SIMPLE Platform

User Guide

An introduction to the SIMPLE Platform

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Contents

Conventions Used In This Book

Text that appears in ***like this*** is used to denote an element on the screen that you can interact with or an option that you should select.

Text in *italic* is used to denote information that you need to enter.

Text in "double quotes" is used to indicate names or values.

Using this Book

This book is a basic guide to using the SIMPLE Platform as a User.

Because the SIMPLE Platform is a system which Creators can deploy their own Simulations, they can enable and disable some features of SIMPLE, therefore as a User you may find that you can perform some actions in one Simulation but not in another.

SIMPLE: Simulated Professional Learning Environment: a User Guide

The SIMPLE environment

Increasingly, universities are using systems called 'virtual learning environments (VLEs)'. These systems help administrative and academic staff to communicate with students, and organise the content of courses and their administration. They help students to access materials when they are off-campus, and to submit work to staff via email. Examples include BlackBoard, and WebCT. You may be using these systems in your programme of study. If you haven't, it's certain that in future students will use them more and more, as university departments begin to adopt them as essential parts of course management.

However, these systems are generic systems, designed to be applicable to all disciplines in your university or college. SIMPLE is different. It is an interdisciplinary simulation environment designed to help students learn by doing. Students can thus learn by doing professional transactions, whatever their discipline or profession. SIMPLE achieves this by giving staff the tools to create simulations, and gives students the simulation environment within which they can communicate with clients or patients and other professionals, carry out transactions on behalf of clients, patients and others, and practise and learn from the transactions appropriate to their discipline or profession.

What we aim to produce is a unique learning environment that:

- is directly applicable to the work you do on the rest of your course, at either undergraduate or postgraduate level
- can be accessed anywhere there is a web browser, and anytime. In this way, we are seeking to make this form of learning as flexible as possible for students.

The SIMPLE platform consists of two main elements:

A virtual town

The town is represented on the web in three ways:

History

it will have a modest description of its geographical and historical past and present.

Map

The town also has a map, from which you can open web sites and obtain information.

Directory

You can use the directory to find people, institutions or businesses within the town. It contains a street address and a links to web sites.

Virtual office

This is, in effect, your office on the web. Each office contains all tools and functions you need to communicate with each other, with fictional characters in the town, with tutors and anyone else. Within it, you can store your work, your correspondence and your drafts. You can log your group-work, use calendars and task lists, and use style banks where appropriate. We have modelled this virtual office on the typical document production, communication and personal organisational tools that you would find in a professional office. In this way, SIMPLE is a simulation of the sort of basic digital environment that you will be working in when you enter professional life.

Having described the environment briefly, a little more needs to be said about the background to the simulation learning within the transactions or projects you will undertake in your groups or groups.

Simulation Learning

In a sense the work you will undertake is a version of learning by simulation. Flight simulators are now a normal and essential way of teaching pilots to fly; engineering students use simulations to help them understand airfoil design and modelling; medical students use role play and simulated patients to help them understand communications and the application of medical science, while medical and pharmacological students now use computer simulations of experiments and procedures, many with interactive and self-test features. Most university disciplines have their own versions. In Law, for instance you'll be learning how to negotiate by actually negotiating; how to complete a Private Client matter by actually winding up a deceased client's estate; how to convey property by carrying out a purchase and a sale of domestic property, and how to act for a client in a court action. In all of this, learning by doing can be a powerful and more effective method of learning than listening to a series of lectures on negotiation theory and practice, or Private Client or Conveyancing. Of course, it is necessary to learn about the concepts, principles and procedures before you carry out procedures and actions in SIMPLE – tutorials, lectures and other learning events perform the usual function here.

But there are other significant learning differences to the learning you would normally carry out on your course. You will, for instance, be learning to work with others on practical tasks -- an essential feature of professional life. You'll also use professional forms of ICT – many professions now use intranets and email or web-based communications to communicate within the office and between offices and between clients and other professionals; Social Work offices have specific case-based software; architects use specialist tools for graphical communication. You'll also be practising letter writing, to a variety of audiences and on a variety of matters, and you will almost certainly want to convey different attitudes: polite neutral business tone, warm, engaging, cool, distant, distancing, assertive, forthright, clear – the list is long.

Transactional Learning

Our approach to simulation and learning in SIMPLE can be summarised by the phrase 'transactional learning'. We use it in a number of different senses, and below are some of the ways we design it into SIMPLE. Transactional learning is broadly characterized by:

Active learning

Transactional learning is active learning, not passive. In that sense, we want you to be involved in activities within professional cases and roles, rather than standing back from the actions and merely learning about them. There is, of course, a place for learning about actions. Indeed, transactional learning is rarely possible unless you first have an understanding of the basic concepts and processes that underlie a transaction. However, transactional learning goes beyond learning about actions to learning from actions. In fact we hold that there are some forms of learning that can only take place if students go through the process of active learning.

Learning to do professional transactions

As befits the type of learning that students do in a professional course, we aim to give you something of the experience of transactions. If you are a law student, for instance, then in addition to learning about how property might be bought and sold on your Property course, you will actually buy and sell property on behalf of your client. You thus learn considerably about the transaction itself, the process by which abstract principles of property law become embedded in everyday society, and the process of professional learning.

Transaction + reflection

Transactional learning involves thinking about transactions, thinking across transactions. It includes the ability to rise above detail, and 'helicopter' above a transaction; or, to take another example, the ability to dis-engage yourself from potentially damaging views of the group process, and re-construct that view. Reflection while you are doing a transaction helps you understand what's happening and why. Reflection after a transaction can increase this understanding, and help you remember the principles and abstract concepts you have learned on other parts of your course.

Collaborative learning

Transaction as collaboration, indicating the root of the word: literally 'acting across'... Students are valuable resources for each other. There is of course a place for individual learning, silent study, literature review and so on. But students can help each other enormously to understand disciplinary concepts and procedures by discussing issues, reviewing actions in a group, giving peer feedback on work undertaken in the group, and so on. Such group work is essential to SIMPLE. By working with each other in some depth, you will have the opportunity to begin to trust each other to carry out work that is important (there may be assessment value to the projects you undertake). In other words, you will begin to learn how to leverage knowledge amongst yourselves, and to trust each other's developing professionality (learning about know-who, know-why, as well as know-what within the group). Often, we have found, if there are groups that are not producing good work or keeping to deadlines, it is because they do not know how to work together effectively; and this often arises from a lack of trust.

Ethical and Holistic process learning

In seminars and lectures and in your reading of texts, you engage with ideas, and form understandings of concepts and processes. You link up emerging understandings with your prior knowledge, and the more you become familiar with the discipline, the easier and more efficient this learning process becomes. Your learning proceeds by chunks, carefully structured by staff, and you make sense of the body of knowledge so that you can produce successful coursework, pass exams, etc.

Professional learning is different. As a professional, you learn to do things to certain standards for others – typically, clients or patients. One of the interesting comments that some solicitors have made about some trainees is that when they first start, they can identify the micro-elements of a transaction (eg what a form or letter is for) but if they are given a file, they find it difficult to see where that form or letter might be used (or mis-used), or what might be needed to be done next in an incomplete file. When they first start, trainees are also predictably poor at realising what might be wrong with the file; and their contextual sense of ethical awareness is not well-developed. This is hardly surprising: they lack a sense of the rhythm of a transaction as a whole, and the contextual awareness that that knowledge gives them. As a result, they find it difficult to move quickly and intuitively from part to whole, and from whole to part.

Transactional learning emphasises holistic and process learning; but you don't need to wait until you enter a professional office in order to understand transactions. . In your work in SIMPLE you will practice part-to-whole and whole-to-part thinking. You will also practise forward reasoning ('If I do x, y & z, what will happen next to my client / patient?') and backward reasoning ('I want to achieve a & b: how can I do that most effectively in this case?'). And you may also become aware of the ethical dimension of professional practice – though this depends on how your simulation is designed. Throughout, you will have the tools that professionals typically construct to help them deal with cases – flow charts, task lists, learning outcomes, just-in-time learning.

Assessment

SIMPLE is both a learning zone and an assessment zone. Assessments in SIMPLE look like coursework, in that you will be asked to carry out a number of tasks, and you'll be given feedback. Depending on how your course is designed, the tasks that you carry out may count towards your overall assessment in a module. This will be explained in more detail in module handbooks and the like.

The nature of the work undertaken in professional disciplines is very diverse, so it makes sense that assessment by simulation ought to be diverse, too. SIMPLE has been designed to take account of this diversity, both within transactions (no two are ever exactly the same...) and across professions. For instance, some of the transactions you may be involved in are more 'open-field' than others – that is to say, within the simulation you'll be given more opportunity to think and plan for yourself how the transaction ought to be conducted, who you might want to contact, and why. Other transactions are more linear: write this letter, complete this form, contact that person, do this research in order to carry out that task for a client, and so on. To give an example from Law, winding up the estate of a deceased client is a fairly linear process – certain tasks have to be carried out in a certain order – though the nature of these tasks depend upon the facts of the case (eg the estate left by the deceased client, whether the person left a will, etc). Contrast this with fact-finding in a case where a client is claiming compensation for injury sustained in an accident at work – amongst many questions you'd want answered here would be: were there any witnesses to the accident? how severe were the person's injuries (and who is best placed to comment on that)? was the accident the result of anyone's negligence?

Working in Groups

In many ways, preparing for undergraduate assessments can be an isolating experience: lots of solitary reading, writing and research. One aspect of SIMPLE that students often find positive is the social aspect – learning in a social context, working in groups ('groups' or other groups), generally mixing with students from different universities and all ages, all of which is possible within SIMPLE. Is SIMPLE group work, though, different from other group work you may have done in the past? In many ways it might well be.

Nowadays nearly all undergraduate programmes in UK universities and colleges have some element of group work built into them. Your undergraduate experience may have left you cautious of teamwork and the random personality combinations that can be thrown together. Some of you may be smarting from having to take responsibility for those slackers who calculated that they could 'sit this one out' and still receive the same mark. Perhaps you have been traumatised by a military-style group leader? Others will have enjoyed the real buzz of a group working hard and successfuly towards achieving great results, and finding that learning in groups can be fun as well as a satisfying learning experience.

There are many reasons why it is important to practise group working. Everyone works in different ways: while conscientious students like to be able to have the essay/dissertation written, proof-read and bound at least 2 weeks before the deadline, others thrive on the adrenaline rush of all-nighters, and the white knuckle ride that is the sprint to the office to meet the deadline. Perhaps even more significant than working methods, though, are the different personalities that exist within a team: some people like to take active leading roles while others prefer secondary roles; some are extrovert, some introvert; naturally intuitive people will find themselves working with naturally logical thinkers. Yet these same differences, can make the combined end-product superior to that of one individual.

Taking the longer-term view, group work is a fundamental part of working life: graduate employers rate the ability to perform well as part of a team extremely highly. If you are uncomfortable working with groups or with your abilities as a group member, don't give up! Teamwork skills are not impossible to acquire or improve. Within SIMPLE and in your group, you will have an opportunity to practise them before you use them in your professional life. In the following sections we outline what group work you may be asked to carry out, and ways to do it effectively.

Group-working issues

There are a number of key issues here which, depending on how your groups are structured, you may want to bear in mind:

Responsibility

… is crucial to your group's success. Depending on how your group tasks have been structured, each group as a whole may have responsibility for achieving the final aims and objectives of the project or task. Each subgroup will have responsibility for achieving its allocated tasks, and each individual will have a responsibility to apply themselves as best they can to their particular roles and tasks.

Delegation

There are obvious time-savings in being able to split work up. There are also possible disadvantages e.g. loss of control over work and working style, inconsistency, unequal burdens of work. These can be reduced or avoided by communicating with each other. You may find it useful to use the tools you have in your virtual environment and elsewhere: task managers, calendar,intra-group mail, mobile phone, texting – even talking face-to-face…. Delegation does not mean withdrawal from the group while work is being done, either by the person doing the work or by others in the group: all members of a group should remain involved and all should provide support for each other if necessary. In addition, your group may have ultimately collective responsibility to ensure that all work submitted is completed to a competent standard. In discharging this responsibility, the group can ensure that individuals are supported and that members benefit from the ideas and experience of others.

In order to get the balance right, you will probably find it is necessary to delegate the work as a team:

- Some tasks may be suitable for one person. If this is the case, the person responsible for compiling the assignment should have a draft ready for the group to read at the very least 24 hours in advance of an assessment deadline. This will allow the rest of the group time to make suggestions before the final draft is handed in. The meetings should make it clear what the task is, when it is to be completed and how it will be reviewed. In this way the individual knows what is required of him/her. The task itself should not be unrealistically difficult and within the capabilities of the member to whom it is allocated.

- Other assignments might split easily/logically into two parts – the group ought to be able to delegate work to pairs, using face-to-face meetings and IT to communicate. Again, the other members of the group should have enough time to read and comment on the draft before it is submitted. Make a careful note of what is delegated to the various individuals and sub-teams of your group. Check for consistency and overlaps, and ensure that there is clear communication within the group as to who has responsibility for which areas.

It is inevitable that some tasks require the entire group to work together. This will be obvious at the start of a project, when work needs to be evaluated and a course of action decided. Everyone will need their say: with potentially four different viewpoints this early stage could well be 'slower' than when working solo. However for group work, this is a necessary step. Meetings of all group members will also be required at the finishing stages of a big piece of work – it is unprofessional to hand in something that has been written by four people separately. Sometimes work will have to be written in collaboration in order to be consistent.

Meeting skills

As noted above, some people are naturally keener to lead than be led while others would shrink from a leadership role. People who are happy to chat away when with their friends may not be willing to speak out when placed in a group with different dynamics.The reasons for this are highly complex. One well-known analysis, namely the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator divides human personalities into categories – extrovert, introvert, thinker, intuitive person, and so on. No category is inherently better than any other – simply different. Awareness of our character traits can help us to understand how we act as individuals within groups.

In your group you may not be allocated group roles: sometimes this can be unduly constraining, and at times it is better to leave these to emerge naturally. The idea of group work is to use the pool of talent so that the team's output is greater than that of the individual, and so that each member in the group can learn from the rest. In order to do this, though, the value of each individual must be realised. Remember that each individual has their own outlook, talents and skills, and will in some way be able to contribute positively to the group, e.g. generate ideas, draft a competent letter, get the small details right. To the visionary who contributes ideas, the 'finisher' may be too pernickety – however the finished product ought to show that both roles were of equal worth. So play to your strengths, allow all members equal opportunity to speak, and remember that their contributions are at least as valuable as your own.

Constructive feedback

Feedback should note the excellent ideas and innovations as well as pointing out the obvious and less obvious defects. Most importantly, feedback should be aimed at the concept, not the individual e.g."Perhaps we could make the letter a wee bit more formal" rather than "Craig has made this letter to a client sound like he's his best mate". Differences in opinion should, whenever possible, be handled at the group level. If you give good feedback to the other members of your group, they will value your opinions and comments. Your own work will improve because you have a chance to learn from others' mistakes as well as your own.

Logs

Logs can be useful in carrying out professional work. They can:

- enable you to keep track of the work you carry out in your group over the course of the transaction
- track the time that the group as a whole has spent on a matter.

Written up regularly they should (as a bare minimum) contain a note of the tasks and the amount of time you personally have spent on a project/assignment, together with any comment on the process or progress of a task. To reap the maximum benefit from them however it is helpful to note how the group is functioning, whether you believe that work is being distributed fairly, how you are dealing with problems etc.

There is no right or wrong way of keeping a Log. In deciding what to include, remember that this is your personal record of what is happening. It may enable you to show your commitment to your group should there be any problems. You may find yourself making observations on who is taking the lead within the group, and other matters. Obviously the Log is not intended to be a long moan about other members. In the real world you have to tackle personality or work related differences in a mature way: e.g. if group members have part-time jobs which interfere with meetings, this issue should be tackled with respect for their personal circumstances. This does not mean you just put up with members missing meetings, silently fuming: work can be delegated, meeting minutes can be read and a mutually convenient time for most meetings should be possible.

Tackling Problems

Anger, frustration, apathy -- all are symptoms of an 'unhealthy dynamic ' or, to put it simply, a group not getting on. With so much coursework assessed on a group basis, it is imperative that groups highlight problems and tackle them at an early stage. Many people shy away from the idea of confronting a problems because they perceive it as 'rocking the boat' and being unpopular. It's understandable why so many people are uncomfortable in conflict situations. They don't want to become embroiled in a fight that has a good chance of becoming personal. At the other end of the scale, there are others who welcome conflict as a chance to engage in combat and win over others. They often go out of their way to create conflict when there are no real grounds to warrant it.

Both of these ways of viewing conflict make the same incorrect assumption, namely, that whenever differences occur, there will inevitably be a winner and a loser. Both are also extremely unproductive from a group's point of view. It is crucial to deal productively with differences. They can be a vehicle for building relationships instead of tearing them apart. The ideal solution would be for a group to tackle the issue within the group. This assumes a certain level of maturity on the part of all members. If, despite your best efforts to remain impersonal and see both/all sides, the problem continues, then at this stage it is probably best to involve a member of staff.

Missed Meetings

A group member who cannot avoid being absent from a meeting should handle the situation responsibly by contacting the other members to explain the problem. When feasible, he or she should also send written ideas, reports, and/or completed assignments to be shared during the meeting so that the group can operate on schedule despite the absence. After the meeting the person who was absent should again contact the group or read the meeting minutes to find out what took place, and to get a copy of any paperwork or assignments missed. If a group member does not maintain contact, e-mail and phoning should be attempted by the group. If this fails, upon consensus of the rest of the group, the Practice Manager should be informed of this so that he/she can tackle this issue. If you are ever in the situation of missing a meeting or a deadline, don't let it get this far without getting in touch. It is basic risk management technique as well as good manners to keep in touch with your group. If you are having a particularly hard week and you know that you will be unable to make a great contribution to an assignment, let your group know so that they are not left waiting for your input.

Getting Started

When a project starts, you will need to decide what tasks require to be done, and when, and by whom. Make a note of this. Use the electronic facilities on your virtual group intranet to help you. You will find there task managers with reminders, calendars, contacts lists, to-do functions, and the other features of a typical personal information management system.

These tools can help you organise the work of the group. They are, though, only tools – as programmers say, with brutal honesty, 'garbage in, garbage out'. Take time at this stage to think through what the project might look like, and in these important early stages set up rhythms and habits of working that will stand you in good stead when the pressure begins to mount. For example:

- You may want to appoint a Case Manager. Who will take up this role?
- What are the first tasks to be carried out?
- Are there any other tasks on the horizon you can see that you will need to start soon after?
- Use a calendar to insert assessment deadlines and plan your work for tutorials and assessments.
- Use a calendar to plan meetings, and integrate the group work with your individual work on your course

There's an engineering management saying that's useful here: 'good, fast, cheap – choose two'. If you want to do lots of work close to a deadline very fast, it won't be good quality. If you want quality and quantity of work, you'll need to plan over a long period of time. An essential aspect of getting off to a good start is planning flexibly for the future, and playing to the strengths of the individual members of the group.

Student Comments

Has this sort of thing ever been done before? There have been quite a number of simulation projects. In Law, for instance, some Australian universities have organised inter-university negotiations for students. An undergraduate simulation project based on contract law and involving negotiation was held at Lancaster University. Postgraduate law students at Warwick have negotiated with business students at a French university, while students on the LPC at the Inns of Court School of Law took part in an international negotiation with students in a university in California. Eight previous Diploma yeargroups at Strathclyde University have carried out simulations. In many of their modules they learn and are assessed *via* simulation.

What do students learn from simulation? It very much depends on how any particular simulation is designed, but there is almost no limit to what can be learned. To show you this, below are some extracts from the reflective reports that students were required to submit after a simulation in the area of Personal Injury law. The whole yeargroup was divided into virtual firms, with one half representing a claimant who had been injured at work, and the other half representing the insurer with their files. Not all were positive: honesty is essential in these reflective reports, and for some students the experience of group-working was difficult, for a variety of reasons. However each year the project has run, the positive comments have far outweighed the negative. Students have enjoyed the interaction, the feeling of carrying out real legal transactions, and later, as trainees, they have commented that this was an activity that helped prepare them for the kinds of tasks they were required to do in their traineeships.

Here is what students said about it in 1999/2000:

> "This project was an excellent exercise in teamwork. Our team seemed to work well together which did make a difference. The project forced us to think logically and made us put the law into practice."

> "Overall, I felt that our project went extremely well. In a real life situation, we would have probably spent a little more time on the actual legal research. However, at the end of the day, both Firms managed to work together, in the process of negotiation, to obtain a final settlement that satisfied both clients' interested. Furthermore, we did so in a friendly and co-operative manner, which lead to a less stressful experience, and a sense that a good working relationship had been established, which would benefit any future negotiations."

> "In all honesty, I found the project quite useful, and quite enjoyable to participate in. I felt that the fact-finding aspect was of great benefit, and from a personal point of view, allowed me to put to use skills that I had acquired in the course of summer placements with legal firms. I also felt that e-mail was a particularly appropriate forum for doing this - although it must have been a veritable nightmare for the 'anonymous' players!! The actual negotiation itself was also of use, in building upon the skills we have been introduced to [earlier in the Diploma in Legal Practice]."

> "We were unsure how to deal with the question of medical consultant's fees, given that we did not realise at first that there would be a fee and therefore did not seek the permission of the client to obtain a medical report and did not inform him in advance that he would be liable to pay the fee. When subsequently told by our client that he could not afford to pay a consultant's fee, we had to take

responsibility for the fees ourselves until insurance paid for it. This was one of the questions that we posed to the discussion forum, as we were initially unsure how to deal with the situation."

"The project was perhaps most challenging in terms of organisation and co-ordination of the team. Given the majority of students in practice will need to know how to work in a team and will have to be responsive to team dynamics and know how to function in a co-operative and constructive way, it was both interesting and alarming to note the comments of other students who shared my experience of wayward team dynamics."

"The project enabled us to practice the art of negotiation by letter. This was a new experience for us, and was more challenging that I had initially expected. In face to face negotiation one can read body language, tone of voice an can gauge perhaps in which direction the negotiation is going. By correspondence, this is not possible. While one can analyse the tone of a letter, the writer may not have intended to give such an impression, but for clumsy or ill thought our phrasing of the correspondence. From our point of view, negotiation by correspondence involved choosing words carefully and being generally aware of the tone of the letters sent, in order to avoid misunderstanding."

"On the whole I am satisfied with the result we obtained. I believe that it was more than reasonable in light of the extent of injury and long term effects. I am also satisfied with how we managed to adapt our negotiation strategy when we were confronted with what was apparently an entirely uncompromising and extremely aggressive opposition. We were able to keep the conversation in the informal discussion on a civil, professional and constructive level, although I am quite sure that it would have deteriorated quite easily into a cross-table brawl if we had allowed it."

"If I had had more time to dedicate to the project there are certain things that I would have done differently. I would have tried to devise a better plan at the outset to guide me through all of the points to be considered. I would also have attempted to exercise much better time-management so that I was not in a rush at the end to ensure that all of the necessary information had been obtained."

"With hindsight, there are inevitably things I would do differently. On a practical level, as stated, I would pay more attention to altering my writing style and considering the intended audience of any communication. The project had fortunately highlighted this in a fictional environment and has given me some practice of professional letter writing, which will undoubtedly form a large part of my traineeship. In terms of the actual negotiation, I did find it difficult to communicate solely by e-mail. To the end my group agreed at the outset that our group discussions would be by meeting and minutes were taken accordingly. In reality many of the difficulties and disputes we experienced are often resolved simply by lifting the phone to your client or opponent. One last point in relation to the actual settlement, I think we should have advised our client that no disciplinary proceedings would be taken by his employers following the negotiation (particularly since we agreed 50% contributory negligence). This should have been made a condition of the Settlement Agreement, i.e. "that the Insured and the Insurer shall not institute any proceedings against the Claimant". On the whole however I enjoyed the project which has shown the negotiation is best learned by actually negotiating. "

Here is what students said about it in 98/99:

"The most challenging aspect of the exercise was undoubtedly working to a limited timescale, whilst attempting to reach a mutually agreeable settlement. Throughout the project, it was valuable working as a team with each member completing their delegated tasks and reporting back to the others."

"As a firm this exercise allowed us to learn the importance of negotiating with the written word. In class we had learned how to negotiate face to face which enabled us to observe body language and seize openings or chances on impulse. With negotiation using email as the medium for communication much more thought has to be put in to what is actually said, words are chosen carefully to reflect mood frame and negotiation style."

"Each of us found the exercise valuable for several reasons. Firstly, it allowed you to start from scratch on something and compile your own information. Secondly, it helped us become acquainted with the appropriate procedures. Thirdly, it gave us an opportunity to practise writing professional letters and memos. Finally, it was an exercise in group work which highlighted the need to work well with others and that there are times when the input of others is essential."

"Initially we thought that the project would not prove too difficult. Wrong. The project was difficult. Firstly working in teams and trying to co-ordinate the team is difficult and is a skill in itself. Secondly, managing time – this requires to be considered too. Research is important or else you are reduced to haggling, and lack of time can seriously reduce your negotiating strength, as we found out. This project was hypothetical and in an artificial environment, but it could have been a real situation in practice with the same problems. In many ways the project served as an early warning device as to what is awaiting us. […] Next time it will be for real."

"[…] using web correspondence was convenient for forwarding received information to the other firm members without having to schedule extra meetings simply to exchange information. Consequently this allowed each firm member to become familiar with our client's case before each meeting, and therefore we could spend time at our meetings discussing the relevant points of our client's case without wasting time having to ensure that each firm member had all the necessary information."

"Whilst I have experience of team-working within my employment, the experience gained whilst undertaking [the project] allowed me to appreciate the differing views and inputs by other group members who have varied experience and backgrounds. Whilst working as a group member with the project, rather than rush off and complete certain tasks by myself, I appreciated the need to await the inputs of others. I particularly enjoyed the camaraderie of the 'brainstorming' sessions where we would meet and exchange views, perceptions and ideas. The final negotiation meeting left me feeling drained but exhilarated. I believe we successfully concluded negotiations which left our client's reputation intact, achieved a relatively low settlement figure and obtained an agreement to no further action, whilst achieving a 'non admission of liability' clause."

Using the SIMPLE Platform

Logging In

Before you can access any simulations you must first log in to the Platform.

1. Open the SIMPLE platform URL for your institution

2. Click on the "*Login*" link at the top of the page.

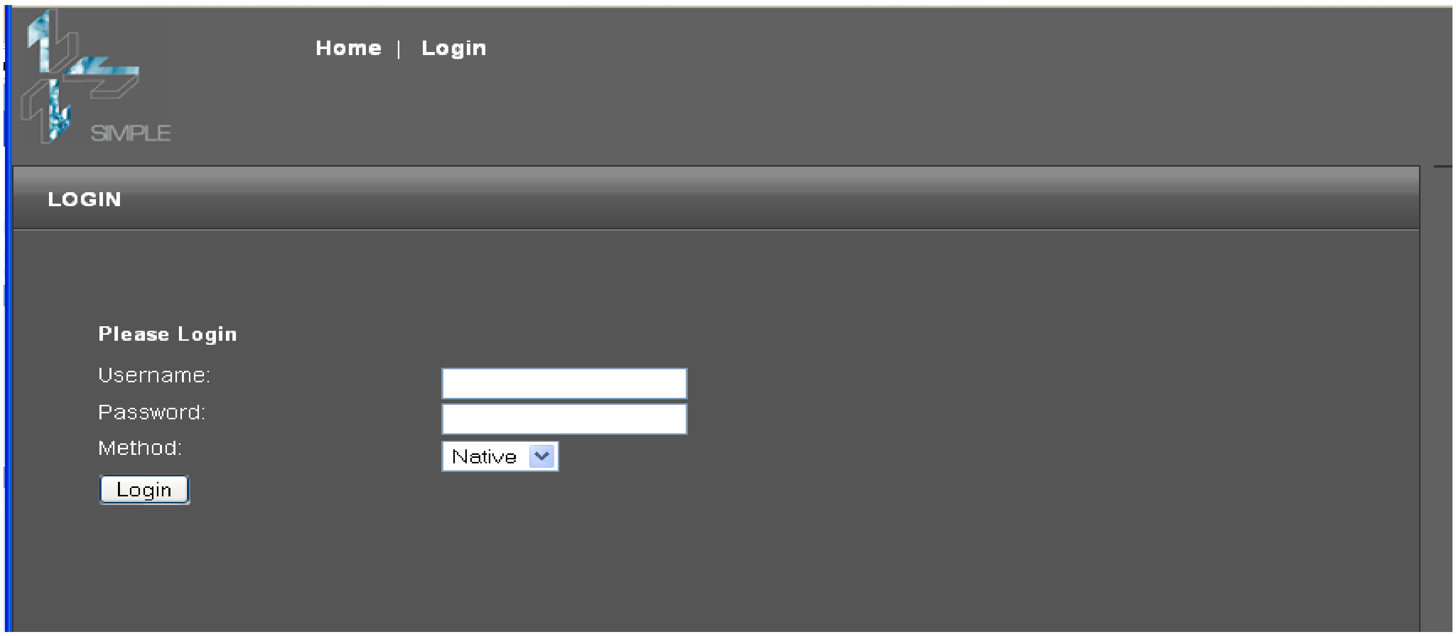


Figure 1 Platform Login Screen

3. Enter your *Username*

4. Enter your *Password*

5. If you have been instructed to select a different authentication method, select the appropriate one from the drop down list*.

6. Click "*OK*".

*Note: This option may not appear if your institution is only using 1 form of authentication.

If you have entered a valid username & password you will be logged in and shown a list of Simulations which you can access.

Accessing Simulations

When you log in to a SIMPLE Platform you will be shown a list of ***Simulations*** that you may take access. ***Note: You may have more than one Simulation.***

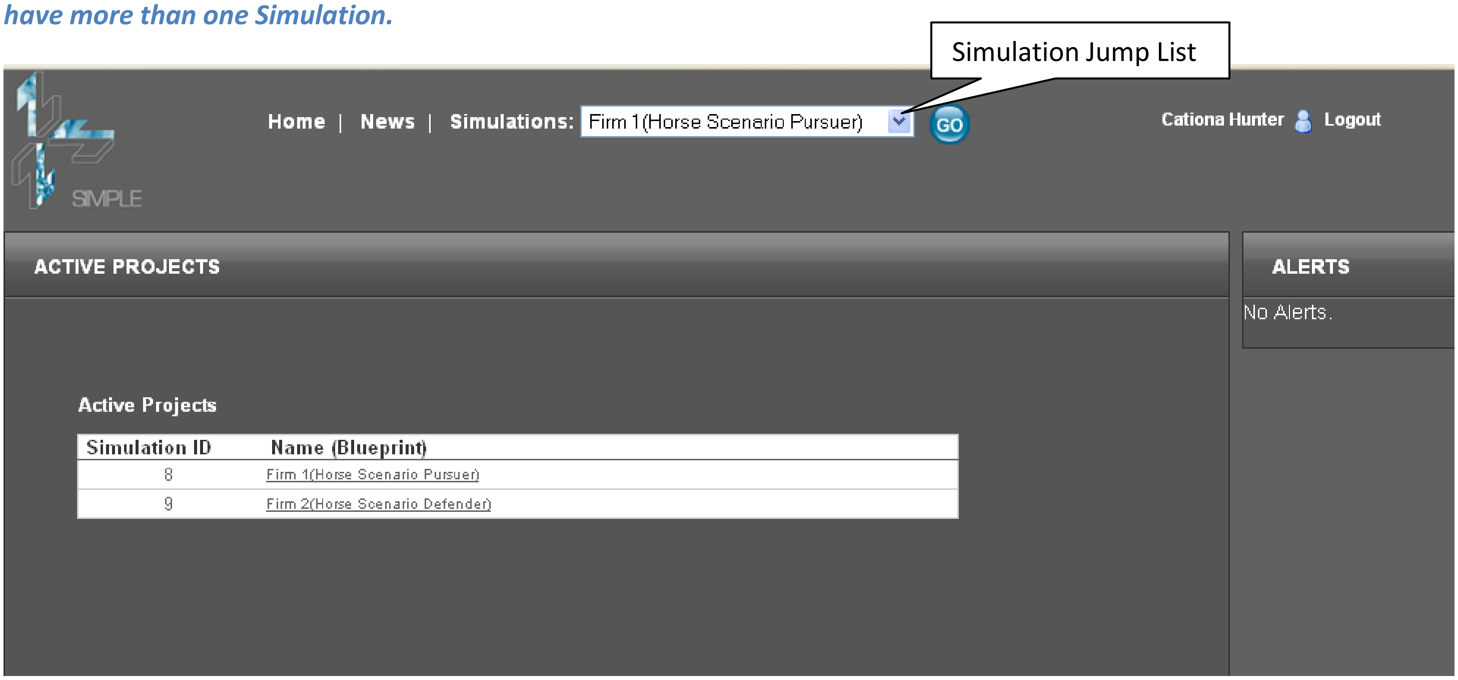


Figure 2 Choosing a Simulation

Simulation Jump List

The ***Simulation Jump List*** displays the current ***Active Simulation*** and allows you to switch ***Active Simulation*** (if you are taking part in more than one).

- To change ***Active Simulation***, select a ***Simulation*** from the drop down list and click "***Go***".

The “Office” Environment

When you access a ***Simulation*** you are automatically placed in the ***Office Environment*** looking at the “Received” folder.

This folder contains all of the documents that you have received arrange in reverse-chronological order (i.e. newest items are at the top).

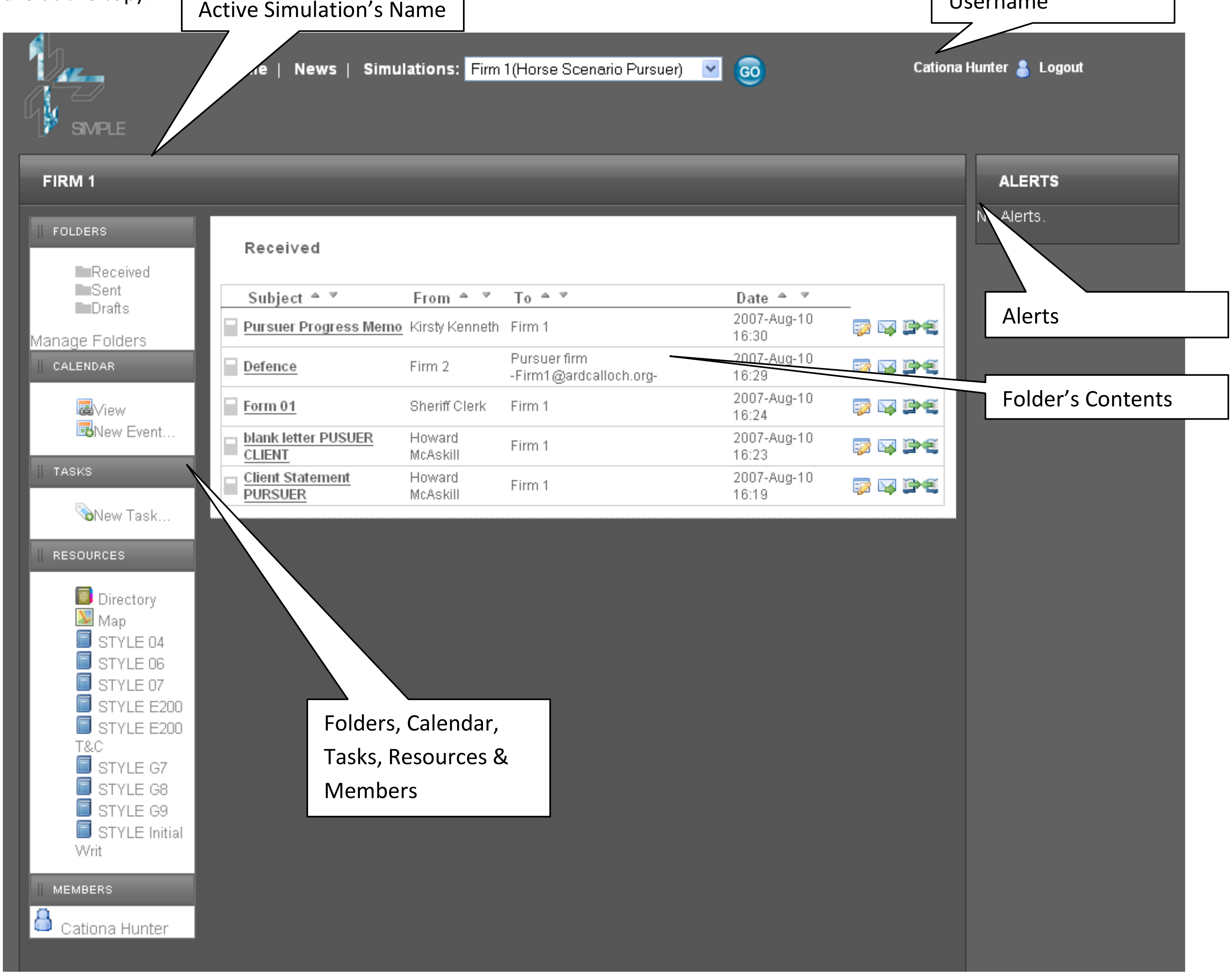


Figure 3 The Office Environment

Username

This is ***your username***. You can access your ***User Profile*** by clicking on the Name.

To the right is a link to ***Log out*** of the Platform.

Folders

The "***Folders***" box in the left hand sidebar of the Office Environment allows you to switch folders, and manage (i.e. create and delete) your own Folders.

Calendar & Tasks

The ***Calendar*** and ***Tasks*** side bars allow you to access the time management features of the ***Office Environment***. Here you can create appointments in the Calendar and allocate tasks.

Resources

The ***Resources*** sidebar shows all of the resources that are available for you to use in a Simulation.

Note: The Resources available will change depending on the Simulation you have active!

Map

The ***Map*** is a graphical view of the area in which a Simulation is taking place. From here you can see the locations of the institutions and businesses that you may have to deal with in the Simulation.

You can zoom in and out of the map to reveal more information. Clicking on a marker will display additional information about the target (e.g. the website of an organisation that you need to get some information from).

To Return to the ***Office Environment*** from the Map either :

1) Click on the "***Back***" link below the ***Map***

– Or –

2) Click on the "***Home***" link at the top of the page.

Directory

The ***Directory*** serves as a "phone book" of all the characters in a Simulation and displays contact details for each one.

Note: Not all of the people you will interact with will appear in the Directory, you may be only be introduced to them over the course of the Simulation.

To return to the ***Office Environment*** from the Directory either :

1) Click on the "***Back***" link

– Or –

2) Click on the "***Home***" link at the top of the page.

Additional Resources

Any additional resources that are available to you will appear in the ***Resources*** side bar. These may include websites, documents or templates.

Members

The last box in the sidebar displays a list of members of the Simulation (e.g. the names of the other people in your group or "firm").

Alerts

The ***Alerts*** side bar on the right hand side displays any appointments or tasks that are coming up or are overdue.

Click on the ***Snooze*** option to be reminded again in a short time, or ***Dismiss*** to clear the alert.

Using the Office Environment

Over the course of a ***Simulation*** new items will appear in your ***Received*** folder. These documents will provide you with the information you need to know, or replies to your correspondence.

Writing Documents

All of the documents that you write must be created “off-line” (e.g. a letter must be written a word processor like Microsoft Word).

When you have completed and saved a document and want to make it available to other members of the Simulation, or to send it to another character you must ***upload*** the document to the Platform.

Uploading Documents

You can only upload documents to Folders that you (or other members of the Simulation) have created or to the ***Drafts*** folder. Documents cannot be uploaded to the “Send” or “Received” folders.

1) Open the Folder that you want to upload the document to.

2) Click on ***Add Document*****.**

3) Enter a *filename* for the document. This will allow you and your colleagues to identify the document quickly.

4) Click on ***Browse…*** and select the document you want to upload.

5) Click on ***Save***.

Once the document has been uploaded you will be taken to the Folder that it has been placed in.

Reading a Document

To read a document, you must first download it to your computer.

1) Open a ***Folder***

2) Click on the Document’s Name (the ***Subject*** column).

3) Save the document to your computer.

4) Locate the downloaded file and open it.

Making Changes to a Document

To make a change to a document you must first download the document (See Reading a Document).

1) Open the ***document*** that you wish to make changes to

2) Save your changes on your computer.

3) Open the ***folder*** which contains the original document you have now changed.

4) Click on the "***Properties***" icon:

5) The ***Document's Properties*** window appears.

6) Click on ***Browse*...** and select the ***document you have changed on your computer***.

7) Click on ***Save***.

Once the document has been uploaded you will be taken to the Folder that it located in.

Sending Documents

1) Open the ***folder*** containing the Document you want to send –or – open the ***Document's Properties window***.

2) Click on the ***Send*** Icon .

3) The ***Send Document*** dialog appears

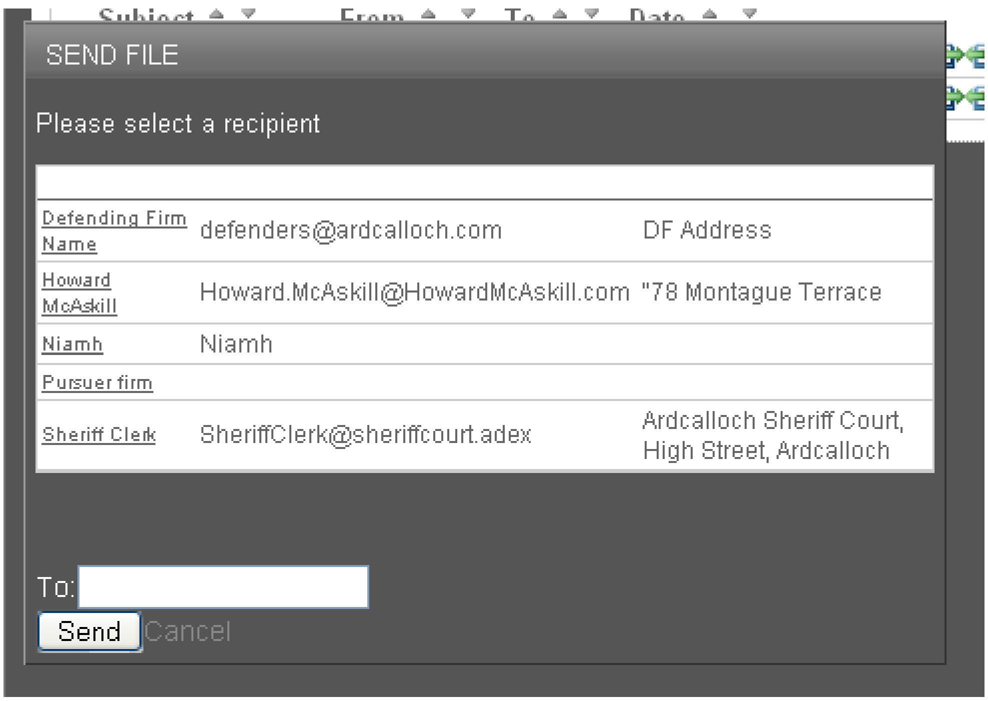


Figure 4 Send Document Dialog

4) Select a ***Recipient*** from the directory list displayed or type an *address* in the ***To:*** field.

5) Click ***Send*** to send or ***Cancel*** if you no longer wish to send the document.

Note: Every time you send a document a read-only copy of the item sent is kept in the "Sent" folder.

Folder Management

Every Simulation contains a number of Folders in which files are saved.

Note: This feature may be disabled by the Simulation's Author.

System Folders

There are a number of System Folders. By default they are named "***Received***", "***Sent***" and "***Drafts***", however they may have been re-named depending on the Simulation.

The "***Received***" and "***Sent***" folders are ***read-only***. This means that you cannot add or remove files from them. You can however ***copy*** items from these folders in to another folder.

The "***Drafts***" folder is the default location for you to upload your files.

There may be additional folders, depending on the Simulation and you may create additional folders to help you organise your work (providing the Simulation creator has allowed this).

Adding New Folders

1. Select a ***Simulation*** and open the ***Office Environment***.

2. Click on the "***Manage Folders***" link in the ***Folders*** side bar.

3. The ***Folder Manager*** appears:

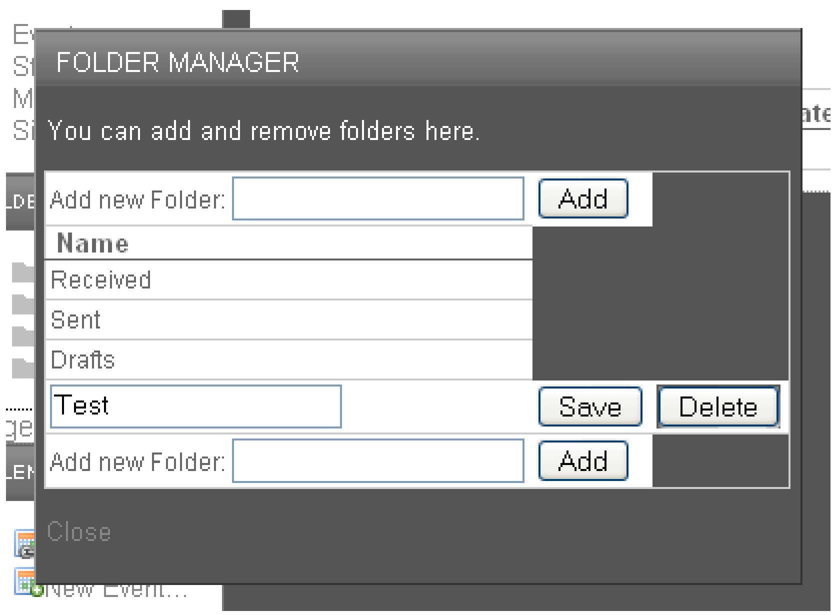


Figure 5 Folder Manager

4. Type a *folder name*,

5. Click ***Add*.**

Any folders that you create will allow you to add and remove items from them.

Renaming or Deleting Folders

1. Select a ***Simulation*** and open the ***Office Environment***.

2. Click on the "***Manage Folders***" link in the ***Folders*** side bar.

3. The ***Folder Manager*** appears:

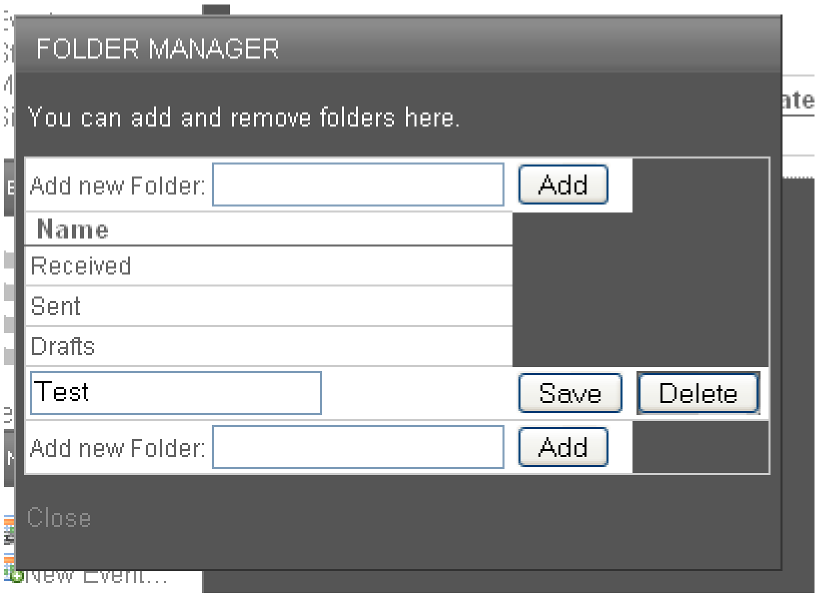


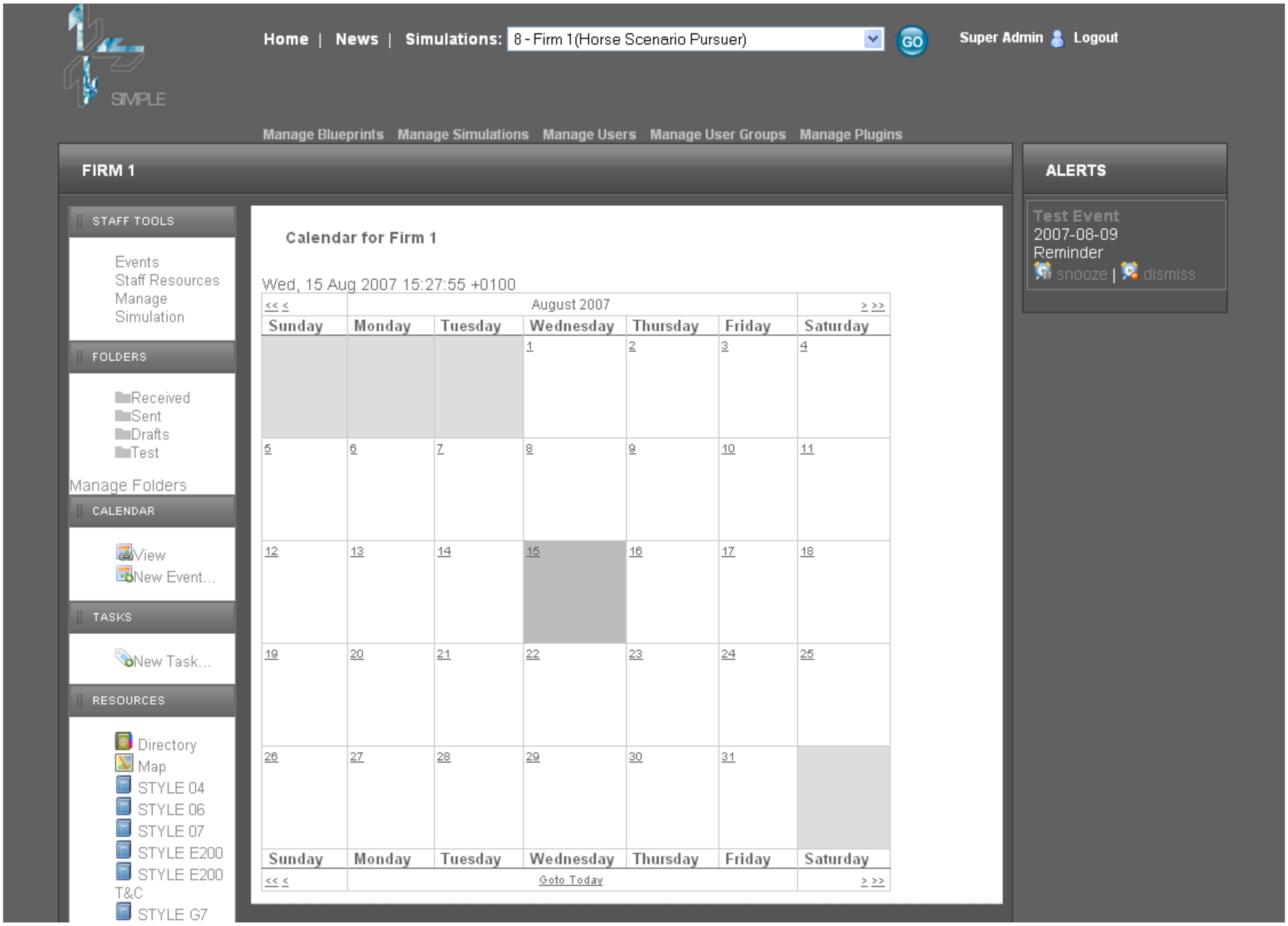
Figure 6 Removing a Folder using the Folder Manager

4. Change appropriate *folder name* and click ***Save*** or click ***Delete*** (next to the appropriate folder) to remove it.

Time Management

The Office Environment provides a calendar to allow you to organise your time.

Note: These features may be disabled by a Simulation's Author



Adding A New Event

1. Click on "New Event" in the Calendar area in the side bar.
2. Enter a *Subject*,
3. Enter a *Location*
4. Enter a *Description*
5. Enter a *start date & time* (or click on to choose the date)
6. Enter an *end date & time* (or click on to choose the date)

7. (Optional) Select a date & time to be reminded at
8. (Optional) Enter a *reminder* message.
9. Click "**Save**" to save the event or "**Close**" to cancel.

Adding A New Task

A task is a special version of an event, which can be assigned to members of the Simulation.

1. Click on "New Task" in the Tasks area of the side bar.
2. Enter a *Subject*
3. Enter a *Location*
4. Enter a *Description*
5. Enter a *start date & time* (or click on to choose the date)
6. Enter an *end date & time* (or click on to choose the date)
7. (Optional) Select a date & time to be reminded at
8. (Optional) Enter a *reminder* message.
9. Select a **user** to assign the task to.
10. Click "**Save**" to save the event or "**Close**" to cancel.

Marking a Task Complete

1. Open the Task
2. Click on the "**Completed**" check box.
3. Click "**Save**".

Changing a Task or Event

1. Open the Task or Event you want to change.
2. Click on the "Edit" link
3. Make the changes to the topic
4. Click on "Save" to save the changes.

Exercise

This exercise will introduce you to all of the different areas of the SIMPLE Platform that you will be using. It is designed to be used in conjuction with the “Sandbox Activity” simulation[1]

The memo below is from your training supervisor

From: Karen Powell, Trainee Supervisor

To: Trainee

Date: October 2007

Subject: Meetings

Mr Colin Clelland phoned me yesterday. He is a client and would like to arrange a time to come and see us about a restrictive covenant in his employment contract. He was employed as a marine engineer and is leaving to join a competitor. He is prevented from working in any business in ‘direct competition’ with the company’s business for the next five years. My diary is free all day next Monday, and I believe he is free then, too. Please write to him to arrange a preliminary meeting, then send him the letter, and note the details in the calendar.

In preparation for that could someone research the authorities on time restriction in restricted covenants between now and the meeting? I believe that the term of five years is too onerous, but I require you to check this. It should only take around 2 hours at most – I’d like you to allocate the time as a task in the diary for you to do. Let me know you’ve allocated the time by leaving a comment on this memo.

Also – could you draft an agenda for the meeting with Mr Clelland, using the Agenda Style document in the Resources section, and save that agenda in the Drafts folder for me to check?

As always, write up a separate note to file on your activities, insert this note into the Notes To File folder. It would be useful if you created another folder to store style documents that are not already in the Resources e.g. “Style Letters”.

[1] Contact your local SIMPLE administrator or contact if you require this simulation to be set up for you.