

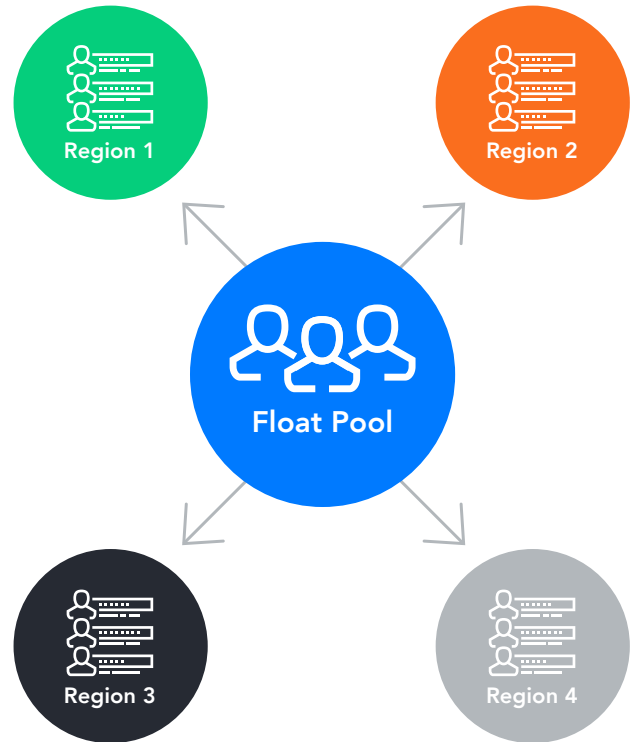
How pooling branch staff improves customer and workforce engagement

By Kerim Tumay

So what happens when an associate goes on leave or quits? Staff is already stretched thin. The expectations of customers won't change—unless they come to demand even more. Thus many banks are evolving the traditional teller pool to concept to bolster customer experience and workforce engagement.

"Any bank that has gone to a minimum staffing model needs some people to flex for training, leaves and attrition," said David Kerstein, president, Peak Performance Consulting Group. "The need for pooled resources may be greater than ever but the approach needs to evolve to include universal associates."

Can the different models that address this changing landscape evolve with our customers and branches? Consider these examples.



SunTrust: Centralized and Evolving

SunTrust has about 1,200 branches staffed by about 7,500 teammates. Of those, 120 tellers and 40 universal staff are considered "float" resources. SunTrust takes a centralized approach to management of these two pools.

"We wanted consistency in the use of float teammates," says Curry Lucas, senior vice president of workforce planning and resource management. "That led us to a structure with float managers at the regional level—about 100 branches in each—all reporting into a corporate group. This has resulted in us having a smaller float pool than most banks."

SunTrust has made the float request process simple. When pools were implemented, branches would make requests for pool associates via an online form. But the hundreds of monthly requests compromised response time.

They have since moved to this approach:

- Branch managers build and submit their schedules by the 10th of the month for the following month.
- This submission is systemically compared to the branch's planned staffing. Understaffed situations are identified, which eliminates the need to again request additional resources.
- Based on that comparison, the regional float managers assign pool resources.
- Branches can make additional pool associate requests in the event of unexpected changes such as a resignation or medical emergency.

"As staffing levels have been reduced, when a teammate goes out on leave there aren't resources available in the branch to cover them," Lucas notes. "All of our float teammates are full time; each has goals as though they were working in a single branch and receives the same training and onboarding as any new hire."

Float resources have a "home branch" and usually work a cluster of six or more branches, depending on branch density. In low-density regions, the goal is to limit assignment drive times to less than an hour each way. If they aren't needed for a pool assignment they will be temporarily placed in a high-opportunity branch so that they can reach their goals.

With conflicting demands for pool staff, priority goes to any branch that lacks the personnel to open. Long-term absences are considered next, followed by unexpected absences.

What should a bank consider when structuring their resource pools? "Your first decision is deciding the profile of your workforce," Curry says. "Are you creating a SWAT team or just providing warm bodies? Our decision to create a SWAT team is reflected in individual goals, staff selection and training."

He adds that "managing a teller pool is relatively low risk. The universal pool creates bigger challenges. How do we ensure that a pool teammate doesn't wind up working a drive-up window all day with no opportunity to reach their goals? The management of that pool will be a major focus with move toward universals, potentially putting management of that function closer to the line."



TD Bank: Localized success

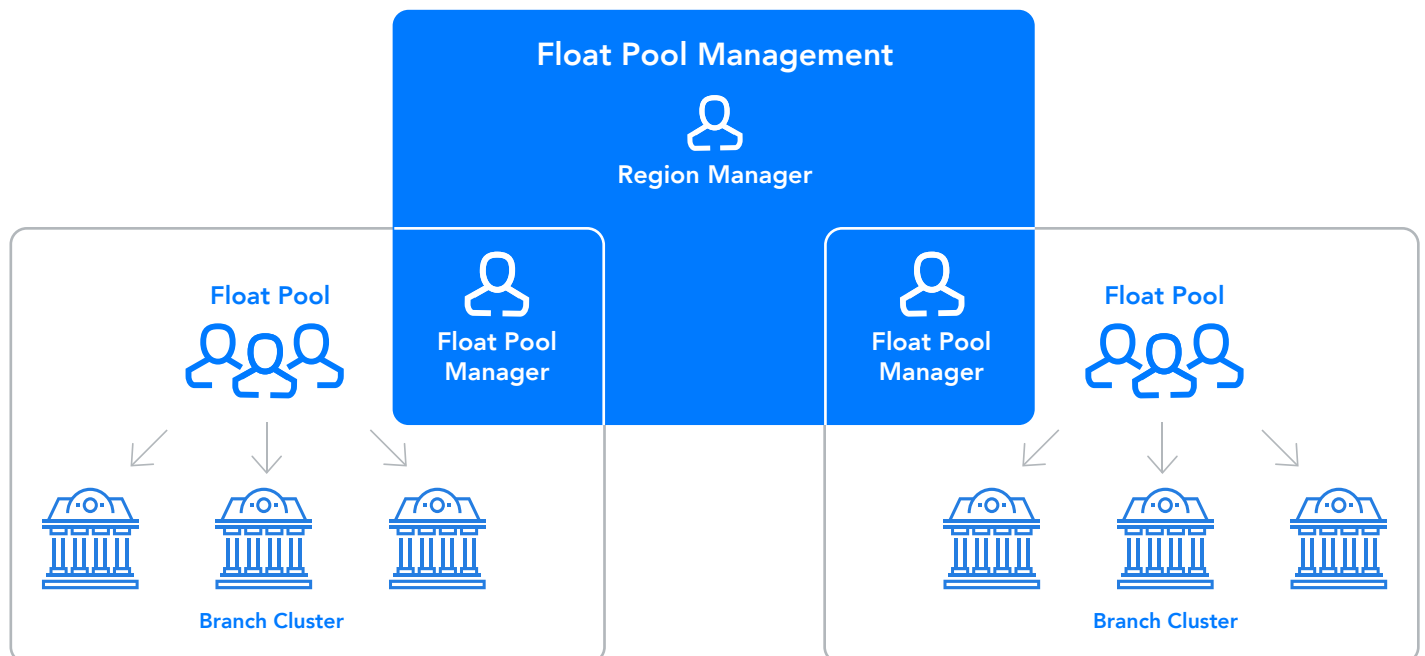
TD Bank rolled out teller and universal banker pools 18 months ago. “These roles are critical to our success, and we adjusted our hiring criteria accordingly,” says Laura Kilday, TD’s senior manager, workforce management.

She adds: “Pool associates are not entry-level roles: They’re all full-time, and we recruit high-performing internal colleagues to take on these important assignments. As these associates move from branch to branch, they gain more experience and a holistic understanding of the bank ... We also know their enthusiasm and energy will help them succeed and motivate/inspire other colleagues at their pool assignment. It’s clear these roles appeal to our workforce; there has been zero attrition since we rolled out the program.”

TD Bank manages its pools within 15-to-20 branch regions. In lower branch density within those regions, clusters of four to six branches are established. For instance, float staff in Manhattan may cover all branches but a float associate in Northern Maine may cover only five to ensure reasonable travel time. One branch manager oversees the teller and universal banker associates in a regional pool, in conjunction with their regional manager.

Branches request float staff with a templated form that accompanies the schedule that outlines its next-month need. The float pool manager reviews requests and then assigns float employees to the highest-need branches. Pool resources cover long-term absences, not call-outs or PTO; this way, float employees know their schedules weeks in advance, which ensures an optimal work experience.

Two-thirds to three-quarters of pool resources are cross-trained as universal associates and have goals similar to permanent branch staff (based on branch averages for their assigned region). Branch managers expect that pool associates will spend most of their time on the platform—with 20 percent of their time maximum on the teller line—as these are higher-level employees.



Kilday offers this advice to banks developing a resource pool strategy:

- **Conduct a pilot.** TD's pilot ran May through July 2017, with rollout beginning in October, reflecting learnings from the pilot.
- **Include multiple regions in the pilot.** This identifies potential differences in behavior and generates more accurate findings.
- **Address operational issues early.** These include dual control or keys.
- **Provide career advancement opportunities.** "Everything we'd read about pooling suggested a high attrition rate," Kilday says. "We've retained all 150 pool associates since the program was implemented ... associates see this as an important role and a way to advance their careers."
- **Implement appropriate reward and recognition for pool associates.** TD offers a separate award category for this group within their quarterly awards program, recognizing that these jobs carry unique challenges.
- **Pick the right float pool managers.** This is an added responsibility for branch managers and their commitment to the program is vital.

Evolution?

Modern workforce management solutions driven by advanced analytics have greatly improved how we manage resource pools. Advanced analytics empower workforce management leaders to accurately model pool resources. Regional and market managers can anticipate or validate near-term needs. And branch managers can more easily communicate needs to management. Mobile scheduling also provides a useful tool for all regional and branch managers to schedule resource pool associates, who benefit from easier schedule management thanks to features such as shift swapping.

Pooling branch staff is not limited to tellers and universal bankers. Some branch managers cover multiple branches in markets with smaller footprints and thinner staff. Others utilize resource pools that include financial advisors and mortgage specialists. Accurate assessment of market opportunity, prediction of monthly and daily resource requirements at each location, and scheduling for all these roles will prove vital to advance the workforce and improve customer engagement: indeed, one pool worth a deeper dive.