



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.



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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 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.