-a-week basis. So that got me thinking along these lines.

### *What key points would you give another instructor who might want to try this process?*

I would encourage others to do this, test it out and see how it plays in their situation. Maybe take one week out of a 6 or 8 week LINKS event and go to multiple decisions in that week and see how the students respond.

It's valuable just because there's a lot of activities that I want to accomplish across the course of the semester with my seniors. It's our capstone class and I view it as a very critical class to their success as they move out into the working world. I think it is really helpful to maintain the learning they get with LINKS but add some other major elements and schedule non-LINKS elements in their own block of time versus having to overlap these activities.

The other option is that you are running LINKS throughout the course of the semester and dropping in a case here or another activity there, which has nothing to do with LINKS. I don't think that's as effective and it may become confusing to some students.

### *Do you change LINKS parameters around and add different options?*

I'm adding the customer service component so the students can have greater control over the customer service aspect of the simulation.

I have always added a fourth region about halfway through. I always throw a couple of shocks into the event; whether it's an air cargo strike for a period or two, or an economic jolt where the demand decreases for a couple of periods, or a vendor goes out of business and is not available anymore. There's always something like that.

I try to make it a little different from semester to semester so that students don't know quite what to prepare for.

# Hybrid LINKS

The 23 LINKS Simulations variants provide plentiful choices for instructors to fit a LINKS simulation to their particular course requirements, preferences, and desired within-course simulation "footprint" size. However, some resourceful instructors (especially after working with LINKS for a while) prefer to scale-up or scale-down a particular LINKS variant for their course application, essentially creating a "hybrid" LINKS variant. Some examples follow.

Scaling-Up LINKS Simulations Variant Examples:

- Brian Jacobs (Michigan State University), LINKS Procurement Management Simulation: Recently up-scaled to the LINKS Supply Chain Management Fundamentals Simulation to add postponement and demand-side management (price and marketing spending) decisions, while deactivating distribution and transportation decisions throughout to have a mid-sized version between the LINKS Procurement Management Simulation and the full LINKS Supply Chain Management Fundamentals Simulation.
- Verda Blythe (University of Wisconsin – Madison), LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation: Adds limited reconfiguration (product development) decisions for bandwidth and packaging only, with the other set-top box product attributes always remaining fixed at their original values for all firms. And, in addition, no patent royalties and no reconfiguration costs exist in her hybrid LINKS variant.

Scaling-Down LINKS Simulations Variant Examples:

- Tom Mahaffey (St. Francis Xavier University), LINKS Marketing Principles Simulation: Reduces the channel structure in each region from two (retail and direct) to one (retail), reducing the decision complexity a notch.
- Alexander Permann (University of Hamburg), LINKS Marketing Strategy Simulation: Reduces overall simulation complexity by deactivating manufacturing, so the LINKS software automatically manages manufacturing to produce just enough each round to meet all demand.

# LINKS Global Services Competition 2015

The 2015 LINKS Global Services Competition is scheduled for March-April 2015.

Student teams participate in either of two separate services competitions ... either with the LINKS Services Marketing Simulation **or** with the LINKS Services Operations Management Simulation.

These mid-sized simulations are appropriate for students in **introductory or elective courses** in marketing, services, or operations management.


Highlights of the LINKS Global Services Competition:

- Cross-Institution 6-Round Services Simulation Competitions
- Your Student Teams Compete Against Student Teams From Other Institutions
- Challenges Students in an Intense Team-Based Cross-Institution Competition
- For Students in Academic Degree-Granting Programs Worldwide
- Targeted at Upper-Level Undergraduates and All MBAs

Two separate LINKS Global Services Competitions are offered, with the LINKS Services Marketing Simulation **and** with the LINKS Services Operations Management Simulation. These are integrative, team-based, competitive simulations suitable for upper-level undergraduates and all MBAs.

Further details about the March-April 2015 LINKS Global Services Competition (scheduling, student eligibility, costs, and registration procedure) are accessible via the **LINKS Global Competition** link on the LINKS Simulations website:
http://www.LINKS-simulations.com

Participating in a LINKS Global Services Competition is an alternative instructional/learning opportunity to the traditional usage of LINKS within a single instructor's course (i.e., an event with students from a single course conducted according to the course instructor's preferred scheduling).

Questions? Faculty members with questions about the LINKS Global Services Competition are invited to contact Randall G Chapman PhD, the LINKS author (Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com).

# LINKS Stats: Top-7 Webpage Hits During 2014

During 2014, our top-7 most-visited LINKS Simulations webpages (of the 39 tracked LINKS Simulations website webpages) through October 24, 2014 have been:

| Ranking | Webpage | Webpage Hits |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Pro-Forma Projections | 23,545 |
| 2 | Newsletter Bulletin Link | 11,643 |
| 3 | Decision Inputs Audit | 10,221 |
| 4 | LINKS FAQs Link | 7,466 |
| 5 | Global Top-10 Rankings | 3,882 |
| 6 | Tutorials | 3,845 |
| 7 | Retrieve LINKS Passcode Link | 3,717 |

Why are these LINKS Simulations website webpages so popular?

**Pro-Forma Projections**

This link is found on each firm's main page in the LINKS Simulation Database. These projections predict the firm's profitability for the next round given their current decisions in the LINKS Simulation Database. These projections are based on various assumptions, including the key assumption that current sales volume forecasts will be the actual sales volume realizations in the next round.

**Newsletter Bulletin Link**

The Newsletter Bulletin, included in the standard Word doc results file, is a quick one-page summary of topical developments in the LINKS industry in the just-completed round.

**Decision Inputs Audit**

This link is found on each firm's main page in the LINKS Simulation Database. This inputs audit checks the firm's current decision inputs for potential problems and inconsistencies. Possible issues are displayed in blue and errors are displayed in red. LINKS students find this page to be very useful in their decision making process.

**LINKS FAQs Link**

This link is available throughout the LINKS Simulation Database. When students make their decision changes for the next round, they can access the relevant FAQs through a link at the top of each web page in the LINKS Simulation Database. While it is accessed most often by students, this same link has been provided at the top of the instructor firm-0 webpage as well for the instructor's convenience.

**Global Top-10 Rankings**

The Global Top-10 Rankings are published weekly. The link can be found on the main page of the LINKS Simulations website. All teams that qualify for the Global Top-10 Rankings are notified via e-mail, along with their respective instructors. The top-performing firms in these two Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are reported in the Global Top-10 Rankings:

- Change in Net Income to Revenue
- Forecasting Accuracy

Across all LINKS Simulations variants, these two KPIs are the easiest to compare cross-industry performance since higher values are always unambiguously better.

**Tutorials**

The LINKS Tutorials are useful supporting 20-30 minute work-through tools built around a variety of useful LINKS topics for each LINKS Simulations variant.

**Retrieve LINKS Passcode Link**

This link is at the top of the LINKS Simulations webpage. If a student or an instructor has misplaced their LINKS passcode, the passcode may be retrieved via this link. Input your three-character industry code along with your official LINKS e-mail address to have an automated e-mail containing the passcode sent to that LINKS e-mail address immediately after the request is submitted.

# Forecaster Simulation

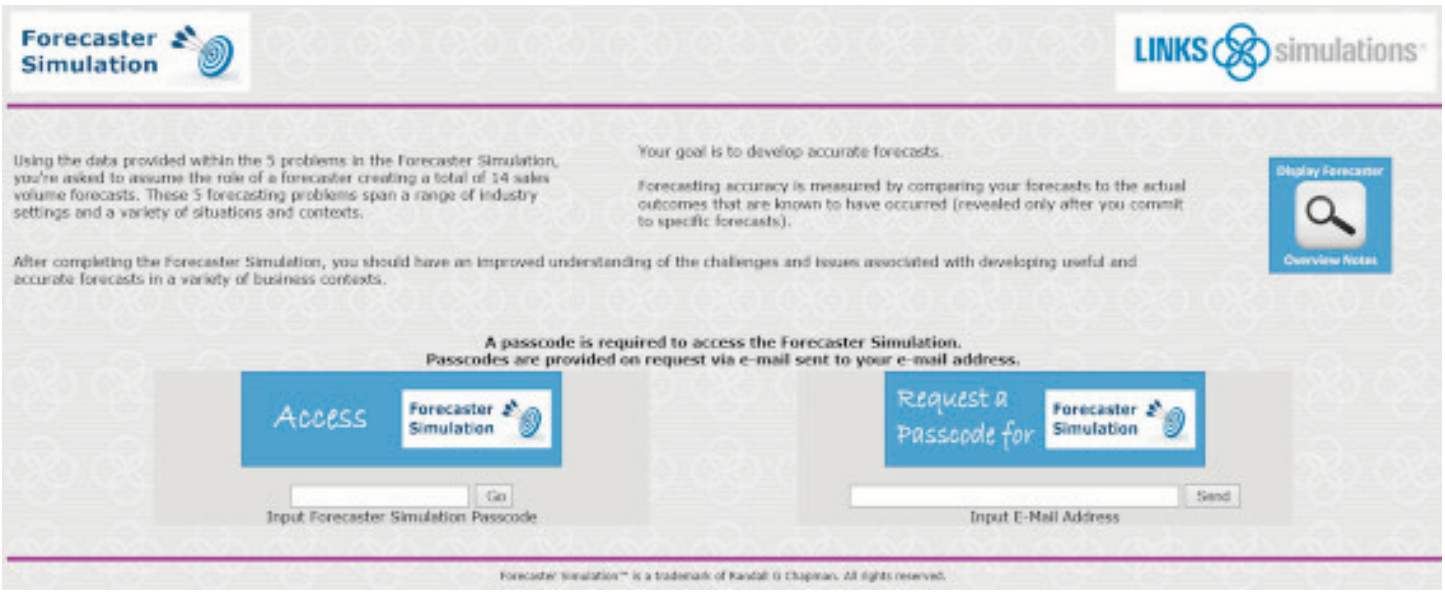
The Forecaster Simulation is an engaging, interactive 1-2 hour outside-of-class learning-by-doing tutorial that complements LINKS simulation usage.

- The 5 forecasting problems in the Forecaster Simulation are relevant to a wide range of introductory and elective business strategy, marketing, operations management, services, and supply chain management courses.
- The Forecaster Simulation includes within-simulation debriefing notes for each forecasting problem, accessible after completing each of the forecasting problems.
- Individuals or small teams can work on the Forecaster Simulation, with 2-person teams recommended for teaming's incremental learning.

Access the Forecaster Simulation via links on the main LINKS Simulations webpage and on each of the specific sub-webpages for LINKS simulations. A link also exists in the variant-specific sub-webpages in the Instructor Resources with a related link to the associated instructor notes for the Forecaster Simulation. The Forecaster Simulation direct URL is:

http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/Forecaster/Introduction.php

The Forecaster Simulation is a no-cost value-added offering of LINKS Simulations, but a passcode (e-mailed upon request) is required. A passcode may be requested within the Forecaster Simulation webpage.



# LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars

## December 8-12, 2014 and January 5-9, 2015

### LINKS Simulations Immersion Experience
### Five Teleconferences and Four-Round LINKS Simulation Events

Registration is available for the next five-day, intensive-mode Train-The-Trainer distance-learning seminars 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. These intensive-mode seminar formats includes 2-3 hours of work per day during each of the five days of the distance-learning seminars.

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.)

# Reminders

**LINKS Passcode Retrieval:** 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 recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database.

**Student Payment Timing:** Student payment with a personal credit card is via the "Pay For LINKS" link on the LINKS webpage.

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 a LINKS 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.

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 a LINKS simulation event. As a practical matter, a final warning/reminder is e-mailed to those students who haven't paid by the first game run, before implementing the non-discounted price.

**E-Mail Address Management:** Using their LINKS firm's passcode, LINKS students may change their official LINKS e-mail address 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.

**LINKS Instructor Resources:** Intructors access LINKS Instructor Resources via the LINKS webpage. Contact Randy Chapman (Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com), the LINKS author, to obtain the username and passcode.

LINKS simulations®

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

Editor: Cyndy Winkler