

From a series of four stories about TNT's award winning GO Programme, part four:

Jewel in the crown: TNT's dedicated "GO Academy" transforms business success

TNT has developed a smart learning solution called the GO Academy. It's a two-year modular programme that enables senior and middle managers across the organisation to learn the principles, tools and modelling techniques behind Operations Research and then use those skills to deliver real Global Optimisation (GO) business cases. It's been so impressive that in just two years, TNT has netted €9 million in supply chain savings (a multiple of the investment) purely from the implementation of the GO Academy's student "Mastercases". Indeed, earlier this year TNT was recognised as a leading company in OR by winning the influential Franz Edelman global award.

"TNT's GO Academy has established itself as a key differentiator in the company's ability to make well-informed business decisions about its supply chain networks," says Jan Salomons, Director TNT Road Network Business Development (but previously Global Manager, TNT Learning & Development leading the early development of the GO Academy). "In only its fifth year, the specialist learning faculty has already become fully entrenched in the business and created a new agility and mental strength amongst self-motivated senior managers through well-applied knowledge and skills, and a desire to work as one global team in order to succeed beyond all else."

How the GO Academy started

The GO Academy was the brain-child of Marco Hendriks, Director Strategic Operations & Infrastructure and Hein Fleuren, Professor at Tilburg University / TiasNimbas Business School. Their vision back in 2007 was to create an innovative, high-impact programme that would become embedded within TNT and instil a culture that would motivate middle managers to continuously improve Operations efficiencies at all levels. Not only was their vision realised when the first cohort joined the GO Academy in April 2008, but it has since surpassed all expectations at every level.

"Together Marco and Hein created a modular programme over two years to teach the students about Operations Research, as well as a range of softer skills, including project management, financial management, procurement, presentation skills and communications," says Geert Jan Peters, Senior Learning & Development Manager, TiasNimbas. "It's designed to enable TNT students to get to know the tools and techniques and then to be motivated to use them in business. It's also about closing the gap between operations specialists and general managers through personal development. The students are taught to recognise the needs of optimisation in their own local environments, identify where best to start, and to be constantly challenged to continue to make the right business decisions."

One essential element of the training includes the GO Game, an online game which helps students understand the complexity of Supply Chain Management. Students are taken to 'GO-Land', a virtual part of the world. There are postcodes listed for deliveries from differing depots, network status lists and costs for linehubs, depots and hubs. "The students are tasked to optimise the networks so that consignments are delivered on time at optimal costs," says Frank Wouters, Global Manager Supply Chain Knowledge & GO Academy, and a former student and lecturer of the GO Academy. "It's an integral part of our first module, and is very successful in engaging our students and focussing their minds on what lies ahead in the programme!"

"With a mixed academic ability within the programme, one of our greatest challenges has been to design well-balanced modules that tackle not only the academic knowledge required but also the ability to apply the knowledge and use the tools daily in real life business cases," adds Salomons. "Over the two-year programme the students learn to use each other's skills very well – playing to each others' strengths. This is incredibly effective towards the end of the programme, when they work in teams on specific business-led 'Mastercases' which are sponsored projects often direct from TNT's Management Board."

Leaders of tomorrow

"One of the most special aspects of the GO Academy is the fact that it's not just about Operations Research," notes Wouters. "The students gain so much more, including the ability to understand strategy and the global picture, to think differently, to realise the importance of networking with your peers, and to work together remotely in international teams. The alumni all join a special GO community called 'Collaborate' – a virtual learning campus - to ensure that they continue to seek advice and support from each other, as well as to share their best practices," he notes. "The real job of GO Academy is to make sure that the gap between the operations research modelling and day-to-day management of the business is as small as possible. In this respect our Learning & Development package is unique and what makes our GO programme so special."

Such is the high regard for the GO Academy that the annual graduation ceremonies are attended by the TNT Management Board and webcast around the world. The students deliver their Mastercases and are then presented with the graduation certificates and Supply Chain Master Cards which entitles them to join the illustrious alumni of Supply Chain Masters. These Master Cards are valid for two years and are renewed only if the graduates have continued to undertake global or local optimisation projects.

Having become an integral part of the Operations community, the GO Academy exerts considerable influence on TNT as a company. There is a strong correlation between GO Academy graduates and managers promoted into senior positions. "Graduating from the GO Academy has almost become a pre-requisite for anyone at TNT wanting a senior management position, particularly in Operations,"

says Salomons. “The HR community closely align successful GO Academy Supply Chain Masters with Succession and Talent planning at TNT.”

The GO Academy has also played a big role in some of the most important strategic business decisions made by the Board in recent years, including how best to optimise the Express Air Network, and whether or not to proceed with separate parcels and freight networks and why. Overall, the return on investment into the GO Academy is a “no-brainer”; as CEO Marie-Christine Lombard has stated herself: “The GO Academy is probably the best investment TNT ever made”. “The return is almost immediate because the students deliver the savings and benefits as part of their graduation project,” adds Wouters. “And then the business gains keep growing, because Supply Chain masters must continue to produce and implement Supply Chain projects that deliver operational efficiencies each and every year thereon.”

The GO Academy has also led to several smaller “spin off” learning and development programmes, such as TNT’s Team Leader training, which is delivered to all TNT employees at Supervisor or above level. Every fortnight, the team leaders undertake a one-day training module and after the three month programme, they are expected to deliver a mini-mastercase that will improve the productivity of their particular team. “This is being applied across all functions including sales and customer service – leaders learning to manage, communicate and coordinate,” says Salomons. “It’s training for the masses across TNT, but the concept and methodology is straight out of the GO Academy.”

Truly unique

“The GO Academy is unique in what it achieves,” says Peters. “In my time at TiasNimbas, I have not seen another company that is so determined about that it wants to achieve and which has shown me such real evidence of their return on investment. They are passionate and committed and you can see the step change in TNT - not only in financial terms, but also in terms of the behaviours of the Supply Chain Masters who, once graduated, become part of a very close collaborative network across TNT. Their ability to take the initiative for new projects is tangible and the strong network creates a strong platform for change within the company which is actively achieving results. TNT has demonstrated that you can indeed lead a horse to water and make it drink!”

About TNT's Global Optimisation (GO) Programme

Operations Research became part of TNT's modus operandi five years ago to enable the optimisation of its global networks and local depot operations. To date, the projects that have emulated from the research have enabled the company to save more than €207 million through better business decision making, reduce the number of kilometres driven by 60 million and cut CO2 emissions by 283 million kilograms. The GO Programme is an optimisation "ecosystem" built on three Core Pillars: Supply chain optimisation learning through the GO Academy, modelling through Systems & Technology and global Communities of Practice in the workplace.

About INFORMS and the Franz Edelman Award

The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS®) is an international scientific society with 10,000 members, including Nobel Prize laureates, dedicated to applying scientific methods to help improve decision-making, management, and operations.

<http://www.informs.org/About-INFORMS>.

The Franz Edelman competition, held annually by INFORMS, aims to bring forward, recognize and reward outstanding examples of operations research, management science, and advanced analytics that are used to bring changes to society, industry and business.

<http://www.scienceofbetter.org/Edelman>

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