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Shaping Culture through Transformational Leadership
A Case Study on Organizational Change at Randstad

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Abstract

This case study explores the transformative leadership of Sander van 't Noordende, Randstad's CEO since 2022, and its impact on the organization and employees during a period of significant change. The study examines the interplay between digital innovation, cultural evolution, and human-centric leadership. Anchored in transformational leadership theory and supported by primary and secondary data, the case highlights the challenges and successes of aligning innovation with Randstad's legacy values of trust, collaboration, and transparency. It provides insights into employee engagement, cultural transformation, and sustainable organizational strategies.

Keywords

Transformational Leadership, Organizational Change, Cultural Transformation, Leadership Communication, Randstad Case Study

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Case Note

This case study invites students to explore the profound organizational changes that took place at Randstad following the appointment of Sander van 't Noordende as CEO in 2022. Through a focus on transformational leadership, students are encouraged to examine how the new leadership style balanced digital innovation, sustainability, and human-centric values while addressing cultural and operational challenges.

The case underscores the role of transformational leadership in fostering cultural alignment, clear communication, and employee engagement during periods of significant change. By examining how the new leadership style at Randstad influenced these critical factors, students are encouraged to explore the dynamic relationship between leadership behaviors and their impact on employee attitudes, organizational outcomes, and the broader strategic transformation. This cohesive focus on transformational leadership provides a lens for understanding the interplay between leadership strategies and the cultural and operational challenges faced during the transition.

The case study is divided into two parts. Part A presents the situation, focusing on the leadership strategies during the transformation and the organizational culture. Part B offers a Teaching Note with a synopsis, pedagogical objectives, and suggested discussion questions, and insights for facilitating an engaging and thought-provoking discussion.

Part A - Case study

Opening

In March 2022, Randstad welcomed a new chapter in its leadership with the appointment of Sander van 't Noordende as CEO. Known for his forward-thinking approach and extensive experience, including a three-decade career at Accenture where he drove digital transformation, championed diversity and inclusion, and fostered innovative strategies for industry growth, van 't Noordende brought with him a vision to elevate Randstad's position as a global leader in the talent industry (World Economic Forum 2024). With a strong emphasis on equity, inclusion, and digital innovation, his leadership marked a fresh beginning for the company, which had previously focused on traditional staffing solutions but faced growing pressure to adapt to digital transformation, address workforce diversity, and meet the evolving challenges of the labor market (Randstad 2024a).

His commitment to diversity and inclusion is deeply personal. In the 1980s he made the pivotal decision to come out as homosexual to his colleagues. This experience has van 't Noordende described as one of the best career decisions he's ever made, emphasizing the importance of authenticity in the workplace (Business Insider 2019).

Sander van 't Noordende was not only emphasizing strategic realignment but also a deep cultural shift, focusing on balancing Randstad's long-standing values with a push for innovation and adaptability. With his focus on transformational leadership, van 't Noordende set out to reshape Randstad's identity, blending digital innovation, sustainability, and a human-centric approach (Randstad Annual Report 2023). This transformation presented a critical question for Randstad: Could this new leadership style integrate advanced technology, foster a culture of innovation, and simultaneously maintain the human-centered values that had always defined it?

Company Background

Randstad was founded in 1960 in the Netherlands by Frits Goldschemding and Ger Daleboundt. Initially focused on temporary staffing, Randstad expanded its services over the decades to include permanent recruitment, outsourcing, HR consulting, and workforce management solutions (Randstad 2024a) (Exhibit 1). Randstad's mission is to support people and organizations in realizing their true potential by combining advanced technology with the passion of HR professionals. The company's *Tech and Touch* approach underscores its commitment to maintaining personal relationships while leveraging digital advancements to enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Randstad 2024b). This dual focus on personal and digital advancements aligns with van 't Noordende's vision of specialization and technical integration in high-demand sectors like engineering, healthcare, and IT (Randstad Workmonitor 2024). Randstad's core values "*to know*", "*to serve*", "*to trust*", "*striving for perfection*", and "*simultaneous promotion of all interests*" serve as a compass for all employees, guiding behavior and forming the foundation of the company's culture (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

By 2024, Randstad had operations in 39 countries, employing more than 40,000 people and generating annual revenue of 25.4 billion euros (Randstad 2024a). Randstad has played a crucial role in the Portuguese labor market, providing staffing solutions across industries such as manufacturing, retail, and technology. Randstad's history of human connection was being reimagined as the company sought to integrate advanced technology while retaining its core values of trust, collaboration, and empathy (Randstad 2024b) (Exhibit 3). The new CEO, Sander van 't Noordende, brought a fresh perspective with a focus on transformational leadership, implementing strategies such as leveraging digital tools to enhance workforce efficiency, promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives to create a more equitable workplace, and driving sustainability efforts to align with evolving market

expectations, all aimed at fostering a values-driven culture (Randstad 2024d). His vision was aimed at addressing key business problems, including adapting to market changes, overcoming internal resistance to cultural shifts, and ensuring that employees engagement remained high amidst transformation (World Economic Forum 2024).

Balancing Tradition and Innovation

Van 't Noordende had a bold vision for Randstad, aiming to lead the HR industry into the future through transformative initiatives. These initiatives included advancements in technology, such as the adoption of advanced AI-driven talent-matching platforms, and cultural shifts emphasizing equity, inclusion, and employee engagement. Additionally, he focused on improving organizational processes by streamlining recruitment workflows, enhancing employee training programs, and integrating sustainability into business operations (Randstad Annual Report 2023). He envisioned a company that was not only innovative, but also agile and deeply attuned to the changing needs of its clients and workforce (Randstad 2024c). Van 't Noordende brought a clear vision for transformational leadership; he inspired a fundamental shift in how Randstad approached change, emphasizing a shared vision that motivated employees to innovate and embrace new challenges. By focusing on empowering individuals through upskilling, fostering inclusivity, and aligning the organization with purpose-driven goals, he cultivated a culture of collaboration, adaptability, and long-term growth (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

This transformation was a fundamental shift on how employees approach their roles, collaborated, and contributed to the company's evolving strategy. Van 't Noordende's transformational leadership style emphasized inspiring employees with a shared vision, fostering adaptability, and building trust during times of uncertainty (Bass & Riggio 2006). These priorities aligned closely with global trends identified in the Workmonitor report

(2024). According to the same source, employees were increasingly seeking connection and a sense of purpose from their organizations; for Randstad, achieving this balance meant addressing concerns like flexibility (37% of global workers said they would quit their job if required to spend more time in the office) and ensuring work life-balance was prioritized (57% ranking work-life balance as more important than higher pay) (Randstad Workmonitor Report 2024).

The organizational change also reflected the company's emphasis on employee development and engagement. Through programs like the *Randstad in Touch platform*, employees could directly provide feedback on their experience, fostering a sense of ownership and inclusion in the transformation process. Through this program employees were empowered to anonymously share their thoughts through quarterly surveys, which were reviewed in real-time dashboards. This enabled managers to address concerns, spark open dialogues, and implement targeted action plans that aligned with both local needs and company-wide goals (Randstad Annual Report 2023). The company's commitment to offering growth opportunities, through the *Frits Goldschmeding Academy*, played a significant role in this shift. In this program leaders and employees alike engaged in cutting-edge programs developed with top global business schools, enhancing transformational leadership skills and exchanging best practices across markets. Going in line with van 't Noordende's transformational leadership vision, which aimed to cultivate a values-driven culture and prepare the organization for future challenges, these programs fostered a unified vision for driving strategic change. Participants rated their learning experiences an impressive 8.8 out of 10 (Randstad Annual Report 2023), reflecting the alignment of these initiatives with the broader goals of innovation, inclusion, and growth under the new leadership.

Transformational Leadership: Redefining Randstad

The change was positioned as critical for Randstad's future, driven by the growing demand for innovative talent solutions and the rapid digitalization of the HR industry. Randstad's 2023 Annual Report underscores this necessity, emphasizing the company's commitment to adaptability and innovation through embracing digital transformation and fostering a culture of creativity to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market where clients increasingly seek technologically advanced and inclusive workforce solutions (Randstad Annual Report 2023). It also emphasized driving digital transformation through AI-powered recruitment tools and employee upskilling programs. At the same time, it focused on building trust through open channels for feedback and collaboration. It required Randstad to evolve in response to trends like digital innovation, hybrid work models, and increasing demands for sustainability, while ensuring its core values of empathy and collaboration remained central (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

According to a McKinsey study, a transformation is 5.8 times more likely to be successful at organizations where CEOs communicate a compelling, high-level change story, and 6.3 times likelier when senior leaders share aligned messages about the change efforts with the rest of the organization (McKinsey 2021). Van 't Noordende exemplified this approach through his communication, emphasizing the necessity of a mindset shift alongside process changes. He advocated for treating employees as customers, stating "Your customer, you ask what they want, and you try to do the best possible job for your customer. You should treat talent in an equal way" (World Economic Forum 2023). This perspective underscored his commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability while aligning Randstad's global operations with his transformational vision.

Sander van 't Noordende adopted a leadership style rooted in transformational leadership theory, which is characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate employees to

achieve more than they initially thought possible. Transformational leadership involves four key components, which is often referred to as the “Four I’s”: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration (Bass & Riggio 2006) (Exhibit 4).

Sander van ‘t Noordende led by example, embodying the values of transparency, collaboration, and innovation. He fostered an inclusive environment and empowered his employees, which can earn an employee’s trust and confidence (Colquitt et al., 2017). This was particularly important in a company as large and diverse as Randstad, where employees across different regions needed a consistent model to follow.

Sander van ‘t Noordende articulated a clear vision for Randstad's future, framing the transformation as an opportunity to lead the industry in workforce solutions while creating meaningful, rewarding work for employees (Kouzes & Posner 2017). He utilized compelling storytelling by weaving Randstad’s deep heritage with its future aspirations through the introduction of the “*Partner for Talent*” strategy. He effectively communicated the company’s transformation by emphasizing how its longstanding values of equity and connection would seamlessly align with the cutting-edge digital solutions and talent innovation (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

Employees at all levels were encouraged to challenge existing processes, propose creative solutions, and contribute to the transformation. This focus on creative problem-solving fostered a culture of innovation, where employees felt empowered to experiment and take calculated risks, knowing that their input was valued (Gong et al. 2009). This not only enhanced employee engagement, but also strengthened their commitment to the organizations' evolving strategic goals, creating a sense of shared ownership in the transformation process (Randstad 2024e).

Recognizing that each employee would experience the transformation differently,

Sander van 't Noordende provided personalized support and development opportunities (Kark et al. 2003). Managers were encouraged to adopt a more personalized approach, such as conducting regular one-on-one discussions to align employees' goals with organizational objectives. This ensured that employees received tailored guidance and felt supported in their professional growth (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

This approach to transformation leadership was crucial in navigating the complexities of aligning a global organization with local needs. While Sander van 't Noordende provided a unifying vision, regional leaders were empowered to adapt strategies to fit the unique dynamics of their markets (Ferreira 2023).

Communication: Connecting Vision with Practice

Effective communication was central to the success of Randstad's transformation. Sander van 't Noordende prioritized clear messaging to connect vision with action. He created urgency by highlighting the need for change, positioning the transformation as crucial for staying competitive. Sander van 't Noordende stated that "Employers need to step up to meet talent demands and understand what motivates them, to maintain a competitive edge" (Randstad 2024e). The transformation relied on a multifaceted communication strategy to ensure that every employee felt connected to the broader mission (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

His initial communication outlines the why, what, and how of the change, addressing not only operational goals, but also the cultural shifts that would be required for success. This vision was reinforced through leadership engagements, and regular updates designed to translate the strategic objectives into practical steps for employees. For example, Randstad's senior leaders conducted periodic *Great Conversations*, a series of structured dialogues designed to align priorities, share updates, and address concerns across different departments.

Additionally, tools like the *Randstad in Touch platform* were leveraged to gather feedback and adapt action plans, ensuring that communication was clear and actionable (Randstad Annual Report 2023). Workmonitor (2024) insights highlighted the critical importance of clarity and frequent engagement. Employees valued communication about career progression and organizational goals, with 40% wanting these conversations quarterly or more often (Randstad Workmonitor Report 2024). By fostering open channels for feedback and dialogue, Randstad created an environment where employees can feel informed and involved in the transformation process.

Leaders sought to ensure employees were informed about key developments, encouraged to share their perspectives, and supported in navigating changes. Randstad's open channels for feedback were crucial during this period, as they allowed employees to express concerns and contribute to the transformation process. Active listening through the *Randstad in Touch tool* encouraged innovation and accountability across teams, helping employees feel like integral parts of the change process (Randstad Annual Report 2023). This communication style implemented with the new CEO helped to build alignment and reinforce employee confidence during the transition, which was critical for its success (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

Cultural Transformation

The cultural transformation envisioned by van 't Noordende was ambitious, but necessary. Randstad's global operations were shaped by diverse local cultures, which, while a strength, also created challenges for consistency and alignment. To address these challenges, van 't Noordende sought to create a cohesive cultural framework that maintained local adaptability while emphasizing shared values (World Economic Forum 2024). This framework was reinforced by Randstad's commitment to diversity and inclusion across the

company. Employee resource groups (BRGs) like the *Global PRIDE* and *Women's Inclusive Network* helped foster an environment where employees could thrive uniquely to the company's success (Randstad Annual Report 2023). Van 't Noordende wanted diversity and inclusion, and said "A company must have the ambition to create an inclusive and inspiring workplace where people feel they belong, regardless of their background. This way they can be their best self everyday" (Mtsprout 2024).

Van 't Noordende's vision for cultural transformation can be examined through the lens of Edgar Schein's (1985) model for organizational culture, which emphasizes the importance of aligning artifacts (visible changes), espoused values (stated beliefs and goals), and underlying assumptions (core beliefs). The transformation was marked by visible artifacts, including the introduction of collaborative workspaces and advanced digital tools that symbolized the organization's commitment to innovation and transparency. Storytelling, in the form of success stories highlighting employees who embraced change, also emerged as a key artifact, reinforcing the cultural shift while maintaining a connection to Randstad's heritage (Randstad Annual Report 2023). At the espoused values level, core principles like trust, collaboration, and transparency were reframed to reflect the company's evolving strategic vision, ensuring employees saw continuity in their cultural identity amidst change. Finally, at the level of underlying assumptions, deeply held beliefs in human-centric approach and the importance of adaptability became integral to the transformation (Randstad Annual Report 2023). These assumptions supported van 't Noordende's emphasis on fostering a growth mindset, enabling employees to embrace new technologies and innovative ways of working.

To encourage alignment with these values, efforts were made to recognize and appreciate behavior that reflected the company's goals. Leaders often highlighted positive examples of individuals and teams who demonstrated commitment to the organization's

evolving culture. These gestures, whether formal or informal, helped to foster a sense of appreciation and motivate employees to engage with the transformation. As noted by Cameron and Green (2015), recognizing and reinforcing behaviors that align with the organizational values is a key of successful change management, helping to create an environment where employees feel valued and are more likely to contribute to the ongoing transformation. This aligns with global findings: employees increasingly sought employers whose values aligned with their own, with 38% stating they would not accept a job if leadership's values did not align (Randstad Workmonitor Report 2024).

Impact on the Organization and Employees

The transformation had a profound impact on Randstad's employees, both challenging and empowering them. The introduction of AI-driven tools and new digital processes was met with resistance from some, where many felt unsure about their roles in a digitally transformed organization. 34% expressed concerns that AI could reduce the human touch in the workplace, and 32% identified the potential to amplify bias or misuse technology irresponsibly (Randstad 2024g).

However, Randstad's emphasis on employee well-being and training reassured employees that these changes would not compromise their value to the organization. By providing mentoring opportunities and a comprehensive training curriculum, Randstad enabled employees to seamlessly integrate new technologies into their workforce, which freed them to focus on more impactful, strategic work (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

Many employees began embracing the opportunities brought by the transformation under the new leadership style. This shift was fostered through leadership support initiatives, such as clear and timely communication, active participation in feedback mechanisms, and a strong emphasis on training and development opportunities. Since 2018, Randstad has

conducted a global study to evaluate employee commitment across its 37 operating companies, using a consistent 0-10 scale. Leadership support, accessed through practical guidance and social empathy, has consistently scored above 8, reflecting strong alignment with employee needs during organizational change. This helped in building trust and alignment with the company's strategic direction (Ferreira 2023). The open lines of communication and efforts to recognize employee contributions helped build a sense of community, even as the organization navigated significant changes. This echoed global trends, where employees valued skilling opportunities (72%) and emphasized personal development over traditional career progression (Randstad Workmonitor Report 2024).

The cultural shift also made employees become more comfortable working across departments, breaking down silos, and sharing knowledge. The emphasis on transparency and shared values helped build trust, which according to Edmondson (2019), is essential for fostering collaboration and maintaining morale during times of transformation. Many teams, which once struggled with the uncertainty of change, became more cohesive and motivated, finding a renewed sense of purpose aligned with Randstad's mission (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

Organizational Outcomes

Under Sander van 't Noordende's leadership, Randstad embarked on a comprehensive transformation aimed at aligning the company's operations with its core values of trust, collaboration, transparency, and innovation. By fostering open communication and encouraging employee involvement, Randstad has seen a rise in engagement levels. Employees felt more valued and connected to the company's mission (7.9 out of 10 on engagement score) leading to increased motivation and productivity (Randstad Annual Report 2023) (Exhibit 2). Additional indicators include a steady leadership support score

exceeding 8, reflecting employees' recognition of practical and emotional guidance provided during organizational change (Ferreira 2023). The emphasis on core values has cultivated a cohesive culture that promotes collaboration and trust. This cultural alignment has improved teamwork and a shared sense of purpose across the organization, with 84% of employees reporting that they find work at Randstad meaningful (Randstad Annual Report 2023).

Aligning strategy, culture and innovation has better positioned Randstad for long-term financial success and competitiveness in the HR industry. The company's Q3 2024 results reflect operational discipline and strategic progress, indicating a positive trajectory (Randstad 2024g). Randstad's internal employee commitment study highlights that the success of an organization's strategy relies on employees understanding and believing it, as strategy shapes both short- and long-term goals. Following the introduction of a new strategy in 2022, employee alignment with the strategy increased significantly in Randstad Portugal and globally, mirroring a positive trend in leadership support scores (Ferreira 2023).

While these outcomes are promising, the transformation process also presents challenges, such as resistance to change and the need for consistent implementation across all levels of the organization. Randstad addressed resistance by fostering open communication channels, ensuring transparency, and providing targeted training programs to help employees adapt to new processes. Leadership also played a pivotal role by modeling desired behaviors, reinforcing the importance of the company's core values, and actively engaging with employees to address their concerns.

Conclusion

Randstad's transformation journey under Sander van 't Noordende exemplifies the power of transformational leadership in navigating complex organizational change. The successful balance of digital innovation with the preservation of core human values highlights

the importance of visionary leadership, effective communication, and a commitment to culture. Known for his approachable and inclusive leadership style, van 't Noordende consistently emphasized the importance of engaging with employees at all levels, fostering trust and alignment. His ability to bridge the company's legacy of human connection with a forward-looking digital strategy not only inspired confidence but also galvanized employees to actively contribute to the transformation.

Under his guidance, Randstad achieved significant strides in aligning its strategic objectives with the needs of its people, empowering employees to adapt, grow, and thrive amidst uncertainty. This leadership approach fostered a renewed sense of purpose and collective drive, ensuring that employees felt valued and connected to the company's mission. Van 't Noordende's personal dedication to inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability serves as a powerful reminder that true leadership lies in inspiring others to envision and achieve a shared future. His example underscores the enduring importance of aligning transformational change with a human-centered approach, a legacy that continues to shape Randstad's success.

Part B - Teaching Note

Case Synopsis

This case explores the transformation journey of Randstad under the leadership of its new CEO, Sander van 't Noordende, focusing on the implementation of transformational leadership in a global organization. Randstad, a company deeply rooted in its human-centric values, faces the challenge of adapting to a fast-changing business environment driven by digital innovation. The case examines how Sander's leadership inspired a strategic reorientation, fostered cultural alignment, and redefined employee roles in the face of significant organizational shifts.

This case offers students an opportunity to examine the ripple effects of strategic organizational change. It illustrates the role of transformational leadership in redefining company culture, guiding employees through uncertainty, and inspiring alignment with new organizational goals. The case highlights the nuanced dynamics of change management, including fostering trust, addressing resistance, and cultivating a sense of shared purpose within a diverse and global workforce. By engaging with Sander van 't Noordende's story, students can analyze how leadership decisions shape employee perceptions, drive emotional responses, and influence behaviors in the context of organizational evolution.

Pedagogical Objectives

This case study is intended for use in graduate, master's, or executive programs in courses such as Leadership, Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management, Strategic Management, or Organizational Change. It can also be applied to executive education programs and workshops focused on developing practical skills for managing people and leading organizations during times of change and crisis.

The case provides a foundation for detailed analysis of transformational leadership

and its role in navigating organizational change. It invites students to explore leadership strategies that drive cultural transformation, inspire trust, and align diverse employee groups with new organizational objectives. By focusing on Randstad's strategic reorientation under Sander van 't Noordende, students will learn to connect theoretical concepts of leadership and change management with real-world application.

By the end of this case discussion, students should be able to:

1. Understand how transformational leadership, through the "Four I's" framework, inspired organizational change and employee alignment at Randstad.
2. Explore strategies for balancing legacy values with innovation to drive cultural evolution and adaptability.
3. Evaluate the role of effective communication in leading organizational change.
4. Analyze leadership approaches to sustaining employee engagement and motivation in the context of rapid organizational change.

Suggested discussion questions:

- A. How does Sander van 't Noordende's leadership reflect the principles of transformational leadership?
- B. In what ways did transformational leadership shape Randstad's organizational culture and employee engagement during the transition?
- C. How did Randstad successfully integrate its legacy values with the need for innovation under new leadership?
- D. What strategies can Randstad adopt to sustain employee engagement and foster a culture of continuous innovation in the long term?

Key Literature to this Case Study

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Discussion

The following section provides answers to the case questions related to Randstad's organizational transformation under Sander van 't Noordende's leadership. These answers are designed to guide the in-class discussion and promote deeper understanding of the application of transformational leadership, organizational culture, and innovation strategies in real-world contexts. Approximate times for each discussion point are provided to help instructors manage the session effectively. The material is structured to be covered in a 90-minute session, encouraging and engaging and interactive classroom experience.

A. How does Sander Van 't Noordende's leadership reflect the principles of transformational leadership? (20 minutes)

Transformational leadership fosters motivation and ethical behaviors by encouraging

collaboration between leaders and employees to achieve common goals. This style emphasizes adaptability and change, with leaders inspiring and guiding their teams through organizational transformations (Bass & Riggio 2006). Wang et al. (2005) highlight its positive influence on organizational citizenship behavior and trust within teams, which are crucial for successful change management. Additionally, transformational leadership is linked to improved adaptive performance, enabling organizations to navigate dynamic environments effectively.

There can be many indicators that a leader's style is transformational, for example through the "Four I's" model (Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration) (Bass & Riggio 2006). This model is relevant as it captures the key elements of transformational leadership, showing how leaders inspire trust and respect, articulate a compelling vision to motivate employees, encourage innovation and problem-solving, and address the unique needs of each team member to foster growth and commitment.

Sander van 't Noordende's transformational leadership was the driving force behind Randstad's strategic reorientation, guiding the company through its digital transformation while staying grounded in its core values of trust, collaboration, and transparency. His leadership approach not only shaped the strategic direction of the company, but also deeply influenced employee engagement and organizational culture during a time of significant change.

Idealized Influence: At the core of van 't Noordende's leadership was a clear, compelling vision for Randstad's future - one that involved modernizing the company's operations through digital tools while realigning the organizational culture to be more innovative, collaborative, and adaptable. His vision exemplified *idealized influence*: he consistently modeled the behaviors and values he wanted to see in the company, such as

openness, collaboration, and innovation. By personally embodying these qualities, he earned the trust and respect of his employees, which was crucial for inspiring commitment to the transformation. As a result, employees were more likely to follow his lead, aligning their own behaviors with the organizational goals.

Inspirational Motivation: One of the most powerful aspects of van 't Noordende's leadership was his commitment to open communication. Recognizing the importance of keeping employees informed and engaged throughout the transformation, he made frequent updates a priority and created multiple channels for employee feedback. This emphasis on transparent communication allowed him to practice *inspirational motivation*: he effectively communicated the vision for the future and inspired employees by making them feel like active participants in the change process. This approach fostered a sense of ownership and purpose among employees, which significantly strengthened their engagement and helped mitigate resistance to change.

Intellectual Stimulation: Moreover, van 't Noordende's leadership was characterized by a strong focus on *intellectual stimulation*. He encouraged employees to think beyond traditional methods, experiment with new ideas, and embrace digital transformation. By fostering an environment that valued creativity and risk-taking, he helped Randstad's workforce develop the adaptability and innovation necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital HR industry. Employees were encouraged to challenge existing processes and propose new solutions, which not only improved operational efficiency, but also made employees feel more empowered in their roles.

Individualized Consideration: Finally, van 't Noordende's focus on *individualized consideration* was key to the success of the transformation. He understood that each employee experienced change differently and that personalized support was essential during times of uncertainty. Managers were empowered to adapt their leadership style to meet the

unique needs of their teams. This personalized approach helped employees feel supported and valued, particularly during a period of significant organizational shifts. By focusing on individual well-being and development, van 't Noordende ensured that employees felt both cared for and motivated to contribute to the company's transformation.

B. What role did organizational culture play in supporting Randstad's transformation under Sander van 't Noordende? (20 minutes)

Organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape the behaviors and practices within an organization, influencing how employees interact and approach their work (Schein 2010). It serves as the foundation for aligning employees with the organization's mission and fostering a sense of identity and cohesion (Hogan & Coote 2014).

Organizational culture was a cornerstone of Randstad's transformation under Sander van 't Noordende, providing the foundation for aligning employees with the company's evolving goals while preserving its core identity. Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture (originally introduced in 1985 but renewed several times later) which emphasizes the alignment of values, practices, and underlying assumptions, can be applied to understand how van 't Noordende balanced preserving Randstad's human-centric culture with embracing innovation. His leadership exemplified how an organization can evolve culturally without losing sight of its foundational principles.

At the *Artifacts* level, visible practices and behaviors, such as the use of digital tools, leadership modeling innovative behaviors, and structured open forums for feedback, demonstrated Randstad's commitment to innovation while maintaining its collaborative spirit. Also, storytelling emerged as a crucial artifact. Sharing success stories of employees who adapted to the transformation or drove innovative projects helped reinforce the cultural

narrative. These visible symbols reassured employees of continuity amidst change, bridging the company's heritage with its modern aspirations.

At the *Espoused Values* level, van 't Noordende reinforced the importance of trust, collaboration, and transparency - values that had long been central to Randstad's culture. He emphasized that these values were not being replaced, but adapted and modernized to align with the company's evolving strategic goals. By consistently communicating his vision, he ensured employees remained connected to the company's mission, fostering trust and reducing resistance to change.

At the *Underlying Assumptions* level, the deeper, ingrained beliefs about Randstad's human-centric approach were critical to the transformation's success. These assumptions underpinned van 't Noordende's focus on empowering employees to embrace a growth mindset, encouraging experimentation, creativity, and problem-solving. This cultural adaptation supported the digital transformation, making employees feel valued and motivated to adopt new technologies and ways of working.

Furthermore, Randstad's cultural emphasis on collaboration sustained employee engagement during the transformation. Inclusive practices, such as open forums, transparent decision-making, and recognition efforts, strengthened employees' sense of belonging. The alignment between espoused values and visible practices reinforced trust, enabling employees to actively contribute to the transformation process. As a result, Randstad successfully cultivated a workforce that was not only resilient to change, but also actively empowered to innovate and drive the organization's strategic goals forward.

C. How did Randstad successfully integrate its legacy values with the need for innovation under new leadership? (20 minutes)

Under Sander van 't Noordende's leadership, Randstad successfully integrated its

legacy values with the need for innovation by aligning its strategic goals with cultural continuity, fostering trust, and ensuring employee buy-in throughout the transformation. This was a relevant and smart move because it allowed Randstad to navigate change without alienating its workforce or disrupting its core identity, ensuring stability and employee commitment during a period of significant evolution. By preserving its trusted human-centric ethos while embracing innovation, Randstad strengthened its competitive position and ensured long-term adaptability in a rapidly evolving industry.

Randstad's core values of trust, collaboration, and transparency were explicitly emphasized and reinforced as foundational pillars during the company's transformation, ensuring alignment with both its legacy and evolving strategic goals (Randstad Annual Report 2023). Rather than discarding these principles, van 't Noordende emphasized their continued relevance. He framed innovation as an extension of these values, ensuring that employees saw the transformation as a natural progression, not a departure from the company's identity. For example, the emphasis on trust was reflected in the company's transparent communication strategy, where leadership consistently explained the rationale behind the new initiatives and sought employee feedback. This open dialogue reinforced employees' confidence in the process and created a sense of continuity amidst change.

Simultaneously, Randstad embraced a culture of innovation to remain competitive. Van 't Noordende encouraged employees to view technological advancement and modernization as tools to enhance, not replace the company's human-centric culture. Initiatives promoting creativity, problem-solving, and a growth mindset were integrated across teams, allowing employees to see innovation as a means of strengthening the company's foundational principles.

The integration of legacy values and innovation was also visible in Randstad's approach to its digital transformation. New tools and processes were framed not as a break

from tradition, but to improve collaboration and efficiency, aligning perfectly with Randstad's values. This approach helped ensure that innovation complemented, rather than contradicted, the company's cultural framework.

A key factor in this successful integration was employee involvement. Van 't Noordende prioritized engagement, empowering employees to contribute ideas and take ownership of changes. This participatory approach made employees feel valued and encouraged them to align their behaviors with both Randstad's traditional values and its evolving goals. Recognition efforts further reinforced the connection between legacy values and innovation. By highlighting examples of employees who demonstrated trust and collaboration while embracing new practices, leadership showed that the two could coexist. This created a ripple effect, motivating others to adopt similar behaviors and align with the company's mission.

D. What strategies can Randstad adopt to sustain employee engagement and foster a culture of continuous innovation in the long term? (20 minutes)

Strong leadership is essential for sustaining employee engagement and fostering a culture of continuous innovation. Effective leaders significantly influence employee motivation and organizational culture, which are critical for maintaining engagement and driving innovation (Forbes 2023). Randstad should focus on developing leaders who exemplify the principles of transformational leadership, especially inspirational motivation and individualized consideration. By empowering managers to inspire, support, and connect with their teams, Randstad can maintain trust and alignment with organizational goals. Additionally, fostering leadership at all levels through mentorship programs and leadership training will create a pipeline of capable leaders who can sustain innovation and engagement over the long term. Over time, these leadership practices can evolve to include adaptive

strategies, equipping leaders to address challenges such as market uncertainty, technological disruption, and generational shifts in the workforce.

Transparent communication should remain a cornerstone of Randstad's strategy. Regular updates on company goals, successes, and challenges will keep employees informed and aligned with the organization's vision. Implementing open forums or feedback mechanisms will ensure employees feel heard and valued. Moreover, storytelling that highlights employee contributions and successful innovations can further reinforce engagement. Sharing stories of how employees embrace change and drive innovation will inspire others to do the same, cultivating a culture of continuous improvement (Denning 2007). In the long term, evolving these communication strategies to include advanced digital platforms, such as AI-powered feedback systems or interactive storytelling methods, will ensure alignment across a geographically dispersed workforce.

To foster a deeper culture of innovation, Randstad should invest in ongoing professional development. Providing employees with access to training in emerging technologies, creative problem-solving, and leadership development will equip them with the tools to drive innovation. Encouraging employees to continuously acquire new skills and explore novel ideas not only enhances organizational innovation, but also demonstrates Randstad's commitment to employees' long-term growth. Additionally, creating personalized learning paths aligned with employees' career goals can help them see a clear, engaging future with the company.

Recognizing and rewarding employees who exemplify Randstad's values and contribute to innovation is critical. Recognition can take many forms, from formal awards and promotions to informal acknowledgments. By celebrating success, Randstad reinforces positive behaviors and encourages others to follow suit. Additionally, creating platforms where employees can showcase their ideas and receive constructive feedback will further

enhance motivation, creativity, and innovation. Looking ahead, Randstad could establish a global recognition framework that rewards innovation with tangible career growth opportunities, fostering a competitive yet collaborative environment.

Finally, meaningful work plays a central role in employee engagement (Pratt and Blake 2003). Randstad should continue to connect its organizational goals to its core values, emphasizing how innovation contributes to the company's human-centric mission. By highlighting the societal impact of its HR services and demonstrating how employees' work contributes to a broader social good, Randstad can inspire employees to remain committed to both the company's mission and the continuous innovation needed to drive it forward.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

To conclude, it is important to revisit the case study, key discussions, and findings, connecting them to real-world scenarios in leadership, organizational culture, and change. Encourage students to reflect on how transformational leadership can help organizations balance tradition and innovation, while also shaping and sustaining a culture that supports organizational change. Discuss final questions or thoughts on the case study, emphasizing the interconnectedness of leadership, culture, and change in achieving long-term success. Students are more likely to engage with ideas relevant to their future careers, so highlighting discussion insights and their personal impact on future leadership approaches is key. By exploring the impact of transformational leadership in navigating change, alongside the role of culture in fostering alignment and adaptability, students will be better prepared to address similar challenges. This makes the case a valuable resource for understanding the complexities of leading through transformation and cultivating an adaptive organizational culture.

Annex

Table 1 - Challenges and Strategies for Leading Organizational Change at Randstad

Challenge	Description	Suggested Strategy
Strategic reorientation after leadership change	The shift in leadership from the former CEO to Sander van 't Noordende created a need to realign the company's strategy with new leadership vision.	Clearly communicate the new strategic vision to all employees. Provide regular updates on how this strategy will affect daily operations and engage employees in the transition.
Cultural change	Ensuring that employees remain aligned with Randstad's human-centric culture during the transition.	Focus on maintaining core values while integrating innovation. Use leadership's role to model desired behaviors and recognize employees who embody these values in action.
Resistance to digital transformation	Employees may resist changes brought on by the need for digital innovation and modernization at Randstad.	Provide training and support to help employees embrace digital tools. Communicate the benefits of digital transformation in enhancing job roles and improving company performance.
Employee engagement during organizational restructuring	As Randstad undergoes restructuring, keeping employees motivated and committed to the company's mission.	Foster an environment of open communication where employees can voice concerns and feel heard. Use team-building activities to maintain morale and align everyone to the mission.

Table 2 - Relevant Frameworks

Framework	Description
The Four I's of Transformational Leadership (Bass & Riggio 2006)	Idealized Influence: Leaders act as role models, demonstrating high ethical standards and inspiring trust and respect among their followers.

	Inspirational Motivation: Leaders articulate a compelling vision that motivates and energizes employees, fostering a sense of purpose and commitment.
	Intellectual Stimulation: Leaders challenge assumptions, encourage creativity, and support innovative thinking, enabling employees to solve problems in new ways.
	Individualized consideration: Leaders provide personalized support and mentorship, recognizing the unique needs and aspirations of each team member.
Edgar Schein's Organizational Culture Model (Edgar Schein 1985)	Artifacts: The visible and tangible aspects of an organization's culture, such as office design, dress code, and formal policies, which provide initial impressions of the organization.
	Espoused Values: The explicitly stated principles, values, and goals of an organization that guide its strategies and actions.
	Basic Underlying Assumptions: The deeply embedded beliefs and perceptions that are often unconscious, but shape the organization's culture and behavior over time.

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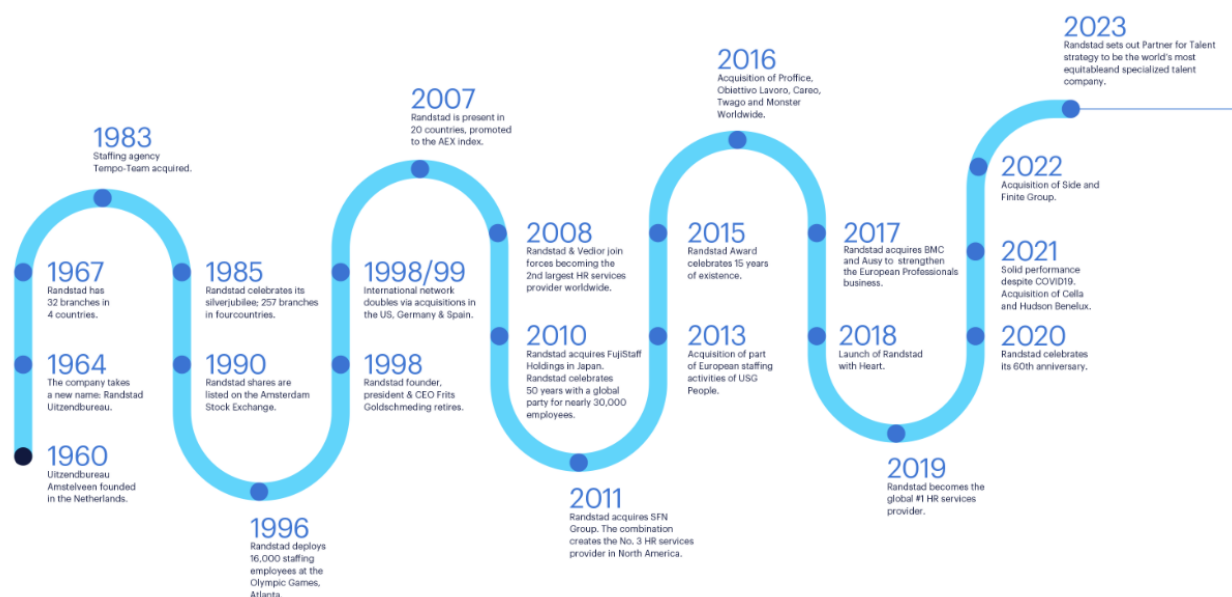
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Exhibits

Exhibit 1 - Randstad's Timeline



Source: Randstad 2024

Exhibit 2 - Randstad's Value for Employees 2023

value created in 2023



Source: Randstad Annual Report 2023

Exhibit 3 - Key Events since the CEO shift

Year	Key Events
2022	Sander van 't Noordende becomes CEO and Chair of the Executive Board.
2023	Launch of Randstad Digital, a global organization specializing in meeting the technology talent needs of multinational companies across various industries.
2023	Partner for Talent Strategy was launched, aiming to position Randstad as the world's

	most equitable and specialized talent company.
2024	Randstad Digital acquired Torc, an AI-powered digital talent marketplace, enhancing its digital capabilities.

Exhibit 4 - Transformational Leadership Theory

Component	CEO Actions	Outcomes
Idealized influence	Modeled transparency and collaboration.	Increased trust and alignment with leadership.
Inspirational motivation	Communicated a clear and inspiring vision.	Enhanced employee motivation and engagement.
Intellectual stimulation	Encouraged creative solutions to challenges.	Fostered innovation and adaptability.
Individualized consideration	Provided personalized support to employees.	Improved employee morale and retention.