ADVANCES IN BUSINESS, OPERATIONS, AND PRODUCT ANALYTICS

CUTTING EDGE CASES FROM FINANCE TO MANUFACTURING TO HEALTHCARE

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Advances in Business, Operations, and Product Analytics
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Cutting Edge Cases from Finance to Manufacturing to Healthcare

Matthew J. Drake
For my wife, Nicole,  
and my daughters, Noelle and Maia.  
You are the inspiration  
for everything that I accomplish.
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Contents

Preface ................................................................. xx

Part I  General Business Analytics  ................................. 1

Chapter 1  VidoCo Demand Forecast Information Sharing ........ 3
  Background ............................................................ 3
  VidoCo and TechnoMart ............................................. 4
  Study Questions ....................................................... 9
  Endnotes ................................................................. 9
  Exhibits ................................................................. 10

Chapter 2  Container Returns at Pasadena Water Solutions ........ 15
  PWS’s People Planet Profit (P3) Sustainability Initiative ........ 16
  PWS’s Operations ..................................................... 18
  The Water Systems Shipping Containers .......................... 19
  The Container Supply Chain ......................................... 21
  Mike’s Options ........................................................ 22
  Exhibit ....................................................................... 26

Chapter 3  Developing a Business Model to Improve the Energy
           Sustainability of Existing Buildings ......................... 27
  Introduction ............................................................. 27
  Improving Energy Efficiency at Boğaziçi Sarıtepe
    Campus ................................................................. 29
  Energy Efficiency Measures Identified for Boğaziçi
    Sarıtepe Campus ..................................................... 30
  Selecting the Energy Efficiency Measures Optimally
    for a Given Budget .................................................. 32
  Selecting Energy Efficiency Measures in Multiple
    Time Periods .......................................................... 33
  Offering Energy Efficiency Measures as a Service:
    ESCO Business Model ................................................ 34
  Investing in Energy Efficiency Measures as an
    Alternative Source of Energy ..................................... 35
  Study Questions ........................................................ 36
  Endnote .................................................................... 37
  Exhibits ................................................................. 38
Chapter 13  Equipment Purchase and Replacement Strategy  
 at the Fayette China Company .......................... 139
  Company Background ................................. 140
  Equipment Replacement Strategy ...................... 141
  Equipment Purchase Decision ......................... 142
  Exhibits ............................................. 143

Part IV  Analytics in the Public Sector ................. 145

Chapter 14  Using Regression to Improve Parole Board Decisions 147
  Study Questions .................................... 150
  Closing Comments ................................... 151
  Exhibit ............................................. 151

Chapter 15  Redesigning Pittsburgh Port Authority’s Bus Transit System ................................. 153
  Introduction ......................................... 153
  Pre-analysis ......................................... 155
  Model ................................................. 156
  Data for Case Analysis ................................ 158
  Study Questions .................................... 159
  Endnote ............................................. 161
  Exhibits ............................................. 162

Part V  Analytics in Management and Ethical Decision Making ........................................ 165

Chapter 16  The Bloodgate Affair: A Case of Breaking Rules and Breaching Trust? .................. 167
  Introduction ......................................... 167
  The Incident ......................................... 170
  The Immediate Aftermath .............................. 171
  The Outcome of the ERC Disciplinary Panel Hearing 172
  Responses to the Verdict ............................. 173
  The Delayed Aftermath ............................... 174
  Epilogue ............................................ 177
  The Task ............................................ 179
  Study Questions .................................... 180
Note: Data Files Available Online

Data files corresponding to the case studies can be found on the book website, www.ftpress.com/title/9780133963700. Click the Downloads tab to access them.
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Preface

The field of business analytics continues to gain momentum as more organizations begin to emphasize its importance in improving the effectiveness of the decision-making process. Thomas H. Davenport perhaps did the most to thrust the limelight on the field with his seminal 2006 *Harvard Business Review* article, “Competing on Analytics,” which he and coauthor Jeanne G. Harris later expanded into a book with the same title. In the decade since Davenport’s initial publication, business schools around the world have rushed to ensure that their curricula reflected the analytics trend. Many programs have even established “business analytics” concentrations or minors that can enhance the value of students’ degrees.

The interesting thing about this recent analytics wave is that business analytics itself really is not that new of a concept. A general definition of business analytics is “the scientific process of transforming data into insight for better decision making.” Organizations have been using data analysis to inform their decision making for decades. The more recent development and proliferation of desktop technology applications for analytics have expanded the accessibility of these solutions to a wider range of business professionals instead of relegating them to those experts in computer coding and programming as was the case in the past. Business schools no longer have to reserve coverage of these topics for students who have taken a suite of programming courses because much of the analysis can be performed in a spreadsheet, possibly utilizing add-in tools with point-and-click interfaces.

With more business school programs offering courses in business analytics and incorporating analytics material into their existing courses, there is a need for additional offerings in the library of educational materials. This book is designed to serve dedicated analytics courses as well as instructors in other functional areas who
want to introduce analytics into the coverage of their core material. Cases are an especially effective way to teach analytics because they place the students in a simulated role as a decision maker in an organization. The cases often provide enough detail that the students must identify the information that is relevant to the analysis at hand rather than neatly organizing the information that they will need as textbook problems usually do. These additional details also provide topics for follow-up discussion in the course beyond the original analysis. Instructors can emphasize not only the mechanics of the technical analysis but also the way that the analytical results can be used to help a manager make better decisions.

Several vast case libraries are maintained throughout the world, which allow instructors to identify materials that complement their course content. Many of these cases are written at a level that is only appropriate for graduate students, and it can be challenging to find cases that are appropriate for undergraduates. To address that gap, this book mainly contains cases that could be used effectively at either the undergraduate or the introductory graduate level. They are also of varying length, with some being relatively short for use in a 30-minute class discussion and longer ones that are more appropriate for an out-of-class assignment and subsequent wrap-up discussion.

The cases in this collection are grouped by the business or industry application highlighted in the case. This structure allows instructors of courses in various business functions to identify quickly the cases that are most appropriate for their courses. The degree and sophistication of analysis required varies greatly from case to case, with some cases demanding extensive quantitative modeling and analysis and other cases necessitating a more qualitative approach. Part I includes six “general” business analytics cases that apply to business functions such as demand planning, logistics, and sustainability. Part II contains four cases set in organizations within the service and utility industries. Part III includes three cases that require students to apply analytics to accounting and finance decision environments. Part IV contains two
cases from the public sector to provide a government and nonprofit decision-making perspective. Part V provides two cases that utilize analytics to aid the development of ethical decisions.

**Note: Data Files Available Online**

Data files corresponding to the case studies can be found on the book website, www.ftpress.com/title/9780133963700. Click the Downloads tab to access them.

It is my hope that the cases in this collection expose students to the opportunity that exists to apply business analytics to improve decision making in organizations in a variety of industries. Students equipped with an effective set of analytical skills and techniques will be valuable contributors to their companies and organizations as a result of their ability to make thoughtful, reasoned decisions informed by data analysis. The broad applicability of these analytical skills will serve the students well regardless of where their careers may take them in the future.

Matthew J. Drake  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA  
May 2015

**Endnote**

1. Data source: http://www.informs.org/About-INFORMS/What-is-Analytics
Index

A
Accu-Med ADC, 113
ADCs (automated dispensing cabinets), 111
    benefit analysis, 114-116
    medications, 112-113
    stocking strategies, 113-114
advising Harlequins, 179
aftermath of
    Bloodgate Affair, 174-177
    Boat Race protests, 194
Allegheny County Port Authority, bus transit system, 153-155
alternative sources of energy, investing in energy efficiency measures, 35-37
American Freightways, 45
    rate quotes, LTL services, 59
analytics
    decision-making processes, 151
    parole boards, 147-150
    study questions, 150-151
Antique Haven, Inc.
    background of, 126-127
    change in shareholder’s interest through sale of stock, 128-129
    termination of shareholder’s interest, 127-128
A-P-A Transport, rate quotes (LTL services), 57
appeals
    disciplinary actions, Bloodgate Affair, 174-177
    to verdict in Bloodgate Affair, 174-177
Ascent Medical Solutions, 113
athletes, reaction to Boat Race protests, 195
automated dispensing cabinets.
    See ADCs (automated dispensing cabinets)
B
benefit analysis, ADCs (automated dispensing cabinets), 114-116
Bennett, Steve, 61
Blackett, Jeff, 176
Bloodgate Affair
    advising Harlequins, 179
    aftermath of, 171-172, 174-177
    disciplinary actions, 172
    response to verdict, 173
ethical dilemmas, 181
governance, 182
incident, 170-171
outcomes of, 177-178
study questions, 180-182
Boat Race
- history of, 191-192
- judgments against protestor, 196-197
- outcomes of, 198-199
- protests, 192-193
  - aftermath of, 194
  - Oldfield, Trenton, 193-194
  - reaction to, 195-198
  - supporters of, 197-198
- study questions, 200-202
- tasks, 199-200

Boat Race Company Ltd. (BRCL), 191

Boğaziçi University, Sarıtepe Campus, energy efficiency measures, 30-32

Boğaziçi University Sarıtepe Campus Sustainable and Green Campus Initiative for Boğaziçi University, 29-30

Booth, Toby, 173

BRCL (Boat Race Company Ltd.), 191

Brennan, Steph, 172, 174
  - disciplinary actions, 178
- budgets, selecting EEM measures for, 32-33
- buildings, energy usage. See energy usage in buildings
- bus transit system, 153-155
  - data for case analysis, 158-159
  - demand behavior, 159
  - models, 156-158
  - pre-analysis, 155-156
  - study questions, 159-161
- business analytics, defined, xx
- business plans, investing in energy efficiency measures, 37
- business travelers, 85

C
- C corporations, 123-124
- Cambridge University, 191
- Çamlibel, Emre, 31-32, 34
- capacity availability, wind energy, 98-99
- capital investment costs, wind energy, 98
- Chapman, Dr. Wendy, 172, 175
  - disciplinary actions, 177
- Charleston Rigging, 131
  - history of, 131-134
  - marketing studies, 135-136
  - opportunities, 134
- Cheika, Michael, 171
- classifying service failure, hotels, 90
- clean energy, wind energy. See wind energy
- Cleary, Mick, 173
- closing of the books method, 124
- CO2 emissions, 31
- collaborative planning, forecasting, and replenishment, 4
- Consolidated Freightways, rate quotes (LTL services), 47
- contracting LTL services, Hankey Industries, 45-46
- contracts, selecting for LTL services, 48
- corporations
  - C corporations, 123-124
  - S corporations, 124-125
    - Antique Haven, Inc.,
      126-127
  - change in shareholder's interest through sale of stock, 128-129
profit/loss, 124
termination of shareholder’s interest, 127-128
costs
  initial costs, replacement strategies, 141
  operating and maintenance costs, replacement strategies, 142
  wind energy, 98-99
CPFR (collaborative planning, forecasting, and replenishment), 4
Cross, Martin, 195
customer recovery, 91

D
data for case analysis, bus transit system, 158-159
Davenport, Thomas H., xx
Davenport Associates, 136
Davis, Susan, 69
decision-making processes, 151
dbining cost of wind energy, 99-100
demand behavior, bus transit system, 159
demand forecasts, 3
  TechnoMart, 4-9
  VidoCo, 4-9
Depew, Jack, 126
developing strategies for product bundling, 66
disciplinary actions
  Bloodgate Affair, 172
  appeals, 174-177
  response to verdict, 173
Brennan, Steph, 178
Chapman, Dr. Wendy, 177
Dong, Shi, 7
Driscoll, Larry, 69
drivers of costs, wind energy, 98-99
  capacity availability and efficiency, 98-99
  capital investment costs, 98
  operating costs, 99
E
EDI (electronic data interchange), 4
EEM (energy efficiency measures), 30-32
  investing in as alternative sources of energy, 35-37
  offering as a service, 34-35
  selecting for budgets, 32-33
  selecting in multiple time periods, 33-34
efficiency, wind energy, 98-99
electricity, wind energy, 97-98
electronic data interchange, 4
energy,
  natural gas, 100-102
  wind energy. See wind energy
energy efficiency measures (EEM), 30-32
  Boğaziçi University, Saritepe Campus, 30-32
  investing in as alternative sources of energy, 35-37
  offering as a service, 34-35
  selecting for budgets, 32-33
  selecting in multiple time periods, 33-34
Energy Service Companies (ESCOs), 34
energy usage in buildings, 27-29
Boğaziçi University, Saritepe Campus, 29-30
Engeman, Roger, 77-80
equipment purchase decisions, Fayette China Company, 142-143
equipment replacement strategies
   Fayette China Company, 141-142
   salvage value, 142
ERC (European Rugby Cup Limited), 171
   appeals, 178
   disciplinary actions, 172
   appeals, 174-177
ESCO business model, 34-35
ESCOs (Energy Service Companies), 34
ethical dilemmas, Bloodgate Affair, 181
European Rugby Cup Limited (ERC), 171
Evans, Mark, 174
Evans, Nick, 169-170, 173
EverClean Energy, Inc., 95
   background of, 96-97
F
Fang, Sheng, 6
Fayette China Company, 139
   background of, 140
   equipment purchase decisions, 142-143
   replacement strategies, 139, 141-142
fixed-charge problem, 156-158
forecast information, 4
forecasts, 103
G
Garrett, John, 193, 196
governance, Bloodgate Affair, 182
green initiatives, 17. See also sustainability initiatives
growth, India, 86
H
H. P. Davidson, 69
Hankey Industries, 43
   contracting for LTL services, 45-46
   logistics operations, 43-44
   selecting contracts for LTL services, 48
Hankey, Joshua, investing in energy efficiency measures, 43
Harlequins
   advising, 179
   disciplinary actions, 172
   response to verdict, 173
   internal investigations, 174
   rugby, 169
Harris, Jeanne G., xx
Harrison, Stephanie, 199
Heineken Cup, 169
   Harlequins versus Leinster, 169
Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, 85
Hopley, Damian, 173, 176
hotels
   India, background of, 84-86
   minus occupancies, 83-84
   service failure, 86-88
   classifying, 90
   service process improvement, 90
   service recovery, 89
   SM International, 83-84
hub subproject, 155
  bus transit system, 156
  models, 156-158
Hudspith, Karl, 195

I
India
  growth of, 86
  hotel industry, background of, 84-86
Industrial Technology, 69-70
  background of, 70-71
  intermodal routing options, 71-72
  selecting, routes for shipping, 72-73
initial costs, replacement strategies (Fayette China Company), 141
intermodal routing options, 71-72
investigations, into Harlequins, Bloodgate Affair, 174
investing in energy efficiency measures as alternative sources of energy, 35-37

J
James, Andrew, 95-96, 110
  Jillings, Charles, 177
judgments against protestor, Boat Race, 196-197

K
Keyes, James, 132
  Keyes, Robert, 131-134
kilns, replacement strategies (Fayette China Company), 141-142

L
labor, 79
lead time, 79
Leinster, rugby, 169
Lewis, Ken, 136
Li, Tao, 7
logistics operations, Hankey Industries, 43-44
Lolly’s Restaurant, 77-80
  study questions, 80
LTL services
  contracting, Hankey Industries, 45-46
  rate quotes, 46-48
    Hankey Industries, 45-46
  selecting, contracts, 48

M
Mably, Prosecutor Louis, 196
MacArthur, Bartholomew, 140
MacArthur, Carl, 140
maintenance costs, replacement strategies (Fayette China Company), 142
market research, Point and Shoot Camera Shop (product bundling), 64-67
marketing studies, Charleston Rigging, 135-136
May, Home Secretary Theresa, 199
McDonell, Jason, 5-7
McKenzie, Rod, 175
media, reaction to Boat Race protests, 195
medications, ADCs (automated dispensing cabinets), 112-113
Mike’s Product Packaging and Distribution (PPD) group, 17
minus occupancies, 83-84
service failure, 86-88
Mitchell, Mitch, 197
models, bus transit system (hub subproject), 156-158
Molyneux, Judge Anne, 197
Moore, Brian, 171
Moore, Kevin, 199
multi-period settings, selecting EEM, 33-34
Myers, Rupert, 195

natural gas, 31-33, 100-102
prices, 101
variables
affecting demand, 101
affecting supply, 101-102
O’Connor, Roger, 171
officials of Boat Race, reaction to protests, 196
Oldfield, Trenton, 192
Boat Race, 193-194
aftrenath of protests, 194
reaction to Boat Race protests, 196
verdict from trial about protest, 196-197

operating costs
replacement strategies, Fayette China Company, 142
wind energy, 99
opportunities, Charleston Rigging, 134
options for dealing with returned water systems shipping containers PWS (Pasadena Water Solutions), 22-25
organizers of Boat Race, reaction to protests, 196
Otay, Emre N., 30, 32, 34
outcomes of Boat Race protests, 198-199
Oxbridge, 191
Oxford University, 191

P3 (People Planet Profit), 15-18
park-and-ride project, 154-155
data for case analysis, 158-159
study questions, 159-161
Parker Motor Freight, rate quotes (LTL services), 47-57
parole boards
analytics, 147-150
study questions, 150-151
decision-making processes, 151
Pasadena Oil Equipment (POE), 18
Pasadena Water Solutions. See PWS (Pasadena Water Solutions)
People Planet Profit (P3), 15
Peretin, Cheryl, 61
pharmaceuticals, ADCs
(automated dispensing cabinets), 111
  benefit analysis, 114-116
  medications, 112-113
  stocking strategies, 113-114
Pilger, John, 197
Pinsent, Sir Matthew, 192, 196
Pittsburgh, Allegheny County Port Authority, bus transit system. See bus transit system
POE (Pasadena Oil Equipment), 18
Point and Shoot Camera Shop, 61
  background of, 61-62
  market research, product bundling, 64-67
  product bundling, 62-64
  developing a strategy, 66
Port Authority bus transit system.
  See bus transit system
PPAs (power purchase agreements), 97
pre-analysis, bus transit system, 155-156
prices
  of natural gas, 101
  of wind energy, 98
product bundling, Point and Shoot Camera Shop, 62-64
  developing a strategy, 66
  market research, 64-67
profit/loss, S corporations, 124
protests, Boat Race, 192-193
  aftermath of, 194
  Oldfield, Trenton, 193-194
  reaction to, 195-198
  supporters of protester, 197-198
PWS (Pasadena Water Solutions), 15
  history of, 18-19
  sustainability initiatives, P3 (People Planet Profit), 15-18
  water systems shipping containers, 19-21
    options for dealing with returned containers, 22-25
    supply chains, 21-22
Q-R
Ran, Bo-Liu, 7
rate quotes, LTL services, 46-48
  Hankey Industries, 45-46
reaction to Boat Race protests, 195-198
regression, study questions (parole boards), 150-151
renewable portfolio standards (RPS), 97
replacement strategies, Fayette China Company, 139, 141-142
restaurants, Lolly’s Restaurant
  expanding operations to include dinner, 77-80
  study questions, 80
Richards, Dean, 170, 172, 174
  appeals, 175-176
Richardson, Logan, 71
Ross, Robert, 139
routes for shipping, selecting (Industrial Technology), 72-73
RPS (renewable portfolio standards), 97
Rucinsky, Mary, 111
rugby
  Bloodgate Affair
    aftermath of, 171-172, 174-177
    appeals, 174-177
    disciplinary actions, 172
    ethical dilemmas, 181
    governance, 182
    incident, 170-171
    outcomes of, 177-178
    response to verdict, 173
    study questions, 180-182
  Harlequins, advising, 179
  Heineken Cup, 169
    Harlequins versus Leinster, 169
  history of, 167-168
  RWC (Rugby World Cup), 168

S

S corporations, 124-125
  Antique Haven, Inc., 126-127
  change in shareholder’s interest through sale of stock, 128-129
  profit/loss, 124
  termination of shareholder’s interest, 127-128
  salvage value, 142
  Sanger, Michael, 43
  Saritepe Campus, Boğaziçi University, energy efficiency measures, 30-32
  Saritepe Campus, Boğaziçi University Sustainable and Green Campus Initiative for Boğaziçi University, 29-30
  Scale, Lee, 149

SCC (social cost of carbon), 100
Searle, David, 196
selecting
  contracts for LTL services, 48
  routes for shipping, Industrial Technology, 72-73
service failure, hotels, 86-88
  classifying, 90
service process improvement, hotels, 90
service providers, ESCOs (Energy Service Companies), 34-35
service recovery, hotels, 89
service recovery paradox, 91
services, offering EEM as, 34-35
shareholders, S corporations
  change in shareholder’s interest through sale of stock, 128-129
  termination of shareholder’s interest, 127-128
shipping, intermodal routing options, 71-72
shipping containers, water systems
  shipping containers
    options for dealing with returned containers, 22-25
    PWS (Pasadena Water Solutions), 19-21
    supply chains, 21-22
shuttle subproject, 155
Simpson, Mary, 126
SM International, 83-84
  service failure, 86-88
  service process improvement, 90
  service recovery, 89
Small Business Corporation
  Investment Act (1958), 124
social cost of carbon (SCC), 100
Southeast Ohio Women’s Hospital (SOWH), ADCs (automated dispensing cabinets), 111-112
   benefit analysis, 114-116
   medications, 112-113
   stocking strategies, 113-114
Soyak Holding, 31
stakeholders, Bloodgate Affair analysis, 180
stocking strategies, ADCs (automated dispensing cabinets), 113-114
strategies, developing for product bundling, 66
study questions
   analytics, parole boards, 150-151
   Bloodgate Affair, 180-182
   Boat Race, 200-202
   bus transit system, 159-161
   Lolly’s Restaurant, 80
Subchapter S corporation. See S corporations
supply chains, water systems shipping containers, 21-22
supporters of protestor of Boat Race, 197-198
sustainability initiatives
   P3 (People Planet Profit), 15-18
   Sustainable and Green Campus Initiative for Boğaziçi University, 29
Sustainable and Green Campus Initiative for Boğaziçi University, 29
Sweat, Earl, 77-78

T
Tanner, Arthur, 171
tasks, Boat Race, 199-200
TechnoMart, 4-9
demand forecasts, 4-9
termination of shareholder’s interest, S corporations, 127-128
time periods, selecting EEM in multiple time periods, 33-34
Turkey, investing in energy efficiency measures as alternative sources of energy, 35-37

U-V
used machinery, salvage value, 142
variables
   affecting demand, natural gas, 101
   affecting supply, natural gas, 101-102
VidoCo, demand forecasts, 4-9

W
water systems shipping containers, 19-21
   options for dealing with returned containers, PWS (Pasadena Water Solutions), 22-25
   supply chains, 21-22
Williams, Tom, 170, 172-175
wind energy, 97-98
  declining cost of, 99-100
  drivers of costs, 98-99
    capacity availability and efficiency, 98-99
    capital investment costs, 98
  operating costs, 99
EverClean Energy, Inc., 96-97
PPAs (power purchase agreements), 97
prices, 98
Wolfe, Mike, 15

X-Y-Z
Xinhua Electronics Company, 69-70
Zeng, William, 195