



Rabobank™ and The Open Group IT4IT™ Reference Architecture, Version 2.0

An Open Group Case Study

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Introduction

Rabobank™ is an international, privately held bank based in the Netherlands. Originally founded by farmers as a cooperative bank for and by its customers, today Rabobank is one of the largest banks in the retail financial services market in the Netherlands. The bank also aims to be the best bank in the international food and agribusiness sectors. With significant global presence in more than 40 countries, the bank has more than 45,000 employees and 8.8 million customers worldwide with specialized services focused on programs such as asset management, real estate, and insurance.

Like many industries, the banking and financial services sector is under increasing pressure and competition due to digitalization. The pressure to deliver more services online, to do it faster, and to meet customer expectations for speed, efficiency, and excellent service has never been greater. At the same time, banks are also facing added pressure due to increased regulation, cyber attacks, and security issues. Rapid change – and the need to adapt to it quickly – is the new normal.

As a response to these challenges, Rabobank understood it needed to better manage its IT processes to meet the demands of customers, increased competition, and a changing business climate.

Background

According to Toine Jenniskens, a business architect responsible for managing all of the bank's IT processes and models:

“Rabobank has always been at the forefront of using automated IT management processes for aligning the company's IT and business goals. In fact, the bank was one of the first companies outside of the UK to adopt the ITIL standard in the mid-1980s.”

In the early 2000s, Jenniskens became a manager in Rabobank's IT department and began advocating for the company's IT processes to be automated to facilitate better communications and break down silos throughout the organization. As the IT department began to automate its processes, they quickly learned that this was the way to go:

“We recognized early on that having an end-to-end value stream-based approach to IT would be very important and that IT needed to bridge the gap among different silos within the organization.”

The Problem

As the IT department began automating its IT management activities, it looked into a variety of automated solutions from various IT vendors. With a growing portfolio of IT management solutions, Rabobank soon realized that a more sophisticated integration and interoperability is necessary to better serve the business. Meanwhile the business has become significantly more demanding on the IT function. Increased demand for developing new services, as well as a need for greater continuity of services in production and faster time to market, was placing additional pressure on Rabobank's IT development and operations departments.

Rabobank's IT culture also had to change to become more agile, while still meeting information security and compliance requirements as well as continuity demand in a reliable manner.

The Solution

To meet changing industry and customer requirements, Rabobank's IT department decided to fully automate its entire IT delivery processes, from build to test and release through to deployment.

When Rabobank first embarked on this journey in 2007, the company “started off with a fantasy” that it might be able to find one vendor which could automate all of the IT processes. Although the simultaneous emergence of cloud computing models was making IT process automation easier, Rabobank soon realized that there is no all-encompassing IT automation and management solution on the market today. To enable effective and efficient IT service delivery, integration and standardization is needed across multiple IT management solutions.

Using both TOGAF®, an Open Group standard for defining Enterprise Architecture, and an early release of The Open Group IT4IT™ Reference Architecture for managing the business of IT, Rabobank began to integrate its IT management solutions across the entire company with the following goals in mind:

- Create a clear and common understanding of Rabobank's loosely-coupled IT.
- Design one common service model for the API level (the service backbone).
- Implement an Agile-based culture across IT.
- Provide direct feedback (or showback) of usage and costs.
- Automate all of Rabobank's IT processes, including:
 - All manual tasks and processes (build, test, release, deploy, monitoring, and incident remediation)
 - Tooling
 - Identity and Access Management (IAM) (or rights management)

Because Rabobank had already standardized on ITIL, the company also wanted to take a standardized approach to further integrating its IT processes. With no overarching IT management solution available on the market, Rabobank realized it needed to consolidate management across multiple solutions. As such, they created both a consolidated monitoring platform and a consolidated service management platform, underpinned with a common data model. Without this consolidation, Rabobank would have to integrate 50 service management solutions. Instead, they could start automating their processes based on what they already had in place.

The IT organization got senior management involved to help determine their governance models, what to automate first, and also to help them present business cases that would necessitate automated workloads. IT teams, such as the .NET and Java teams, then developed further initiatives from there.

The TOGAF standard was used to help in Rabobank's approach to creating its IT management architecture. As such, the company moved from a rules-based to a principles-based architecture. In addition, the TOGAF framework helped the IT department discuss “why” the approach they chose to take was important for the business. The IT4IT framework, on the other hand, was used primarily to develop the department's strategy and models for how IT could be managed and automated.

The Result

Rabobank has taken a “manager of managers” approach in building out its current management platforms. Although the company would like to eventually use one solution, with no all-encompassing solution on the market today, they are currently taking a “community” solutions approach, using multiple solutions to manage their IT assets, grouped by individual vendor solutions. For example, they use SAP Solution Manager for the company’s SAP landscape, Enterprise Manager for Oracle products, and Microsoft’s SCOM, TFS etc. for their Microsoft environments. IT management tools from Hewlett Packard Enterprise are used to manage and administer all of those solutions.

Rabobank has begun its long-term roadmap by automating its maintenance tasks and delivery of Linux and Windows servers with self-service. They are also in the process of automating much of their build and deployment capabilities for development.

Although the initiative is still underway, Rabobank is already seeing significant results. Automating their management solutions has significantly sped up timeframes for getting things done.

“Everything is just a faster process,” Jenniskens says.

Implementing Agile and Lean processes has also allowed Rabobank to step up how they manage things.

“Now we really are developing our DevOps methodology in our IT management world,” he says.

Rabobank’s IT department and developers are able to move much faster because they now have a common understanding of how the company’s IT management process works. The IT4IT framework is directly responsible for this result. In addition, the framework has helped them to better understand where there might be duplication within IT and decide which tools they need and which they don’t.

Ultimately, the result thus far has been faster, more efficient business processes. Rather than having time lapses between projects, now the bank is able to practice continuous iteration, and IT is no longer a bottleneck for getting things done.

Looking Forward

In conjunction with the project, Rabobank’s IT department recently revised its mission statement and purpose to refocus on three new areas:

- Know what to build
- Automate everything
- Monitor everything

To do that, the next step in the process is to rebuild a number of the department’s applications to make them cloud-ready and to also enable automated delivery. In addition, IT intends to continue its focus on using Agile in order to keep processes on track.

The benefit of market standards such as the IT4IT or TOGAF standards is they are or will be proven and tested. In the financial services industry, using open-source solutions can be risky. A business like a bank

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can't be dependent on a solution that may not exist in a couple of years. That is why standardization is important for companies like Rabobank.

Jenniskens also says he hopes that groups such as The Open Group IT4IT Forum will further facilitate automation for IT management solutions across the industry:

“The next step would be to integrate between vendors in the IT community. We need integrated solutions across everything, but I think we're still very far from that.”

About The Open Group

The Open Group is a global consortium that enables the achievement of business objectives through IT standards. With more than 500 member organizations, The Open Group has a diverse membership that spans all sectors of the IT community – customers, systems and solutions suppliers, tool vendors, integrators, and consultants, as well as academics and researchers – to:

- Capture, understand, and address current and emerging requirements, and establish policies and share best practices
- Facilitate interoperability, develop consensus, and evolve and integrate specifications and open source technologies
- Offer a comprehensive set of services to enhance the operational efficiency of consortia
- Operate the industry's premier certification service

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