



# CLIENT SUCCESSES

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

# RABOBANK INTERNATIONAL

## BANKING ON HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP

### GOING GLOBAL

Leading a complex business in a competitive global marketplace is never more challenging than during times of growth. Realizing the value of synergies, embedding a common culture, and communicating a “one company” strategy all become more difficult as a result of increased scale. Following a period of substantial growth through acquisition, Rabobank was faced with just such challenges.

Diverse businesses coming together under the Rabobank umbrella had created an organization capable of serving customers around the globe. The market opportunity, then, was to take advantage of the synergies that existed between these operating units so that clients could be sure of having the same experience everywhere. This meant starting within the organization, creating a common culture and clear overall direction, so that the external face of Rabobank would be more consistent. Performance management was selected as the key process to underpin this cultural shift.

“We needed to be explicit about what we want from our leaders. Their job is

to ensure that everyone in the business understands how they contribute to the objectives of the organization, and exactly what’s expected of them,” says Wim Dufourné, global head of human resources for Rabobank International. “Performance management provides the tools leaders need to do just that.”

### HIGH-PERFORMANCE MINDSET

“The purpose of a strategy is to establish a clear vision of what you want to achieve, but executing it depends on managing the activity of the organization in line with this,” Dufourné says. “Performance management creates this bridge between company strategy and individual actions by establishing KPIs for every leader. It’s the process which enables this ‘cascade’ of goals from the CEO to the bank clerk so that vision becomes reality.”

Stephan Janssens, head of human resources Europe at Rabobank International and global coordinator for this programme, was also convinced that performance management could help Rabobank achieve business objectives, particularly if it could be integrated into managers’ daily work. “Effective performance management is in synch with our business processes; key milestones coincide with Rabobank’s annual planning and reporting,” he says. “But most important, it’s a mindset shift; to raise business performance overall, managers must be skilled and confident in having daily conversations with their people about what they do and how they do it.” Importantly, Rabobank’s

#### INDUSTRY: BANKING

#### ABOUT RABOBANK

Rabobank is among the world’s 15 largest financial institutions. It has group assets of more than 364 billion euros and nine million business and private customers, and is represented in 37 countries through more than 50,000 staff. Rabobank’s headquarters are in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

core competencies of Focus on Results, Cooperation, and Customer Satisfaction were also to be measured using the system.

The next question, then, was how to give managers the requisite skills to implement performance management consistently across the globe and, at the same time, to use this opportunity to convince leaders of their critical role in developing future talent. At this point, the Leadership for High Performance Program was born. “By showing leaders how to recognize the existing strengths and future potential of their team members, the program enables leaders to identify high performers and is therefore a cornerstone for management development,” Dufourné says.

## PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

DDI was selected as the partner for this program after a global tender process. It was essential that the chosen partner should be global specialists in leadership development, with consistently high-quality resources worldwide, since the program was to be delivered across 11 locations including Utrecht, Djakarta, Mumbai, Sydney, Singapore, London, Hong Kong, Dublin, São Paulo, New York, and Palm Springs. DDI was chosen also because of its experience in implementing such large-scale development projects and its long-standing research pedigree. “We were attracted to the fact that they offered an all-inclusive service. We could have highly- [customized] content and outsource the project management and logistics to them,” explains Dufourné.

DDI worked closely with Rabobank to develop the content of the Leadership

for High Performance Programme. “DDI has extensive experience in delivering leadership training to the financial services sector,” Janssens says. “They were also able to address Rabobank’s unique position and needs.”

One of the challenges to be addressed in implementation was how to involve and engage participants with differing levels of management experience. In consultation with Rabobank’s global learning and development team, participants are grouped according to experience and the scale of their management role. DDI facilitators are briefed to use more complex situations and challenges for skill practices with the more seasoned managers. More senior participants also focus heavily on learning how to flex their leadership style, and on building a sustainable high-trust work environment.

## FOCUSING ON KEY BEHAVIORS

The program, heavily customized by DDI but based on its tried and tested leadership courses, is split into two three-day modules with time in between to allow for the learnings to be applied back at work. The aim is to give leaders the tools and skills they need to be effective and supportive. It helps them understand that their role is to inspire excellence and recognize potential in order to achieve the best results possible through personal, team, and cross-boundary leadership. In terms of Rabo-specific competencies, the focus is primarily on the core competencies of Delivering Results, Cooperation, and Customer Focus. “These behaviors sit at the heart of performance objectives,” Janssens explains.

Specifically, the first module focuses on “the basics” of leadership: coaching, motivating others, creating an empowering environment, influencing skills, and resolving conflict. The second module builds on this with an additional layer of more sophisticated leadership skills, such as leading change, selecting talent to match the needs of the business, retaining talent, and building winning partnerships.

All of these skills are positioned with the twofold purpose of better meeting customer needs and building a future generation of leaders, to ensure that Rabobank will sustain its current success and reputation. “Rabobank sees its ability to develop its valued employees as a route to securing a healthy future,” says Dufourné. Together, these components enable managers to feel comfortable having the rich and open discussions required to support successful performance management.

### FLAWLESS EXECUTION

In order to maximize the value of the development, pilots were conducted before final rollout. Janssens explains: “We beefed up both modules quite a bit, post-feedback, so that they were more stretching and more specific to our business. It was a very collaborative process of our coming up with ideas and DDI finding different approaches. We appreciated DDI’s flexibility in doing their utmost to help us reach a solution that fits what we’re trying to do exactly.”

Almost as important as the content of the program in securing management buy-in is its execution. Leaders attending the program are first nominated by their managers, to reinforce the importance the business

places on their attending the training. From this point on, the administration is handled by DDI through the use of an online system. Once attendance is confirmed, participants complete an online 360° feedback survey, the results of which are shared as part of the first module. DDI also takes care of all communications with participants about the process, and management for accommodations and logistical arrangements around the globe.

Similarly, after the training, quality evaluation (of the content, facilitator, and materials) and management information are also handled by DDI. A weekly report tracks those trained at each level, as well as course occupancy, in order to measure training cost per head. This feeds into Rabobank’s global HR database of broader measurement data around HR effectiveness overall.

Critically, the impact of the training has been noticed by senior executives in Rabobank. Many report changes in their managers’ behavior, observing a greater focus on attending to the coaching and performance needs of their people. They have also noticed better quality outcomes from performance discussions; where, before the training, managers struggled to produce meaningful and measurable objectives, discussions now yield a number of high-quality, “SMART” objectives.

The skills and tools learned during the leadership training will only impact business performance if they can be immediately applied in the daily work environment, so Rabobank’s global HR team has built a strong network of support on all levels.

“Application of the learnings is key to the success of this program,” Dufourné says. “We’re also counting on the strong support from local and regional HR advisors, who will work with senior leaders to anchor the program in our daily activities. Together they will ensure proper follow-up of personal development plans.”

“In terms of quantitative data, we know that there are more than double the number of proper objective-setting discussions taking place. But I should stress that this is not simply a series of training courses that is completed and then left behind. The program is really about changing behavior and taking a new look at how effective our leaders are on a daily basis,” says Dufourné. “It requires a long-term commitment to the program by leadership on all levels. This will help us build a successful, sustainable business with strong leaders and engaged employees.”

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

WORLD HEADQUARTERS  
412.257.0600

E-MAIL [INFO@DDIWORLD.COM](mailto:INFO@DDIWORLD.COM)

[WWW.DDIWORLD.COM/LOCATIONS](http://WWW.DDIWORLD.COM/LOCATIONS)

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

- > The number of performance objective-setting discussions taking place within Rabobank has doubled.
- > Participant feedback has been exceedingly favorable:
  - “The training changed the way I relate to people and the tasks I have to achieve. It has also helped me recognize the importance of seeking rather than telling, and the importance of thinking more broadly and seeing the bigger picture.”
  - “My manager has also been on the program. I notice that he is different. He sees me trying to apply new skills and it seems to create an atmosphere where we’re both trying to change. He now asks for my ideas and gives more recognition.”
- > Senior executives within Rabobank have observed that the organization’s leaders are better attending to the coaching and performance needs of their people and are realizing higher quality outcomes from performance discussions.