

## Enhancing Student Learning Experiences With Virtual Organizations

*Abstract:* The Virtual Organizations are a unique and innovative set of learning tools specifically designed to teach and assess the problem solving skills necessary for success in the twenty-first century. They bring theory to life by allowing the student to take the theories learned in class and apply them in realistic settings with realistic data to solve real-world problems. To solve the problem, the students will have to analyze the information within the company and in the Virtual Organizations environment, and the student will have access to all information - even sensitive and confidential information. In this Best Practices session, the presenter will demonstrate the use of Virtual Organizations as incorporated in curriculum for institutions of higher education.

*Proposal:* The Virtual Organizations are a unique and innovative set of learning tools specifically designed to teach and assess the problem solving skills necessary for success in the twenty-first century. Employers want to hire employees who can solve problems. In countless surveys about employers' vision of the ideal job candidate, problem solving skills has been at the top of the list. Today, instantaneous communication and ready access to information has leveled the playing field on a global scale in nearly every industry. Superior technology and a large database of information are no longer the keys to success. The organizations that will succeed in the twenty-first century are those that can quickly and creatively solve problems - problems within the company, problems within the market, and the problems of its customers.

The Virtual Organizations currently available are organized into the broad categories of Businesses, Schools, Healthcare and Government. Each broad category will be populated with a number of individual organizations. In today's environment, most organizations have an Internet presence - where they communicate with the world at large. These Internet sites vary in sophistication from simple Web pages that communicate the organization's address and phone number to complex e-Business sites that take product orders, process payments, arrange shipping, and update inventory databases in real time.

In addition to their Internet sites, most organizations also maintain an intranet site where the organization communicates with its employees. The firm's intranet site is used to advise employees of the organization's policies and procedures, to share information on the company's financial performance, and to disseminate news about issues affecting the organization.

Students and faculty accessing the Virtual Organizations have access to the Internet and intranet sites of virtual businesses, schools, hospitals, and cities. In most organizations, access to sensitive information via an

intranet site would be restricted. The students and faculty accessing the Virtual Organizations have complete access to all information including employee files, contracts, financial information, and confidential memos. This gives students and faculty a level of access that they probably would not experience in their real companies and gives them the information they need to practice the new skills they are learning in their courses.