In reply to: The Board is not a Team.

On Team Theory: You are absolutely right that knowledge asymmetries are high in boardrooms. However, I would argue this is precisely why boards benefit from operating as teams. Research by Pye and Pettigrew (2005)[1] demonstrates that boards with strong team dynamics and complementary expertise significantly outperform those with fragmented individual contributions. My Doctoral research, which identified behavioural governance and the Third-Team concept, subsequently supported through organisational engagements, supports this view.

The Third-Team (comprising the board and executive team as a unified collaborative body) leverages knowledge asymmetries as complementary strengths through what I term "intellectual capital synergy." This occurs when directors' diverse human capital (tacit and explicit knowledge) combines with strong internal social capital (Synergy, Trust, and Confidence) to create outcomes greater than the sum of individual parts.

Consider the contrast between Enron's board (where directors operated as isolated individuals despite impressive credentials) and GE's board as they guided the business through the financial crisis of 2008. Or Proctor and Gamble's board collaboration and leadership with the executive team during the acquisition of Gillette. Or the sale process when Rohm & Hass sold to Dow Chemical, which saw the board meet over 20 times over several months while the deal was finalised. During this process, the lead director and CEO worked with synergy, trust, and confidence to ensure the directors understood and were across the up and downsides plus much more.

Unlike Enron's board, which was not a team, the other three organisations all had Third-Teams that added exceptional value. Not only in these examples, but across many years, exemplifying effective Third-Team dynamics. High-performing organisations have Third-Teams operating in a behavioural governance environment exemplified by Synergy, Trust, and Confidence within and between the teams and their members. Research by Charas 2015, demonstrated the impact of a board functioning as a team is an eight times greater predictor of corporate performance than individual director demographics[2].

On Consensus vs. Unanimity: I think we may be defining consensus differently. Consensus does not require unanimity or the elimination of healthy tension. It means reaching agreement on how to move forward.

Research and practice shows that team dynamics have a positive impact on profitability. MIT's Csaszar and Enrione (2015)[3] identified that the key is not whether to seek consensus but knowing when consensus helps versus when it hurts. Without some form of consensus, boards face either groupthink or paralysis. Both scenarios undermine the performance of the organisation.

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[1] Pye, A., & Pettigrew, A. (2005). Studying board context, process, and dynamics. British Journal of Management

[2] Improving corporate performance by enhancing team dynamics at the board level. International Journal of Disclosure and Governance (2015)

[3] Csaszar, F. A., & Enrione, A. (2015). When Consensus Hurts the Company. MIT Sloan Management Review.

On Deliberative Bodies: Absolutely agree that boards should deliberate thoroughly. But deliberation without eventual consensus leads to dysfunction. The goal is not to rush to agreement but to work through disagreements toward decisions that everyone can support. Even if they initially and may still, hold differing views.

On Board Membership: While membership does rotate. According to Spencer Stuart's 2023 Board Index[4], average director tenure in S&P 500 companies is 8.3 years which is hardly episodic. This duration allows for relationship-building, stability and shared understanding that can enhance rather than hinder effective governance. Compare this to the instability and poor-performance seen in boards with high turnover rates. Organisational performance, research, and organisational engagements have consistently shown that boards with stable, long-term relationships make more effective strategic decisions.

On Chair Leadership: You raise excellent points about the chair's role as moderator. I would add that effective chairs also need leadership/management skills. Required to facilitate process, ensuring all voices are heard, and guiding the board toward decisions. Consider Warren Buffett's approach at Berkshire Hathaway or Mary Barra's chairmanship at GM during their transformation. Both demonstrate how chairs can be effective moderators while providing strategic leadership. Their authority may be procedural, but their leadership impact is very real.

On Red Flags: Your warning signs are spot-on. The difference is that I see these as symptoms of poor team dynamics rather than evidence against team-based governance. Using a behavioural governance lens, these red flags indicate weak intellectual capital—particularly poor internal social capital (lack of trust, collaboration, and synergy) and underutilised human capital (directors' tacit knowledge not being effectively shared or leveraged).

A high-performing Third-Team encourages dissent, values different perspectives, and creates space for robust debate. Exactly what you are advocating for, but within a team framework where the collective wisdom exceeds individual contributions.

Perhaps the real question is not whether boards are teams, but what kind of teams they should be? I suggest they must embrace constructive conflict while maintaining shared accountability for organisational success. Evidence (functional and research) suggests that boards with strong team dynamics, proper consensus-building processes, and effective leadership consistently outperform those that operate as collections of individual voices. Behavioural governance and the Third-Team identify that when boards and executives function as a unified collaborative body, leveraging their combined intellectual capital (human, social, cultural, and structural), they create a "symphony of innovation" that drives exceptional organisational performance.

Putting all else aside, if a board is not a team, with a culture that encourages collective accountability and a unified purpose, operating in an environment characterised with the behavioural traits of Synergy, Trust, and Confidence. Within and between its members and also the organisational Third-Team. What is It?

It is a dysfunctional board, lacking cohesion, effective governance, while driving organisational performance downwards: it is the board of Enron, and many other failures.

Thank you for prompting this discussion.

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[4] Spencer Stuart (2023). Board Index: Board Trends and Practices