



Advice To My LINKS Successor

Neil Krikorian was a student in Greg Kivencor's course at Rivier University which included the team-based LINKS Enterprise Management Simulation [Enriched Edition]. As part of this course, each student crafted a short "Advice To My LINKS Successor Memo." This exemplary memorandum follows, for the reading enjoyment and benefit of all future LINKS participants. Thanks to Greg for sharing this memorandum with the LINKS community and thanks to Neil for his fine work and his willingness to share this memorandum with the LINKS community.



Welcome to LINKS! LINKS is extremely demanding, time-compressed, and intense. But, if you apply yourself and spend the time needed, you will understand it far more than you do now and have a strong chance to succeed. This commitment absolutely gives you a great return on investment. You will learn more practical lessons to apply to your life in just several weeks of LINKS than you did during many other courses combined.

My most important piece of advice is learn the rules of the game as much and as early as possible. Knowledge is power in LINKS. There is no such thing as being completely prepared for LINKS, but it is possible to be well prepared.

- Read the manual, every item on every page (all items are important in LINKS), more than once. It is impossible to memorize all details for all LINKS variables as each decision or parameter is tied to others, and every move has second and third order effects.
- Become familiar with all areas covered by LINKS, LINKS terminology (e.g., is price point a 'generate demand' or 'product' decision, etc.), and the LINKS manual structure so you can quickly reference information. I recommend downloading the e-version of the manual to leverage search functionality.
- Familiarize yourself with the LINKS system (e.g., the web site and how to input decision changes) preferably prior to the start of the game, as this will make it far less stressful to initially navigate the system during already tight turnaround times.
- Use all guidance documents and exercises on the LINKS site (e.g., the Forecaster Simulation) to fine-tune skills when it doesn't count. There are many good free instructional videos - many

on YouTube, which walk step by step through the LINKS functionality. There are several variants of LINKS beyond the Enterprise Management version (e.g., LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation), but all have similar if not identical functionality so you can still gain lots of relevant knowledge.

Team structure and process is critical in LINKS. I recommend the divide and conquer method where each team member is generally familiar with all areas of the game, but becomes specifically expert in and responsible for all decisions or actions in a specific area of the game. Get your team together and formally delineate who is responsible for what. A team process “rhythm” should be established early around meeting frequency, method, timing, and topics – so that each team member clearly understands the preparation needed and their expected deliverables for these meetings. My team found this very helpful.

Have the same single individual assigned to take notes at every team meeting so that decisions and their rationale are captured for later reference and recall. I also recommend that your team identify a single individual to do the actual decision inputs (or at least do a final check to ensure all decisions are as desired) and a hard cutoff time agreed for when this person will execute this task and when no further updates can be made.

Your team must define a strategy early, trust your instincts and do not deviate (there is room for flexibility in your tactical decisions). No half measures – look for other opportunities and seize them. If you believe a course of action is sound, then commit to it early, heavily and without wavering based on initial simulation feedback.

Like the real world, many LINKS decisions may not immediately deliver the desired result. The analogy of a flower needing regular and sustained watering and other support before it blooms is an apt one here. Do not make your strategy in a vacuum based solely on your results as your competitors’ decisions impacts your world and markets as well. While you certainly cannot read the mind of your competition or control their actions, you can anticipate logical movers of your competition and contingency plan around it. Remember, the best decisions can sometimes be the ones not made and often may need to be changed on short notice due to decisions made by the competition.

Timing is everything in LINKS. For example, a decision to leave a market region or channel due to poor sales and/or market share may seem sound when evaluating your data, but if you then realize many other teams are abandoning this market and a demand still exists there, this may suddenly become an unexpected opportunity.

LINKS is based on real world information and circumstances. For example, consider researching industries and companies “similar” in size and scope to the set-top box industry and benchmark what resources they allocate (as a percentage of revenue) to areas such as marketing, R&D, and customer

service in similar situations. Additionally, don't be intimidated by the size and scope of the fictitious company you are dealing with or by large dollar amounts being discussed. Consider all numbers and data in the proper context relative to other data such as the revenue, sales, expenses and net income of your firm.

There is a plethora of research available to you in LINKS. In fact, there may be too much. The trick is to only purchase the research studies that you need and when it is needed. You do not need to purchase every available report every LINKS simulation round.

Lastly, have fun and remember LINKS is just a game to help you learn. You aren't expected to be right in every decision, and through mistakes we often learn. If proper effort is given, everyone wins - the journey itself will produce the desired increase in knowledge. Good luck!