



A Sports Psychology Approach To Assessing Management Team Dynamics

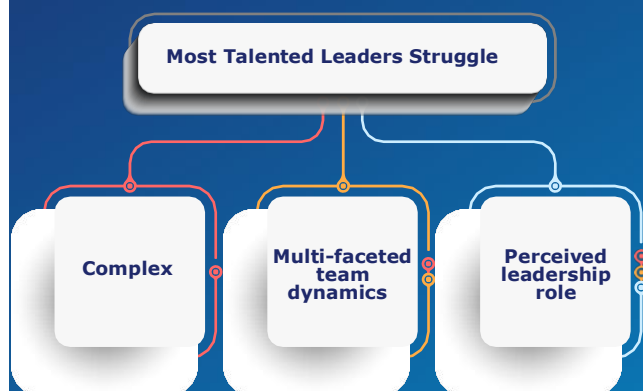
By DRD Advisors, LLC

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Our private equity clients say that their human capital assets, or their people, are the most essential element of their portfolio companies. Indeed, they argue, rightfully so, that successful companies need talented individuals at the helm – seasoned leaders that have proven themselves capable of leading their teams and their companies to success. However, the management teams of these portfolio companies are comprised of diverse individuals each seeking to navigate the complexities of their teams, requiring a deeper understanding of team functioning beyond individual capabilities to gauge group cohesion and overall company success. In other words, even the most talented leaders can struggle to create positive outcomes due to complex, multi-faceted team dynamics and perceived leadership roles. For that reason, we have developed a bespoke, industry-agnostic method for evaluating management teams by looking at the complex factors that impact how talented individuals come together to form well-oiled teams, giving our clients that necessary extra layer of awareness.

Having spent over 20 years assessing leadership teams, Dr. Doug Hirschhorn, PhD leverages his background in Sport Psychology to understand the deeper inner workings of such teams, which exhibit many of the same tendencies as sports teams. Due to these striking parallels, DRD Advisors uses sports-related, metaphorical questions during one-on-one interviews with management team members to comprehend group functioning in a way that is both conversational and disarming.

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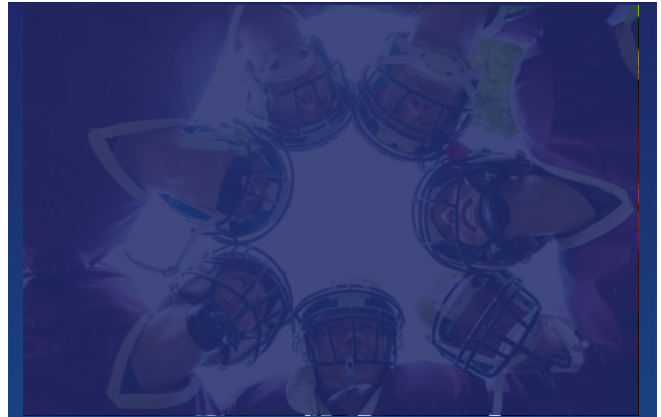


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If you were to describe the management team as a type of sport, what would it be?

While there are a host of sports that can be used to answer such a question, the nature of the sport provided nevertheless sheds light on the team dynamics of the group. In this way, a team member might say that the group functions like “a track and field team in which team members work independently in their respective areas of expertise.” This response, therefore, tends to imply that the team operates in siloes with perhaps minimal cross-pollination between team members. On the other hand, a team member on a different management team may state that his/her team acts like “a football team in which individuals work collectively to achieve the same outcome.” In contrast to the earlier response, this answer tends to imply that the group works in a more collaborative manner with ample cross-pollination between leaders. Because team members play nuanced roles within these different group environments, evaluating each team member’s perceived leadership role is further necessary to obtain a deeper, more holistic understanding of the group.

DRD Advisors adopts the same Sport Psychology approach to gauge individual leadership roles, allowing us to see how individuals function within both collaborative and siloed environments.



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What “position” or role does each member of the leadership team play in terms of the sport provided?

Much like answering the previous question, the respondent has the flexibility to respond in a multitude of ways. That being said, the roles assigned to individual team members still provide valuable insight into how different executives contribute to overall management team cohesion. Let’s say the interviewee previously answered that the team operates like a football team. When that same individual is prompted to assign team members individual roles in the context of football, they are likely to provide wide-ranging, though revealing, metaphorical positions for their peers. For example, someone might say that the CEO is like “a coach that gets on the field to run every play.” This response seems to suggest that the CEO is overly involved in the minutia, perhaps micromanaging other team members. In another vein, this team member might also say that the COO behaves like “a running back that can reliably score touchdowns.” This statement appears to indicate that the COO is a trusted member of the executive team, one that others rely on during crises to consistently perform well. While these individual responses can be revealing on their own, they are still just individual data points that need to be looked at holistically alongside the responses of other team members. Put simply, the best way to reliably understand the perceived roles of executives is to look for consistent themes repeatedly touched on during one-on-one interviews with the management team.

Individual talent is just one of many factors that impacts the performance of a management team. Because we seek to understand how other equally important components like team dynamics and individual leadership roles lead to management team effectiveness, we employ a customized, sport psychology-based approach during individual interviews with management team members to paint a comprehensive picture of the management team.

While our questions are unique and require interviewees to think on their feet, they are reliable tools for assessing the extent to which talented executives can work with one another to achieve team cohesion, and in turn, contribute to overall company success. Our clients reiterate that their people are their strongest assets, an undoubtedly true sentiment that nevertheless overlooks the fact that individual team members are only as strong as the sum of their parts – or rather their teams. Using a non-invasive, indirect line of questioning, our bespoke approach gets at the root of team functioning to help our clients thoroughly understand and support their management teams: their true assets.

For more information, please contact drd@drdadvisors.com