

Young Professionals Programme

at London Business School



The company perspective: Rabobank

Rabobank International is the Rabobank Group's international corporate & investment bank. As a global niche player, focusing on food & agribusiness, Rabobank International provides a select group of customers with a spectrum of services ranging from merger and acquisition advisory to equity transactions, lending arrangements and structured financing. Based in The Netherlands, the company operates a network of around 90 offices operating in 29 countries worldwide.



At Rabobank, 24 high potential managers have been put through the Young Professionals Programme (YPP) – four or five on each programme – as part of Rabobank's broad talent management programme. The programme involves the use of an assessment centre to help select participants for YPP and a coaching and mentoring programme afterwards, to help participants implement their learning back in the workplace.

The 24 line managers of the participants are also closely involved in the programme, selecting people for YPP and then assessing the personal performance of the YPP participants as well as tracking the short and long-term impact of the overall development.

'The short-term impact of the YPP is that it energises our staff. It's a shock, a wake-up call,' says Sylvia Verheijden, Advisor Learning & Development for Rabobank International. 'And their short-term ways of working are definitely now firmly in congruence with the firm's strategy. They are asking different questions now about how they can make an impact.'

Rene Steenhart, Director of FX Money Market Operations and manager of two YPP participants, supports this view. 'In both the people I put through the programme the way they express

themselves, has developed. I notice that they have developed their persuasion and influencing skills, which are important for leaders.' Perhaps more importantly, he adds, 'the way they approach their work, the way they go about things, has matured. Not only looking at the day-to-day issues, but in a broader perspective, looking at what is going on at a strategic level. And that's exactly what I expected from the courses.'

"The YPP out-performed my expectations. I learned many things about myself, especially my group behaviour and effectiveness."

Robert Reekers, Specialist in Asset Management, Food and Agribusiness, Rabobank International

He also appreciates that there will be a long-term effect on the participants themselves, as well as for the organisation. 'I think the programme is really character building and that will take some time. It takes time to really understand what has happened to you and how you can apply what you have learned to your environment at work.'

For Robert Reekers, Specialist in Asset Management, Rabobank International, one of the first participants Rabobank put through the YPP two years ago, the immediate personal and organisational benefits are clear. 'The programme came at the right time for me and for my department. After 2½ to 3 years in the role I had been thinking of moving on within the business. Now, after YPP, I'm dealing with more senior people on a regular basis, involved in big negotiations for the company. I'm more confident and have more tools to help me to handle the significance and responsibility of my position. So the programme bridged the gap for me between the time I was hired and the time when, after ten years or so, I might consider going to a business school. It's great that Rabobank does this



Robert Reekers, Specialist in Asset Management, Food and Agribusiness, Rabobank International.

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Application forms and further information are available from:

Michelle Guest, Client Services, Executive Education,
London Business School, Regent's Park, London NW1 4SA, United Kingdom.
Tel: +44 (0)20 7706 6728 Fax: +44 (0)20 7724 6051
Email: guestm@london.edu Website: www.london.edu/execed/ypp/



Centre: Peter van Dijke, Head of Operations Control – Utrecht, Rabobank.

for us – some of my peers in other multinational organisations offer little for managers at this level.'

Peter van Dijke, from Group Treasury Support Operations, agrees that the programme opens doors for participants at a senior level, especially because of the marriage of short-term performance benefits with long-term organisational vision. 'More senior managers are likely to accept me and my point of view. YPP has enabled me to do my job in a more effective way, with better quality of work and better able to understand the organisation's vision,' he says. 'But the most important thing for me about being chosen for this programme was the signal that the management was committed to me. Of course they demand loyalty in return. It isn't an explicit bond, more a union between the needs of the participant and the needs of the organisation.'

“The learning experience was great and the opportunity to meet a number of professionals from various industries taught me to broaden my views and self-knowledge.”

Peter van Dijke, Head of Operations Control – Utrecht, Rabobank



Lonneke Arntz, Project Manager, Rabobank International.

It is perhaps this link between personal development and the development of the organisation that best characterises how Rabobank is using YPP. 'For the long-term, we now have people actively thinking about how the organisation works,' says Sylvia Verheijden, 'with a sense of responsibility for managing their careers within the company. How we use YPP highlights for managers the strategic importance of HR and of

linking HR development plans to business plans. We now have, for instance, both business development and people development as part of the same balanced scorecard system.'

Mart Pfeiffer, Manager of Regional Teams, Corporate Clients, recognises the impact that YPP has already had both at the personal and the organisational level. 'To assess the impact of high potential managers I always look to the corporate strategy first. And the first problem is do high potential managers have a clear view of corporate strategy? Are they people who ask questions? Now, following YPP, it is a huge advantage for us to have an increasing pool of managers fully aware of their capacities with real clarity of what the business has to achieve.'

At the same time Pfeiffer is critically aware of the need for Rabobank to continue exploring how to get the best from its development programmes. 'Broadly, the development of human capital is not yet linked with business development and business strategy throughout the banking environment. Our core competence should be financial services linked to people development. In Rabobank we, at least, are doing a tremendous amount through YPP on the development side and the question pounding in my head is what next? How do we build on this success?'

Developing emerging leaders

Identifying and developing future leaders is of vital importance when planning for future success and sustained growth. The YPP is designed to help organisations produce high performing business leaders by supporting their development at a critical point in their career. They will return to their organisation ready to implement what they have learned and very quickly make a difference to the performance of their area of responsibility.

YPP addresses three core themes:

Applying business know-how: learning how to use essential management tools and how to apply them to deliver improved organisational performance.

Making things happen: equipping individuals with the influencing skills to get things done, even when the challenge extends beyond their designated sphere of responsibility.

Developing self-awareness: reflecting on personal performance and recognising strengths and weaknesses is an essential element of learning how to become a good leader.

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