



Connecting LINKS to Current Practice – The Japan Tsunami



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I was recently teaching an Executive MBA course on supply chain management (SCM) where I use LINKS as an organizing theme. This is a first course on SCM and most of the students have never been exposed to these principles in a systematic fashion. Many come from service industries and have finance or marketing backgrounds.

I have used LINKS in this context for more than five years. The students attend class every other week for four hours on Friday and eight hours on Saturday. Each weekend has instruction for two courses, so I have the students for two hours on Friday and four hours on Saturday. Friday evening is also available. The course runs over four weekends of instruction and extends over an eight-week period.

I start the students on LINKS at the very first class and then have a decision due on every Friday evening that we meet. I also have a decision due in the “off” weeks. In particular, most groups spend 2-3 hours on Friday evening talking through their decisions. I rotate among the various breakout rooms to answer questions and offer advice. These times accomplish a significant amount of learning as tradeoffs and strategies are discussed.

We use the LINKS Supply Chain Management Fundamentals Simulation, so the structure of the simulation is not as rich as the more comprehensive versions. This simplified structure works well in the beginning decisions since the students new to SCM are trying to assimilate the concepts as well as the execution of LINKS. However, after a few rounds (including a practice round), they seem to need more challenges.

During the most recent offering the tsunami struck Japan about the time of the first session. It provided an opportunity to emphasize the global nature of supply chains. It also provided a chance to add realism and current context to LINKS.

I worked with Randy to define a change to the cost of the Gamma sub-assembly component. The first increment was \$10 per unit with the explanation that Gamma was primarily produced in the afflicted region of Japan and supply continuity was uncertain. For the next decision I raised the price another \$7.50. Lastly, I brought the price back to its base level as “alternate sources of supply came online.”

Overall LINKS was very well received and the students especially liked the connection to the supply issues that they were reading about daily, and often facing in their work environments. The change exceeded my expectations and I have now incorporated it as a regular part of a LINKS event.