Ames National Corporation: A Culture of Success

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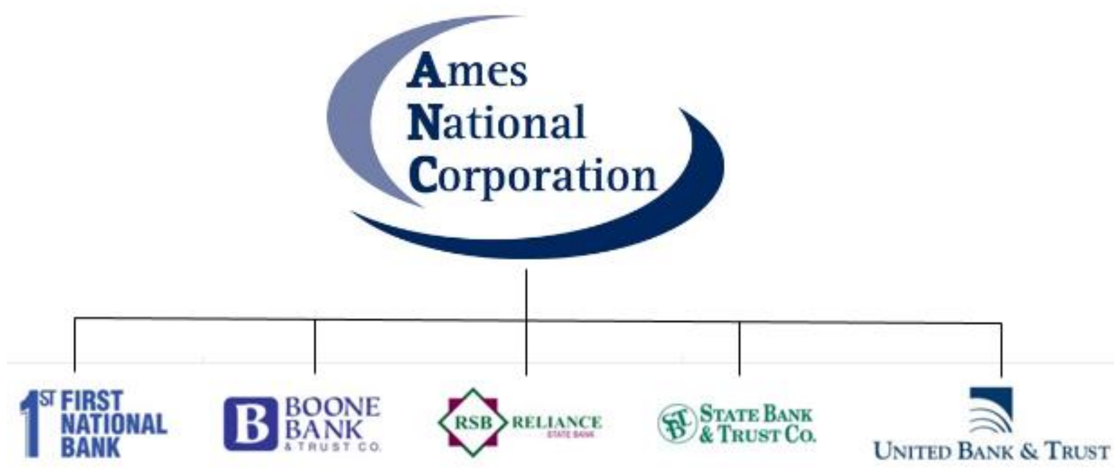

Executive Summary

Ames National Corporation (ANC) is a bank holding company consisting of five subsidiary community banks operating in central Iowa with total assets of $1.3 billion. Over the past 15 years, ANC has consistently outperformed similar community banks in the Midwest with higher net income and total assets per employee and a lower percentage of non-operating loans. ANC leadership attributes its atypical success to a culture that fosters a workforce that is knowledgeable about the local market and the needs of its customer base and is committed to a career with the bank. This culture ensures that ANC will originate loans that have a low risk of default and unusually low operating costs per dollar of operating revenue. ANC keeps a higher fraction of its loans in-house rather than selling them because it expects the loans to generate better returns than loans originated by other banks.

ANC's book of business is heavily weighted toward long-term lending relationships. Compared to peer banks, ANC has an atypically large share of loans in agriculture, commercial ventures, and larger residential developments. This longer-term focus requires talent with a longer-term commitment to the market. Employees must feel that they have a future with ANC that will allow career growth. A stand-alone bank would not be able to provide many options for growth. The bank holding company structure provides employees opportunities to advance both within and across banks. The bank holding company framework also economizes on back-of-the-bank tasks such as auditing, regulation, and marketing while insuring that the front-of -the bank loan origination and customer service tasks are well-staffed.

The bank's succession planning philosophy emphasizes the development and retention of the local market knowledge embodied in its employees. Ninety-three percent of the short-term leadership succession positions and 50% of the long-term succession positions are reserved for internal candidates while only 29% of the long-term positions are expected to be filled by an external hire. The desire to maintain a culture of employees endowed with superior knowledge of local borrowers and market conditions extends to ANC's mergers and acquisitions strategy. The bank will only consider acquiring another bank if it believes its employees have the requisite commitment to the local market. We demonstrate the effectiveness of their strategy using two case studies of ANC acquisitions: a profitable bank whose parent company was in trouble and a bank on the verge of FDIC closure. ANC took over both banks because it believed the employees fit into the ANC culture. Despite the differences in economic circumstances across the two banks, ANC kept all employees in the first bank and all but one employee in the second, reassigning workers whose jobs were made redundant. Both cases produced very successful growth for the acquired banks and a testimony to the ANC culture.

1) Community Banks and Bank Holding Companies

A Bank Holding Company (BHC) is broadly defined by the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956 as "any company that has control over a bank." The BHC structure provides several advantages that has driven the proportion of banks owned by a BHC to rise from 34.3% in 1980 to 84%. Perhaps most importantly, a BHC can raise capital more easily than can a stand-alone bank. It can allocate capital across its subsidiary banks in response to expected returns or to pool risk. Empirical studies have found that banks affiliated with a multi-bank holding company are significantly more resilient to financial distress and recover more readily than stand-alone banks (Ashcraft, 2008).

The multi-bank BHC structure allows for community banks to take advantage of economies of scale while retaining the personal quality of their front-end business. Cost savings can be achieved by centralizing the back-of-the-bank functions including accounting, regulation, and human resources. The subsidiary banks, which have closer connections to the customers, specialize in the front-of-the-bank operations. They manage customer financial services, originate loans affairs, provide local brand recognition, and maintain relationships with customers in their communities.

The BHC structure also allows for coordinated personnel actions across subsidiaries, allowing greater flexibility in succession planning. Lines of succession and promotion can exist across banks as well as within banks, providing more career advancement opportunities than at stand-alone banks.

2) Community Banks and Relationships

The community bank's main competitive advantage over large national banks is its knowledge of the local market and its customer relationships. Contracting theories suggest that small banks have their center of decision making authority closer to the source of information collection than the larger banks, allowing them to act better on "soft information" (Berger, 2005). On the contrary, larger banks base lending decisions heavily on financial and credit information analyzed through statistical methods. Their reliance on statistical analysis simplifies the decision-making process, allowing repeatability across many clients and many loans. Statistical information, however, does not fully reflect customer attributes, many of which are unobservable without one-on-one contact with customers. This additional soft information can reveal opportunities the statistical methods of larger banks cannot. Community banks fill this niche. Community banks develop personal relationships with their clients that allow them to understand their customers' financial needs and dependability to better predict their potential as borrowers (Petersen and Raghuram, 1994). This relationship can also benefit borrowers, as the community bank can then confidently react to help their clients succeed. Given the importance of these relationships to a community bank's success, leadership with a strong understanding of and attention to the local community is of paramount importance. Future leadership must be chosen with this consideration in mind.

3) Succession Planning

Succession Planning is defined as a structured process to facilitate the identification and preparation of prospective talent to fill future vacancies. Succession plans not only allow future leadership to achieve their full performance immediately after assuming a position, but they also provide insurance against unexpected deaths. Davidson and Worrell (1990) examined 60 cases of unexpected CEO deaths. They found that firms with an immediately available successor were more resilient to unanticipated loss of a key manager. Behn *et al* (2005) found that firms with a designated heir apparent had higher cumulative returns in the case of the CEO's death. The analysis of CEO deaths points to the broader implication that planned succession assures continuity. Investors have an assurance that the firm will outlive the CEO. Despite the unambiguous benefits of having succession plans in place, Garman and Glawe, (2004) estimate that only 40% - 65% of firms have established succession plans.

Succession planning is not just about providing contingency plans; it's also about ensuring the long-term success of the organization. The broader literature on succession planning outside of banking advises adopting a mindset of continually "identifying and developing promotable individuals" as opposed to "finding an individual to promote when the need arises." Many companies have adopted leadership development programs or talent pools to facilitate the development of future leadership. Designated successors are provided assignments with the greatest opportunity for learning and visibility including planned rotations to learn the full range of company lines of business and strategic initiatives. When a position becomes available, company leadership has access to a pool of prepared candidates for promotion. For the position of CEO, however, only one potential successor is typically identified to prevent uncertainty about the future transitions.

To identify potential candidates for leadership development, the set of desired skills and characteristics must first be clearly defined. The skills and characteristics of interest vary across industries, business models, and organizational structures. In our application, community banks prefer leadership with strong personal connections to the community while large national banks de-emphasize personal relationships with customers while focusing on portfolio management. For example, the current CEO of Citigroup, Michael O'Neill, spent most of his early life in Europe and Asia and doesn't have deep roots with any local community.

Studies have found firm size to be a significant factor in determining successor preferences. As a rule, smaller firms more strongly prefer external successors than do larger firms. That is not the case with community banks. The importance of lasting relationships in the community bank business model leads to a preference for internal successors.

4) Financial Performance of Ames National Corporation

Ames National Corporation (ANC) is a multi-bank holding company located in central Iowa. ANC is composed of First National Bank, Ames, IA; State Bank & Trust Co., Nevada, IA; Boone Bank & Trust Co., Boone, IA; Reliance State Bank, Story City, IA; and United Bank & Trust, Marshalltown, IA. With total assets of over $1.3 billion as of December 31, 2016, ANC is the 6th largest Iowa-based commercial bank holding company based on total deposits.

Before we delve into ANC's corporate personnel strategies, we want to compare its financial performance with that of comparable peers. Our control group includes six bank holding companies or large individual banks that operate exclusively in the Midwest. They are listed in Table 1. ANC had assets of $1.37 billion at the end of 2016, 62% lower than the peer group average. We will look at ANC's productivity, performance, loan portfolio composition, and capital levels and planning compared to its peers.

ANC is far more productive than its peers. While it has 44% lower asset growth over the past 15 years compared to its peer banks, ANC has been able to grow assets per employee at a much higher rate: 1.4% versus 0.8% annually. Consequently, ANC consistently sustained a statistically significant advantage in net income per employee through both cyclical expansions and contractions, as shown in Figure 1.

The difference in productivity is due partly to a difference in loan focus compared to the peer banks, as illustrated in Figure 2. ANC's loan portfolio places greater weight on agricultural and commercial real estate loans and larger residential developments. Its peers place greater weight on shorter-term consumer, construction and industrial loans. The longer-term business loans and the agricultural loans arguably require greater knowledge of the borrower and of local business conditions than would shorter-term, smaller loans.

The ANC loan mix is a result of a long-standing strategy. There have been no significant changes in ANC's loan portfolio composition over the past 15 years. This loan portfolio requires expertise in the local agricultural and commercial markets. ANC's human capital and succession strategies provide a comparative advantage in identifying and retaining employees who are knowledgeable about their borrowers and local market conditions.

ANC's superior productivity is reflected in ANC's Return on Average Assets (ROAA) as well. As illustrated in Figure 3, ANC has achieved significantly higher ROAA than its peer banks throughout the past 15 years, while limiting the losses during the recession. Part of ANC's advantage is achieved by limiting its costs. ANC averaged 6.4% lower operating expenses per dollar of operating revenue, referred to as the efficiency ratio. The link between high ROAA and low costs is evident in the -0.59 correlation between ANC's efficiency ratio and its ROAA.

ANC achieves this lower cost and greater productivity while maintaining asset quality. Its high underwriting standards and knowledge of its borrowers are apparent in Figure 4. While ANC had the same percentage of nonperforming loans as its peers through the first years of the Great Recession, it has had lower rates of nonperforming loans since 2010. Over the past 15 years, ANC has had a 22% lower rate of nonperforming loans. Meanwhile, there are no significant differences between ANC and the peer banks in the ratio of reserves to nonperforming assets.

As illustrated in Figure 5, ANC is more conservative than its peer banks. ANC holds much more capital while maintaining similar or superior asset quality. In the past 15 years, ANC has had a 27% higher average risk-based capital ratio than the peer banks. The additional reserves give ANC a cushion in the event of a bad shock. More importantly, the added reserves provide a potential source of liquid funding if an acquisition opportunity appears. The additional security also allows ANC to issue a dividend relative to net income that has been 80% higher than its peers on average.

The charts demonstrate that ANC outperforms its peers through greater efficiency of its staff, lower costs per dollar of revenue, and lower default rate on originated loans. The higher quality of loans originated by ANC is consistent with the presumption that ANC staff are highly informed of their local markets and the reliability of their borrowers. The subsidiary banks retain many of their loans rather than selling them, ANC leadership explains their reluctance to sell loans because they expect that their loan origination is atypically profitable.[1] Next, we will

[1] From interviews with Tom Pohlman and John Nelson, CEO and CFO of ANC.

review how ANC's personnel policies aim to attract and retain employees who are knowledgeable about the local communities.

5) ANC Succession Planning and Human Resource Policies

ANC's human resources staff are committed to working with employees on their professional development to help them succeed and incentivize them to stay. ANC has achieved low employee turnover rates which allows it to develop and maintain knowledge of the local community and to foster long-term relationships with clients. The firm believes that staff who have extensive experience in the local market will be able to originate higher quality loans with low default rates. These beliefs represent a culture that has been fostered at ANC since its founding in 1975.

Given its growth, ANC adopted a formal succession plan in 2016. The succession plan is designed "to identify and prepare employees for high-level management positions that become vacant due to retirement, resignation, death or new business opportunities." Succession planning at ANC is a coordinated activity between managers and employees. Both are responsible for insuring the succession plan works. Every January, each subsidiary bank president is charged with providing a review of the key positions of the bank delineating the following:

- Leadership positions that likely will need to be replaced
- Employees who show potential for progression into leadership
- Actions to prepare identified talent to develop
  - Leadership skills
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Demonstration of ANC core values

In addition, management is charged with continually assessing each employee's potential, having honest discussions with the employees about their futures, and working on career development plans with the employees.

While management holds the power to decide whom to promote, leadership development is not a unilateral process and needs employee engagement. Employees are responsible for expressing their interests in pursuing new roles, creating and keeping up-to-date career development plans, working with managers to identify career development opportunities, and being open to and acting on feedback. These interactions benefit both parties. For one, they enable managers to better understand the skills of their employees including those not related to their current responsibilities. This helps identify better promotion prospects for the future. The process also demonstrates that the company values its employees and wants them to stay with ANC. ANC's demonstrated commitment to the employee's future success in the firm lowers the chance the employee will be attracted to positions in other banks.

We interviewed Nick Johnson, a recent MBA graduate of University of Iowa, who is now working as an Investment Analyst at ANC's First National Bank. He attests to the commitment of bank leadership in developing future talent: "I have the ability to say, 'John (Nelson, CFO), my goal is to be CEO, train me." He experienced the flexibility of the ANC leadership immediately when he started. His position of Investment Analyst did not exist until he started at the bank. His position was tailored to his specific skills and interests, which the leadership realized benefits the bank. CFO Nelson has also been engaged in helping Nick develop his skills. CFO Nelson recently helped Nick purchase a $3 million asset. "That is not something I would want to do the first time without John," says Nick.

As mentioned previously, the leadership development process works best when both employee and employer are putting in effort. Employees are encouraged to ask themselves the following questions:

- "What are my career goals? Am I interested in a leadership position within this department? Which position?"
- "Are my career goals and target dates realistic?"
- "What are my strengths?"
- "Are there additional competencies, technical, or leadership skills for a desired future role that need my attention?"
- "What types of career development opportunities do I prefer?"

In larger firms, the Human Resource division is much more engaged in the succession planning process, as they typically operate the leadership development programs. In the case of ANC, however, the focus is shifted to the interactions between employees and management, with HR playing a supportive role in completing clerical tasks.

There are two primary objectives that succession planning addresses, one being insurance in the case of an unexpected loss of leadership, the other being strategic development of leadership for the future. ANC addresses these two separate objectives of succession planning by identifying both a short-term and a long-term successor, who may not be the same individual. In the event of an unexpected loss of leadership, the short-term successor takes over the tasks for a transition period while the long-term successor is made ready. The short-term successor needs to be immediately ready to fill the position, therefore they tend to be more senior members of the organization. While we traditionally think of succession involving a lower-level employee taking on a higher position, the short-term needs to find a successor led ANC to designate some higher-level employees as the successor for their subordinates. However, it is generally desirable for a long-term successor to be younger and groomed to lead the organization strategically into the future. The contingent short-term successor allows the organization to act judiciously and avoid rushing to a premature decision.

Past research advises against identifying multiple individuals for the role of CEO/President. ANC, being composed of several subsidiary banks, has many internal presidents. This allows ANC to fully utilize its potential executive talent by moving targeted future leaders across its subsidiary banks to positions that will groom them for advancement. For example, three of the five current subsidiary bank presidents with ANC were once officers of State Bank and Trust. Because there are several president positions in the bank holding company structure, there can be multiple subordinates under consideration for future presidential roles. The main presidential role of the parent company, however, has a sole internal candidate for its successor and thus follows literature recommendations.

The succession plan for ANC is summarized in Table 2. Most of the long-term and short-term candidates are taken from positions in the bank. For the short-term succession planning, over 90% of the future vacancies will be filled by candidates already in the company. The remaining short-term successors will be filled by external candidates. For long-term succession, 50% of the positions will be filled exclusively from internal candidates. Another 20% of long-term successors will be either internal or external candidates. The final 30% of long-term successors will be sought from external candidates. ANC's preference for internal successors reflects its preference for keeping its current personnel. This allows it to retain the relationships already established by the bank. ANC does note that for certain positions, external candidates can bring a fresh perspective, improved techniques and skills that benefit the bank.

6) The Leadership Transition Process

The importance of a smooth transition when changing leadership cannot be understated. The ability for the successor to begin effective leadership immediately contributes strongly to an organization's financial success. The literature regarding this transition process encourages detailed preparation long before the transition occurs. Garman and Glawe (2004) suggest that the best practices include having training programs tailored toward the one person taking over as well as having post-succession assessments to identify future potential problems. Another major part of the process centers on the person leaving the position. Garman and Glawe (2004) believed that it is essential to have a clear exit strategy in place to assure that there is never uncertainty about who is in the role, the leaving or the new individual. In a study on small firms, Sambrook (2005) found that a common problem for CEO or high level succession is transferring all the knowledge to someone else when most of the knowledge is only stored in the leaving individual's head. This problem could potentially occur in small community banks that have one person in charge for a large number of years.

In the case of ANC, this is a situation that will take place in the very near future. Its current CEO will be stepping down with the current CFO taking over the position. This strategy of identifying one successor well in advance has been found to be the most effective and reliable mode of action. Previous literature also emphasizes further preparation through training and the transfer of responsibility, which ANC has already begun. Employees of lower positions have started training to take over some of the CFO's responsibilities as seen in the previously stated training of Investment Analyst Nick Johnson. If not already instituted, some form of assessment on the way the transition process plays out after completion could be very beneficial to ANC as it pertains to other future leadership successions.

There has been only one transition of major ANC leadership (CEO and CFO) since 2000. The CEO retired and was replaced by a subsidiary bank president. This transition occurred in 2008 at the start of the Great Recession, so it is possible that the transition succeeded even as the measured financial performance of the bank deteriorated. Nevertheless, we can use the peer banks as controls for changing financial environment for the banking industry and examine if there is a change in ANC's returns when it changed leadership. Consider the regression

(1) $y_{At} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_P y_{pt} + \beta_S D_{08} + \epsilon_{it}$

Where y_{At} is a measure of ANC bank performance in year *t*, y_{pt} is the corresponding performance of the peer group in year *t,* and D_{08} is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 after the new CEO is installed. The coefficient α_P will measure how sensitive ANC's performance is to average market conditions for the Midwest banking sector. The peer banks should capture common cost and revenue trends in the area. The coefficient β_S will capture the change in performance that coincides with the tenure of the new leadership. If the succession from old to new leadership results in continuity of performance, we will not reject the null hypothesis that β_S= 0.

Results are reported in the first panel of Table 3. We use three different measures of bank performance: real net income per employer; return on average assets; and the efficiency ratio. All are converted into natural logs. We report the results without (column A) and with (column B) the succession dummy variable. The coefficient on the peer measures are always positive but less than 1, suggesting that ANC responds to the same average cyclical profitability that affects its peer banks, but more moderately. ANC's returns rise slower than its peers when business conditions improve, but its costs also rise slower when market operating expenses are rising. Our primary interest is in the coefficient on succession. For the first and third measures, the coefficient is not significantly different from zero, meaning that the change in CEO had no discernable effect on bank net income per employee or efficiency. The second measure does show some evidence of reduced performance compared to the peers on return on average assets. The coefficient implies that ANC's advantage over its peers in return on average assets, apparent in Figure 3, shrank by 12% after the change in CEO.

We were also able to run equation (1) for two of the subsidiary banks experiencing transition in leadership: First National Bank and Reliance Bank. The promotion of the First National Bank president to CEO of the holding company resulted in a change of presidency in First National Bank in 2008. Using the methodology outlined above, the results in the second panel of Table 3 show no change in subsidiary bank performance as measured by net income per employee and returns on average assets following the change in leadership. But operating expenses relative to operating revenue rose by 15% after 2008, narrowing ANC's efficiency advantage in that bank. Reliance Bank also had a succession in 2008. As shown in the 3rd panel of Table 3, there was a significant improvement in net income per employee and a reduction in operating costs relative to revenues following that change. There was no significant change in return on average assets.

All in all, ANC's recent leadership successions show a general tendency of continued steady performance. Bank performance declined in only 2 of the 9 estimates of β_S and rose or stayed constant in the other 7. Where significant changes are observed, they are not sufficiently large to alter ANC's performance advantage over its peers.

The immediate availability of a successor positively affects a firm's financial performance in the event of a disturbance. ANC's 2016 succession policy is too new for us to evaluate, but its past leadership transitions have been successful on the whole. It is reasonable to assume that ANC's more comprehensive succession plan will generate even more stability in firm performance with future successions.

7) Board of Directors

ANC has a current Board of Directors made up of its CEO and CFO, along with a diverse range of other individuals from many different sectors. This includes CEO/Presidents from different firms, a farmer, a retired veterinarian, who is the chairman, and an attorney. Board members are chosen and replaced with a nominating committee of the Board of Directors. The responsibility of the committee is to identify and select individuals to fill board vacancies. The committee first identifies the competencies, experience, or personal attributes needed to enhance the existing mix of talents on the Board and then identifies individuals who have the desired attributes. The mandatory qualifications include an understanding of business and finance, community involvement, and high moral and ethical standards. Board members are also expected to reinforce the bank's culture as well as its financial success.

The Board must include a minimum of three members independent of the organization. This external membership on the committee is in place to assure an outside perspective is heard when bank decisions are being made in the ever-changing financial environment. The Board also tries to include a mix of demographic groups. The nonprofit *2020 Women on Boards* recently singled out ANC for its inclusion of women on the Board.

The Board of Directors is particularly important in fostering a smooth leadership transition for its CEO and subsidiary banks. It also is tasked with maintaining the bank culture as it decides on mergers and acquisitions. As ANC expands into new communities, the succession plan for the Board will need to accommodate a broader group of potential future leaders who will continue the tradition of strong community involvement in those new geographic areas.

8) Mergers and Acquisitions

Ames National Corporation incorporates its human capital policies into its strategy for acquisitions. ANC views its mergers and acquisitions as an opportunity to strengthen not just its physical capital, but also its human capital. The presumption is that the targeted bank's employees have the necessary locational knowledge to assure the profitability of the acquisition. The physical capital comes with the purchase contract, but retaining human capital is a bigger challenge.

Goyal and Joshi (2012) identified three stages to the merger and acquisition process; pre-merger, acquisition, and post-merger. They suggest that the pre-merger stage involves assessing the financials of the target bank while also checking with shareholders and customers on the overall culture of the bank. The acquisition stage is a time when the bank is actually acquired, the necessary information transfers occur and developing relationships with new customers takes place. The post-merger stage is one of the most important in terms of the long-term success of the acquisition. This stage is where the employees of the newly acquired bank must be integrated into their new bank culture. Goyal and Joshi (2012) heavily emphasize that behind all these business processes there are people whose lives are being greatly affected by the change. Therefore, it is important for the bank to assure that these new employees are taken care of and thought about on a personal level.

This leads to a broadening of the view of succession planning, namely, what is ANC's philosophy regarding succession of employees in banks that they acquire? Because ANC will provide the back-of-bank support for marketing, auditing, regulation, and other centralized operations, some positions in the acquired bank will be eliminated. However, ANC does not want to lose the accumulated community-specific skills and knowledge embodied in those workers. At ANC, the process of acculturalization is a pre-merger and not a post-merger activity. When ANC is looking to acquire a bank, a prerequisite for acquisition is that the personnel fit the ANC culture and that they will remain with the company after acquisition. The operational belief is that keeping the experienced employees in the acquired bank is key to the successful acquisition. Employees whose tasks are no longer required will be moved to other functions where their locational experience will be most profitable. ANC has opted out of a prospective acquisition when if felt the employees of the acquired bank lacked the client relationships or location-specific knowledge that would generate the competitive advantage in originating quality loans and customers.

Because ANC's acquisition strategy depends on retaining the employees in the acquired bank, it has to resolve the problem that it cannot compel workers to stay. ANC addresses this issue by first interviewing every employee in the acquired bank. It is then assessed where each person would fit into the organization and even where they might fit in the succession plan. The benefit of being a bank holding company allows ANC to have the option of placing the person in a position of need at a different bank, thus keeping as many of the same employees and their locational knowledge as possible.

9) Two examples of Acquisitions

ANC has made two acquisitions since the Great Recession. In April 2012, Reliance State Bank, a subsidiary of ANC, acquired two branch banks located in the Iowa towns of Garner and Klemme totaling $98 million in deposits and $47 million in net loans. The seller, Liberty Bancshares, was facing financial problems and was in the process of reducing its assets from

$1.2 billion in Q3 2010 to $267 million in assets by Q3 2013. However, the acquired banks were considered well-managed, and ANC made retention of the existing leadership a requirement for the transaction to be consummated. Through incentives and contracts agreed to with the Liberty Bancshares employees before the acquisition, ANC was able to retain all experienced employees in the acquired banks. This acquisition grew Reliance's assets by 107%, its loans and leases by 90% and its employee base by 138%.

In August 2014, First National Bank of Ames, a subsidiary of ANC, acquired First Bank of West Des Moines, IA. The acquisition added $80 million in deposits and $49 million in loans. The transaction increased First National Bank's asset base by 7.0% and its liabilities by 14.0%. This acquired bank was in financial trouble and was on the verge of being shut down. However, after ANC interviewed all the employees, it determined that the bank's problems were not due to poor employees but to poor economic circumstances related to the recession. ANC retained all but one of the employees in this bank, reassigning back-of-the-bank employees to its loan origination, trust, and other client-based functions.

Both acquisitions have been relatively recent, but both are considered successful. We have enough time elapsed since the Lincoln Bancshares acquisition to evaluate bank performance after the takeover. We illustrate the results in Figure 6. Both return on average assets and loans relative to deposits have grown since the April 2012 acquisition.

With these, other bank acquisitions, and business practices, ANC believes that its employees will be able to generate a more reliable book of business than would larger, more impersonal banks. Both of these specific examples clearly demonstrate ANC's human resources strategy when it is looking to acquire a bank. As noted earlier, ANC does not want to lose the accumulated community-specific skills and knowledge embodied in the employees of the acquired bank and believes they will be key components of a successful acquisition. The strength of the ANC culture is exhibited in the success of both acquisitions.

10) Conclusion and Recommendations

As we have shown in this paper, ANC is an efficient and well-functioning organization with a stable culture and robust plans for the future. The bank holding company consistently outperforms similar banks on many measures of efficiency and financial performance. Their succession planning strategy is consistent with established best-practices, and their human capital strategy has produced a highly effective staff. In acquiring other community banks, they introduce their strategy and corporate culture while retaining the connections with the local community it serves. Both recent acquisitions that we analyze including one well-performing and one poorly-performing bank have proven successful.

We do recommend Ames National Corporation explore adopting college programs. Its hometown, Ames, is home to Iowa State University, the largest university in the state. There are also several community colleges and Drake University in some of the communities ANC banks serve. These colleges could serve as a talent pipeline of highly educated members of the local community. If college students are identified early on as future employees, this also presents the opportunity for ANC to integrate students into their culture before becoming full-time staff after graduation.

Figure 1: Real Assets and Real Income per Employee for Ames National Corporation and Peer Banks, 2002-2016

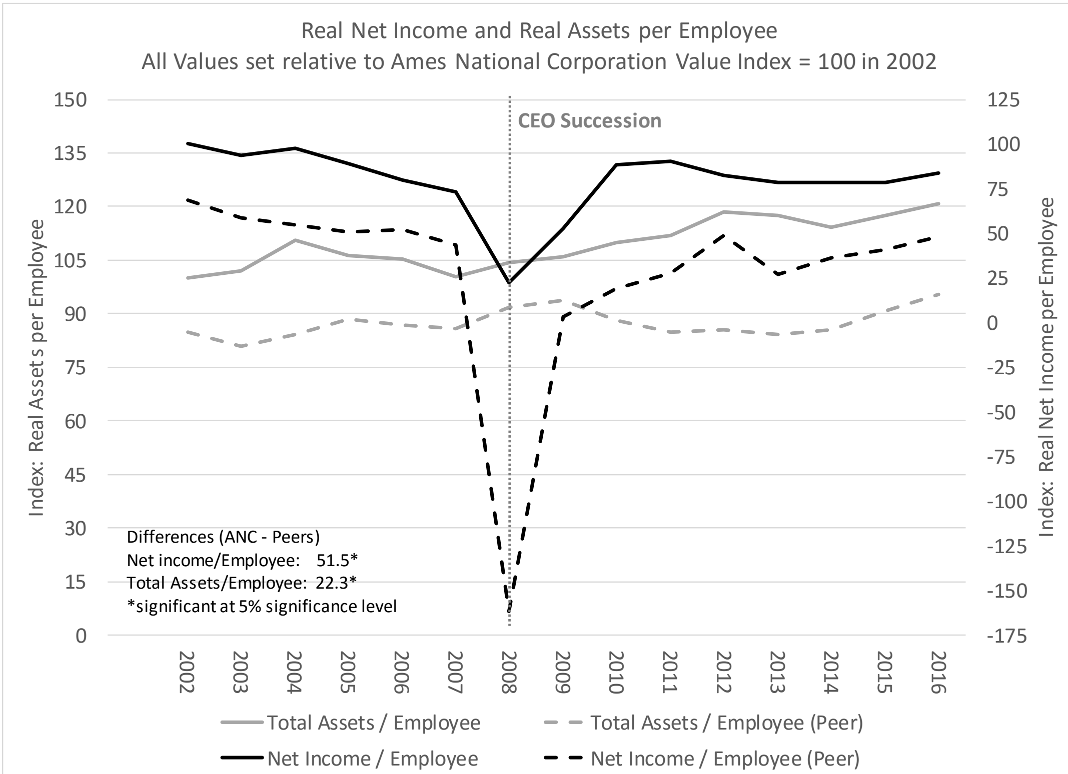

Figure 2: Loan Portfolio Composition, 2002-2016, Ames National Corporation and Peer Banks

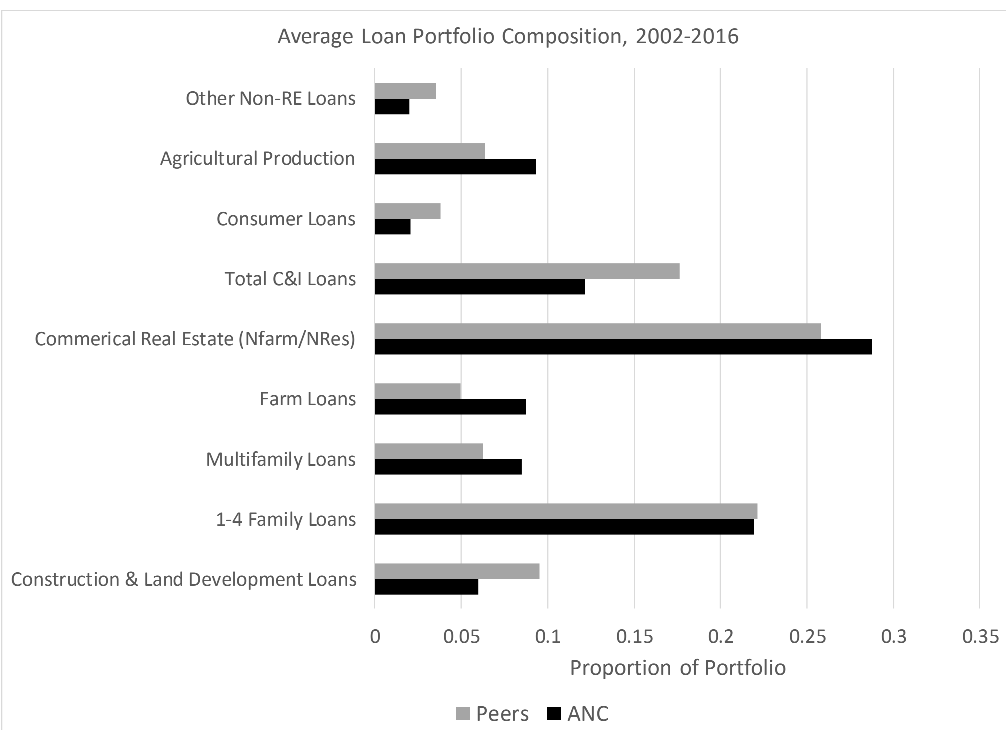

Figure 3: Return on Assets and Operating Expenses Relative to Operating Revenue, Ames National Corporation and Peer Banks, 2002-2016

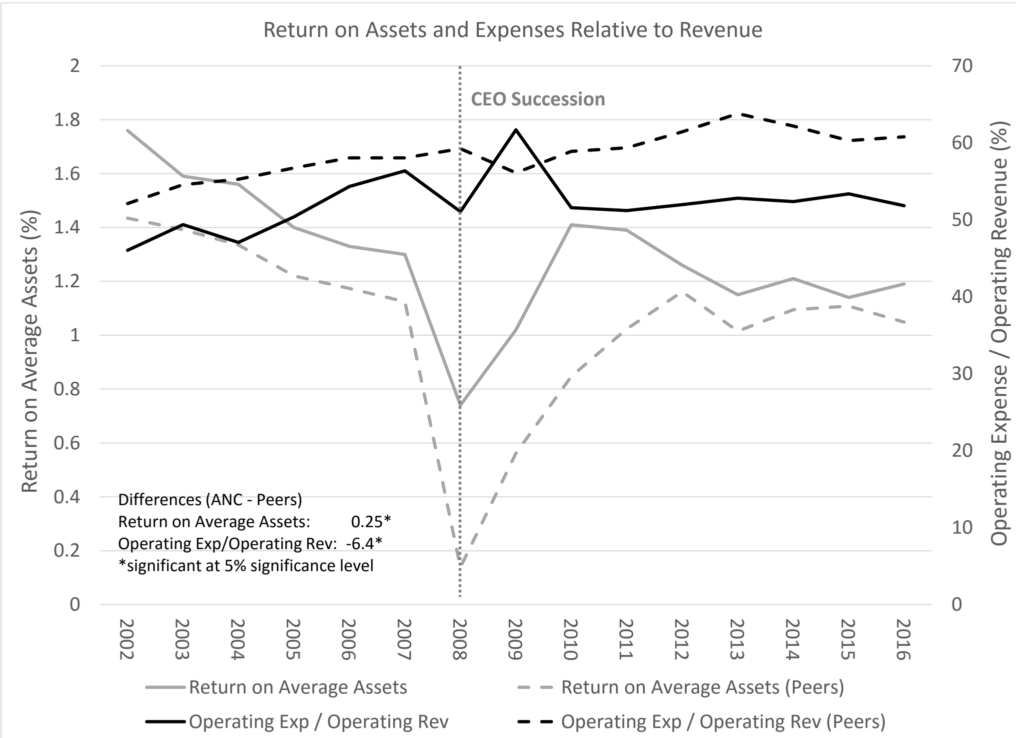

Figure 4: Percent of Loans that are Nonperforming and Reserves per Dollar of Nonperforming Assets, Ames National Corporation and Peer Banks, 2002-2016

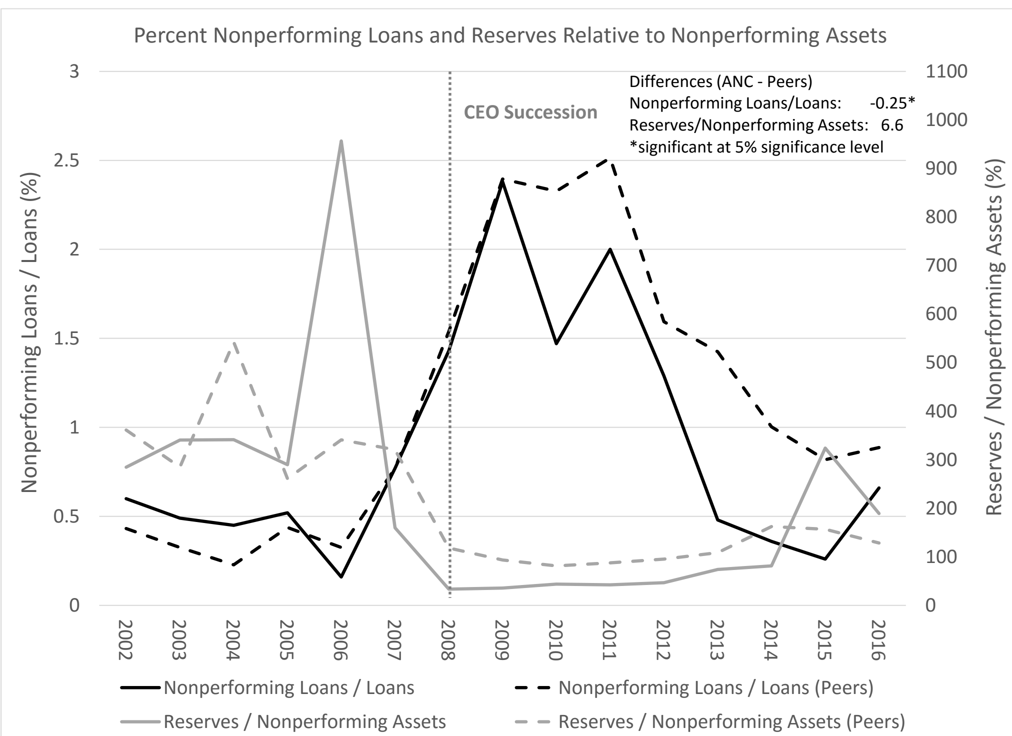

Figure 5: Percent Return on Equity and Risk-Based Capital Operating, Ames National Corporation and Peer Banks, 2002-2016

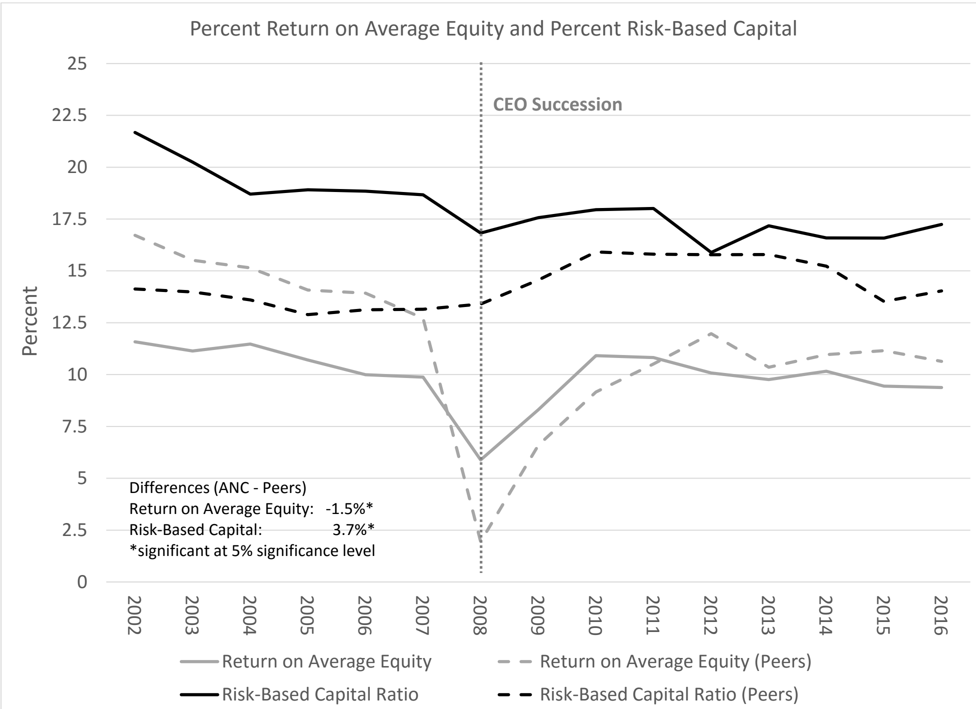

Figure 6: Performance of Reliance State Bank Before and After Acquisition of Two Liberty Bancshares Banks in April 2012

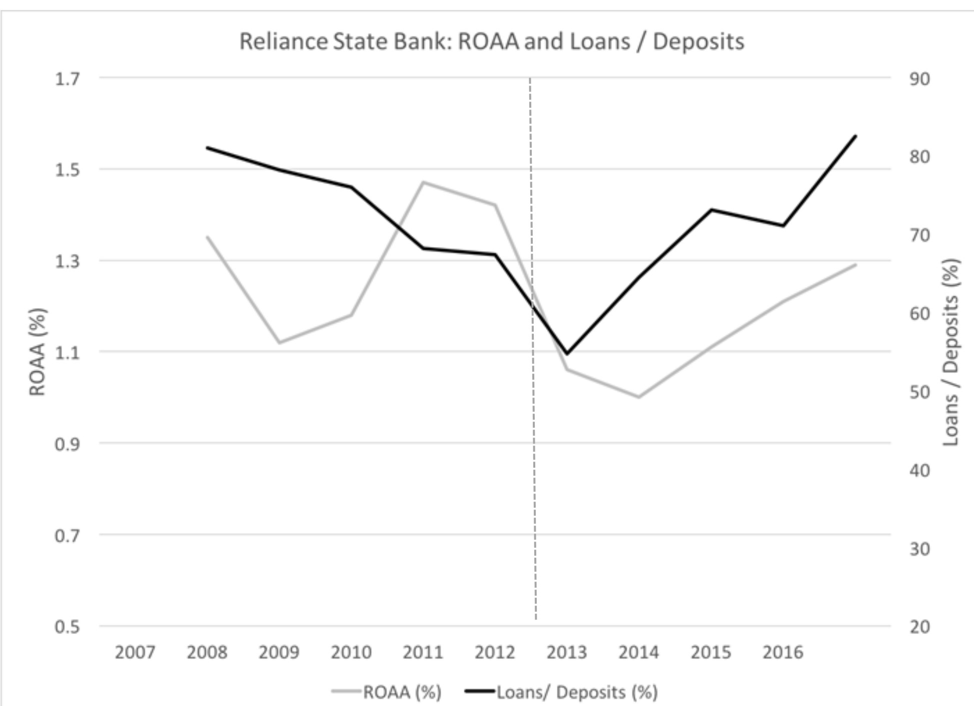

Table 1: Descriptions of the Bank Peer Group[2]

Security National Bank of South Dakota is a Bank Holding Company with 3 subsidiaries headquartered in Dakota Dunes, SD. It has $1.38Bn in assets and its loan portfolio is primarily comprised of Real Estate (53%; 22% domestic and 13% farm) and agriculture production loans (28%).

West Bancorporation, Inc. is a standalone bank that is headquartered in West Des Moines, IA. It has $1.85Bn in assets focused on commercial lending. Only 0.02% of its loan portfolio is agricultural. The bank is highly levered with a high Loan to Deposit ratio of 91%.

MidWestOne Financial Group is the holding company of MidWestOne Bank which operates in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Florida. They had $3.08Bn in assets at the end of 2016.

Great Southern Bancorp is the holding company of Great Southern Bank which is headquartered in Springfield, MO. It operates 104 retail banking centers with retail branches in throughout the Midwest and commercial lending offices in Tulsa, OK, and Dallas, TX. It has $4.55Bn is assets.

Hills Bancorp is the holding company of Hills Bank & Trust Company. All of its operations are within the state of Iowa. They had $2.66Bn in assets.

Heartland Financial is a Bank Holding Company with 10 subsidiary banks spread over 108 locations throughout the West and the Midwest. It has $8.25Bn in assets.

[2] All assets are valued on December 31, 2016.

Table 2: Summary information on the Ames National Corporation Lines of Succession

Internal Candidates			
Bank	Short Term	Long Term	Positions
Ames National Corporation	80%	60%	5
Boone Bank and Trust	100%	50%	4
First National Bank	100%	43%	7
Reliance State Bank	100%	80%	5
State Bank and Trust Company	100%	66%	3
United Bank and Trust Company	75%	0%	4
Total	93%	50%	28
External Candidate			
Bank	Short Term	Long Term	Positions
Ames National Corporation	20%	20%	5
Boone Bank and Trust	0%	25%	4
First National Bank	0%	29%	9
Reliance State Bank	0%	20%	5
State Bank and Trust Company	0%	33%	3
United Bank and Trust Company	25%	50%	4
Total	7%	29%	30
Internal or External Candidate			
Bank	Short Term	Long Term	Positions
Ames National Corporation	0%	20%	5
Boone Bank and Trust	0%	25%	4
First National Bank	0%	29%	9
Reliance State Bank	0%	0%	5
State Bank and Trust Company	0%	0%	3
United Bank and Trust Company	0%	50%	4
Total	0%	22%	30

Table 3: Estimation of Equation (1) Explaining the Performance of Ames National Corporation Compared to its Peer Banks

	ln (Real Net Income/ Employee)		ln (Return on Average Assets)		ln (Efficiency Ratio)	
	A	B	A	B	A	B
Dependent Variable is the Performance of Ames National Corporation, 2002 – 2016						
Constant α_0	2.90*	2.95*	0.258*	0.320*	2.14	3.00
p-value	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.14	0.16
Succession β_S		-0.03		-0.12*		0.03
p-value		0.64		0.048		0.56
Peer α_P	0.32*	0.31*	0.308*	0.261*	0.45	0.23
p-value	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.21	0.65
Adj R-Sq	0.79	0.78	0.74	0.79	0.12	0.14
Dependent Variable is the Performance of Subsidiary First National Bank, 2002 – 2016						
Constant α_0	1.27*	1.20*	0.238*	0.295*	-0.60	3.39
p-value	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.002	0.74	0.14
Succession β_S		0.04		-0.10		0.15*
p-value		0.60		0.34		0.02
Peer α_P	0.08*	0.812*	0.709*	0.671*	1.08	0.09
p-value	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.28	0.86
Adj R-Sq	0.92	0.91	0.85	0.85	0.27	0.50
Dependent Variable is the Performance of Subsidiary Reliance State Bank, 2002 - 2016						
Constant α_0	4.08*	3.57*	0.228*	0.280*	4.68*	1.97
p-value	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.004	0.25
Succession β_S		0.268*		-0.10		-0.10*
p-value		0.01		0.22		0.04
Peer α_P	0.048*	0.147	0.07	0.028	-0.22	0.46
p-value	< 0.001	0.06	0.30	0.67	0.52	0.27
Adj R-Sq	-0.05	0.50	0.01	0.06	-0.04	0.22
Note: * indicates significant at the 0.05 confidence level						

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For information on the Liberty Bancshares operation, go to http://www.businessrecord.com/Content/Finance---Insurance/Finance---Insurance/Article/Patience-will-pay-off-in-bank-acquisition/171/833/63598