

Pipeline

Knowledge Is Power

www.pipelinepub.com Volume 5, Issue 2

School's In: Education at Management World

by Wedge Greene

I had the opportunity to audit and review a few NGOSS courses at the TMForum Management World in Nice. It has been a long time since I attended a TMF sponsored course. Before the bubble collapse, I volunteered to teach for a day at each TeleManagement World and did this for four or five years. Most of these courses were titled "Policy-based Management" and were team taught at first by myself and Jerry McDowell. Later we added John Strassner and he took over teaching the modeling part of the course. While this was Policy-based Management, those who attended will know that this is the course where we first introduced the early NGOSS concept at the TMF – specifically the architecture (which became TNA) and the modeling (which became SID).

It pleased us that so many of our peers were interested in our approaches and we were grateful to give some volunteer time back to the TMF, which we loved, but this volunteerism made the TMF courses very much hit and miss. The TMF itself had little control over the content – instead overseeing who could design and offer a course and insuring that the course slides got to the course attendees. Some management was required because, after all, the "students" paid for the course. I cannot truthfully call them students, as everyone who showed up was clearly a peer of ours. But volunteering was not easy for professionals making a living as independents, so during those 4-5 years, a few people began to be paid by the TMF for teaching a course. When the bubble burst, companies could no longer afford to volunteer their employee's time for creating and teaching courses. Often, the volunteer teachers stopped being telecom company employees and themselves became independents. The TMF turned to its professional consulting associates.

Enter today: TMF courses are all taught by professional consultants who know their field inside and out. By teaching continuously throughout the world in many specific "mini-university" conferences, and in having TMF courses attached to many shows in addition to Management World, these professionals hone skills and keep them current. There have never been a better collective group of teachers in our industry.

These consultants still create course material but the material is no longer so personal, as when I described early NGOSS or Strassner taught early DEN-NG. Today, course material is created in conjunction with the "administrative" TMF

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staffers, often as a collaborative effort among the consultant teachers and the TMF subject team leads. Courses today are about existing TMF programs, not general professional enlightenment. George Greenlee, the TMF's Training and Development Director, oversees the entire program, vetting final content to maintain a consistent style and message, approving all the teachers and getting them trained and certified on the material, and finally administering the venues for courses. Today, the TMF teaching program is a professional mini-university and it makes money for the TMF coffers. John Reilly, TMF master teacher and author: "I liken the adoption of NGOSS to a cresting wave...if a correlation can be made between the amount of training done by the Forum and adoption of NGOSS, and it can, the wave is building and it's a big one...and it's spreading to other sectors, such as government, media, entertainment...with more than 15 instructors worldwide delivering a least a course a week via open enrollment and on site format in a variety of languages, such as English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian...it is quite rewarding for those of us who started with an idea in 2000 to see this happen."

The positive result is a consistent and probably better experience for the students. The downside is the great inspiration and creation that cropped up in the early courses is no longer present. Most of the creation today is rightly in the TMF technical teams and area domains; the TMF "university" is a communications vehicle. Also, today the attendees really are students. Where once some courses served as introductions to get people up to speed on a TMF program and then feed these new people into the technical teams, today these are mainly employees sent as students to learn a quick skill and provide data to take back to their companies for application. The TMF "university" has become a professional development organization, manned by professional SMEs – teaching the world about NGOSS.

And it is doing a good job, in my humble opinion. I do not know of any professional, scientific survey which has been done that measures information dispersal and retention; however, if the student wants to learn, they will get the opportunity to learn. And the material they are provided is fundamentally sound and holds the potential for effective technical modernization of OSS/BSS departments.

A downside of the new program is companies now send employees to learn because they want the skills; it is not because the employees fought for the opportunity to attend a TMF course. Motivation is key to learning the NGOSS material. I saw several bored students who clearly were "tuned out" and could care less about learning the material. Likely they were there because they had to be, and likely this was a waste of their company's money and the teacher's time. They walked home with completion certificates that will actually damage their companies as they are called on to apply skills and use knowledge they do not have.

But the great majority of the students I saw paid attention to the courses, were engaged in the work exercises, and asked enlightening questions. It is these students who are becoming the true disseminators of the NGOSS message. Companies should vet who they are sending and check their new skills and data retention when they return. Better, companies can send attentive students to a brace of courses and get their employee NGOSS certified – thus insuring availability of skills in exchange for their training capital.

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This is another positive development in the training program. TMF now provides a coordinated series of courses that first introduce the material and then teach the content in more detail and provide small-team hands on exercises within the course environment in order to practice the skills of applying NGOSS. There are more courses because there is, after all, much more material to assimilate. Once upon a time the only way to learn NGOSS was to participate on the technical teams and help create it. While this is still the best approach, today the technical teams are equivalent to a Graduate School. The basic skills are now taught in a series of collaborated courses. But to gain these skills, you must attend the whole series; and because NGOSS is a group of interrelated Frameworks, you must attend the series that includes all the TMF NGOSS frameworks.

Today, courses exist in introduction and then application of the SID and eTOM. Work is underway to develop course series for the TNA and TAM. Start with NGOSS distilled. Continue with eTOM Distilled, SID Distilled, and TAM Distilled: the introductory courses. These earlier courses are necessary to attempt the certification exams. Continue with the intermediate courses: the SID Modeler's Workshop (UML knowledge a strong help), the eTOM Implementer's Workshop; and the SID for Application Integration. Lastly, add either of the advanced specialization courses: NGOSS Interfaces and NGOSS SOA. The TMF also teaches a few side courses not directly NGOSS associated, such as introductions to NGN, SLA, and SDF.



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A byproduct of the TMF course development is the creation of a series of books on NGOSS. These are being created by the "master teachers" based on the testing of material over many classes. First, *NGOSS Distilled* by Martian Creaner and John Reilly adds extensive depth to the NGOSS Distilled courses. John Reilly's two collaborative books sponsored by Progress: *Getting Started with the SID* and *Application Integration Using the SID* extend their respective courses. Currently, we understand, John Reilly and Mike Kelly are developing a book based on the eTOM Implementer's Workshop. These should be read and used in conjunction with the training courses. All are available via the TMF, but frequently, they are distributed with the teaching of the TMF courses.

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One caution... One nagging complaint the TMF often gets is the about the time required to learn the NGOSS skill sets where companies must commit "time-limited," valuable employees for long courses. In response, the TMF has tried to meet this concern with a series of "concatenated courses." These were taught at the last TMF Management World. I do not recommend the concatenated versions (one half day instead of a full day for the Distilled courses and one day instead of two for the intermediate courses.) While it is possible to recover the course material missed by time constraints by fully studying the books, it is not possible to recover the loss of the "training exercises." These suffer most in the concatenation; applying and practicing these fresh skills is important for final results inside their home corporations.

Finally, the legacy of the new TMF NGOSS "university" is not just contained in the courses. The teachers are independent consultants and have become the worlds leading SMEs on NGOSS. Along with the team leads - tied up in the TMF member companies - these teaching consultants represent the true repository of TMF NGOSS knowledge and experience. NGOSS is the documents produced and approved by the TMF. But NGOSS is also the practice of modernization of OSS and BSS inside the telecom ecosystem companies. NGOSS is not a theory; it is a practice of transformation.

Taking an external course with mixed company students adds a cross-fertilization of ideas and experience that enriches the learning of the traveling students. But in addition to the external TMF courses, these independent consultants teach inside companies, sometimes at formal TMF courses sold by the TMF and other times as independents. As independents, they can band together and customize training for the specific needs and requirements of companies - and meet their needs for a specific time and place. Learning and practicing NGOSS in established teams helps create continuity for companies developing transformation programs.

If you want NGOSS knowledge and experience, the TMF independent trainers are the place to go. Training is a supplement to their main practice which is helping companies launch and refine NGOSS transformation projects. Next time, instead of turning only to the big SI consultant mega-company who, at best, has just sent people to the TMF courses, think of calling in one of these master teachers and expert NGOSS SMEs.

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