



**Sandra's journey to agility continues**

March 2020

# Where I left you

Hey there, it's me again, Sandra. I am taking you on SunnyBank's transformation journey as we are preparing to go 'agile'.

As you may remember, SunnyBank has experienced severe turbulence. Lagging behind the digital revolution, having difficulties in finding new and retaining existing employees, and a shrinking customer base were but a few challenges faced by the company. We had to change the way we managed, hired, and worked to weather the storm and sail against the wind. Our HR business partner, Peter Miller, had shared his worries with me. I realized that it was time that I called for an emergency meeting to build an alliance of key people at the bank to ensure we got the ball rolling.



## Our DNA

"Who are we?" I asked the members of our steering committee. Just like the 25 largest European banks<sup>1</sup>, our core corporate values are integrity and customer focus. As a bank, integrity was clearly the value that we would not compromise on. However, while customer focus could be found in our statements, it clearly did not reflect reality as we were continuously losing customers. There was a real gap between what we thought we did and what we really did. Corporate culture matters because transformation initiatives fail too often due to culture-related issues. The biggest part of corporate culture is implicit, not expressly defined and goes way beyond some value statements. It is palpable in the office environment, incentive structure, technologies used, decision-making, and the success strategy. It shows who we are and what we stand for. To change we had to get a better understanding of who we were currently.

Following an initial open discussion, we used tools to analyze our culture and realized that our as-is culture was mainly focused on the market. We would closely observe our competitors to be able to react quickly to changes they would implement. We were far from being pioneers in our field—we were followers. If we wanted to start being ahead of others it needed to be reflected in our culture. We would have to create a culture that promotes innovation through experimentation and encourage action learning. "Trial, error, correction" would need to become our mantra to enable the transformation to agile working. If SunnyBank wanted to achieve agility and flexibility, we needed to start working beyond and across conventional boundaries of time and place. Where to start?

## Remote first – or at least not last

As we wanted to redefine ourselves, we needed to move away from the current presenteeism fallacy. Our employees were not happy with the status quo. They had the feeling that the more time they spent in the office, no matter the actual productivity, the higher their chances for promotion. "They are probably right," I thought and figured that a lack of trust was the main reason why we had not implemented remote working yet. The employee survey had shown that 74 percent of all respondents missed a more flexible approach to work including the possibility to work from home. As a traditional bank, remote work was not part of our culture. I realized that this needed to change as we were redefining our DNA. Not just to please our workforce but also because studies like the one conducted by the University of Stanford show that home working can lead to a 13 percent performance increase<sup>2</sup> while improving work satisfaction.

In collaboration with our HR team, we started to research best practices to implement remote working. To my surprise, some companies purposefully decided to be remote first or even remote only. This meant that they could hire the best talent regardless of location or life circumstances. While this would not become the default in the banking sector in the near future, we were now able to draw on their experiences to put our policies in place. First, we needed secure systems and software for remote communication. There are plenty of tools available on the market to facilitate digital teamwork and collaboration. They are essential to implement action learning in non-traditional settings. You can share whiteboards, have chats, conduct polls, and record meetings for those who are not be able to join. Meetings via web conferences can be equivalent to or go beyond the classic meeting. Other tools help you to plan and manage projects online. Communication via long e-mail threads is replaced by communication via chat channels that can be organized by team, project, or client.

<sup>1</sup> [https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/25268625/Ehrenhard\\_et\\_al\\_2018\\_Journal\\_of\\_Public\\_Affairs.pdf](https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/25268625/Ehrenhard_et_al_2018_Journal_of_Public_Affairs.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://nbloom.people.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbijbj4746/f/wfh.pdf>

Once we had decided on the tools we wanted to go for, we started to test the new way of working with some teams. This was also necessary to convince our leadership of the benefits of remote work and to address their concerns before going live with the new policies. In addition, we provided our managers with workshops on how to lead and inspire teams over the screen. They had to learn that the future of work is trust not tracking.

We learnt that we also needed to implement some basic rules to make this work. These were mainly behavioral guidelines, defining work as something more than a physical location. Here are the rules that we put in place:

- Make working hours and absences clearly visible by publishing them in your agenda
- If you need some time out to focus, note it on the agenda as well
- Respond to messages within 24 hours, call if it's urgent
- Be on time for meetings and turn on the video; you will feel more connected and stay more focused
- Have digital coffee breaks and connect with your colleagues over non-work-related-topics.

## Upskill to the next level

With the banking sector changing rapidly, it is no longer possible to plan every detail ahead. Instead, we needed to decentralize decision-making in order to react faster and to anticipate threats and opportunities better. To ensure that our people were willing to give their best and to be capable of adapting to the changing requirements, we needed to provide opportunities to learn continuously and acquire new skills. Having the right people in the right place at the right time alone would not ensure our transition to agile working. We needed to explore how we could foster resilience and curiosity during these times of change.

I sat together with our talent development team and we decided to launch our first SunnyBank University. We now offer a large choice of e-learning that our employees can choose from to gather information and obtain certificates in the field of their interest. We actively encourage them to discover topics outside their field of expertise. Obviously, the trainings should be aligned with their development plan, but the idea is to remain open to new ideas. The learning initiatives are supplemented by seminars and webinars on soft skills such as emotional intelligence, leadership and work-life balance. E-learning go hand-in-hand with remote working as our employees get to decide when, where and at what rhythm they would like to acquire new skills. Where required, e-learning are combined with traditional teaching methods and independent learning to offer a blended learning approach.

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## Recruit Smarter

To gain a better understanding of the current situation, I asked Peter to provide me with some internal HR statistics. At SunnyBank, the average number of applications we received per job opening was 148. Scanning CVs was time-consuming and, more importantly, it did not provide us with enough information. With our new approach, we were not just looking for people with the right diplomas, we also wanted to make sure that they could relate to our new culture and would become part of the family.

I researched for current tools on the market and found that digital recruitment was now often enhanced by video interview platforms. This would allow our talent acquisition team to set up short standardized interviews with job relevant questions. While being skeptical at first, I quickly realized that this approach was not meant to replace face-to-face interviews. Instead, it was improving the candidate experience by giving everyone the chance to present themselves beyond a piece of paper at an early stage in recruitment process. The video interviews could be set up in a way that would allow SunnyBank to introduce our corporate culture to the candidates in a short video clip. The interview could also be supplemented by more objective sources such as ability or personality assessments or indicators of the coherence between our culture and the candidate's motivational drivers. This seemed to be a practical solution to filter applications quickly and efficiently. We could then spend more face-to-face time with candidates who seemed to be the most suited for a given position.

## Our Eureka

For me, as for every other employee, the time at SunnyBank will eventually just be a phase in our lives. We will all leave the bank at some point and maybe even SunnyBank will cease to exist. In the meantime we can make sure that our time at SunnyBank will be a good phase of our life; helping everyone to be the best version of themselves and to grow together. In the end, it is all about the experience we give to our employees and clients.

# Quick Guide to Remote Recruitment

For many hiring managers and recruiters, hiring someone they have never met face-to-face is a worrying thought. However, how different is it really compared to the traditional recruitment process?

The main difference is that we do not sit in a room with the candidate, do not shake their hands, and the subtleties of body language may get lost over the screen. Are these features of in-person interviews the ones that enable us to choose the right candidate? We may get much more insightful information by following these steps:



## CV+

Screen CVs and invite your candidates to a short standardized video interview that they can answer from home at their convenience



## Value check

Use a reliable tool to check how the candidate's motivational drivers align with your corporate culture



## Deep dive

The recruiter can explore further and answer the candidate's questions during a video interview



## Skill check

Now it's time for the hiring manager to check for the required competencies



## Reference check

Speak with the candidate's references and focus on what values they have shown and worked by in the past, to gauge if they are a cultural fit for your team



## Wisdom of crowds

Let the team meet the candidate and the candidate meet the team



## Do you really need more interviews?



## Decision time!



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