



Odyssey's Quarterly Newsletter – Q1 2019

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The Game of Thrones final season is almost upon us, and as George RR Martin wrote, “nothing burns like the cold.” If you’re based in New York like us, you’ll recognize his words in the current cold winds. And wherever you are, if you’re associated with the hedge fund industry, you’re likely feeling the metaphoric chill blowing around you. Redemptions, big fund name closures and disappointments with year-end bonuses (more of that after our Q1 Comp survey) abound. Yet in other fields, talent markets are robust. Smart, qualified people are in high demand throughout public and private credit, private equity and structured equity (a “hot” area we delve into in this edition). As a result, we’re seeing the rise of more formalized talent programs, and the acceleration of recruiting deadlines. We tackle both these topics here.

In addition, for a bit of fun, we look at interviewing protocols – and some mishaps/disasters people have had on the way. Happy to engage further on any of these topics, compensation or 2019 hiring plans.

Odyssey Team

Hedge Fund Moves

Name	Joining	Leaving
Andrew Dadoun	Canyon Partners	Avenue Capital
Brian Delaney	Kensico Capital	Select Equity Group
Peter Jarow	Lakewood Capital	Altalis Capital
Moiz Khan	Palestra Capital	Fir Tree Partners
Billy McAleer	Crescent Park	Criterion Capital
Travis Potts	Balyasny Asset Management	Millennium Partners
Lucy Shi	Select Equity Group	Criterion Capital Management

Note: We came across these moves, typically over the last quarter, in the course of our business; they do not include Odyssey placements, respecting the confidentiality of our candidates and clients.

Formalizing Talent Management Programs

The New York Yankees are not the most successful team in MLB history by accident. They have long been touted for having one of the best “front offices” in baseball. In baseball, like investment firms, the success of the team is largely based on the talent of the players. Most casual fans only pay attention to the players on the 40-man roster but the long-term success of the team is really driven by the GM, the player personnel team, the coaches and the scouts. Together, these talent executives put a plan in place to systematically identify and secure the best of the best. In a highly competitive league, the way the GM constructs the team and incentivizes their player is often the difference between winning and losing.



In the maturing investment management world, we’re also seeing considerable efforts being made to systematize processes around talent management. We see Chief Talent Officers being hired by many Private Equity firms. At hedge funds, whether it’s the person with a Human Resources Director title, or the trendier “Chief People Officer,” specific individuals are being tasked to manage these programs. Software is being increasingly used to help manage talent pipelines across the whole organization, and standardize processes like employee evaluations. According to a 2018 survey by Ernst & Young, for alternative asset managers, talent management was ranked the #2 strategic priority – behind only asset growth. As a fund allocator recently told us, “It used to be all about the managers themselves...now infrastructure, economics, approach, team and processes are just as important.”

To investigate further, we spoke with various allocators, fund managers, and HR personnel in the alternative investment space to get their perspectives on the formalization of talent programs.

Top Down Pressure

Like with many investigations, it’s sensible to ‘follow the money.’ The E&Y study mentioned that nearly eight out of ten LPs request information about their manager’s talent management program during due diligence. Two-thirds of LPs affirm that the existence of a talent program is an important influence on their investment decision.

Almost all of the allocators we spoke with noted that they now expect managers to have developed formal talent management programs. LPs have begun asking probing questions which they may have overlooked years ago, such as “If I invest in a fund and I expect the professionals I’m giving money to to be there over the life of the fund, what are you doing to safeguard that?” They are also asking “Who in the firm is responsible for this?” and “What is the fund’s approach to diversity?” In addition, LPs are growing increasingly interested in how the economics are spread across the funds they invest in – “How is the manager incentivizing their people to ensure alignment?” Key man clauses are now common around some of the most senior partners but are increasingly being discussed for lower level folk, where most of the work is done.

The allocators said investors are expecting fund managers to implement talent programs that would develop future leaders, increase the ranges of skills and perspectives in the firm, and maintain employee satisfaction to minimize the disruption caused by turnover. When pressed on their decision-making process to invest, they said it was influenced by many factors including fees, liquidity and investment strategy. But the top criteria that came up were the past (and anticipated) fund performance, and the quality of the fund management team.

We found that LPs place particular emphasis on talent management programs if geographic expansion or expanding the product offering are part of the growth strategy for the firm. Investors like to feel comforted that the talent the firm is banking on to implement such large-scale expansion efforts will be supported as much as possible throughout the oncoming transition.

Start-ups and smaller funds shouldn't fret, because LPs seem willing to afford more flexibility with smaller funds when it comes to the adoption and implementation of a formal talent program. In these cases, investors still want to understand the fund's approach to talent attraction and retention, how the economics work, and their hiring strategy, yet they are less focused on the need for a formal system with a dedicated human capital team. However, for funds with more than \$5 billion in AUM, LPs we spoke with like to see a program that is less randomized and more institutionalized. After all, they noted that in the investment world, name recognition will only take you so far, as funds tend to rise and fall on a combination of investment strategy and human capital. One prominent LP who invests across a range of fund types told us, "No matter how large the brand name, a change in human capital can have a big impact on the success of the fund."

Competitive Pressure

Steve Cohen once said at a conference, "Frankly, I'm blown away by the lack of talent... It's not easy to find great people." Firms realize they need to focus on talent because it's one of the toughest organizational challenges they face, though it's critical to do so. One prominent Partner at a PE firm put it: "We don't sell widgets. In this business, we sell investment talent; our people. That's part of the secret sauce. It's a core differentiator."

There's also the pressure on getting talent away from Tech firms. This is a whole topic in and of itself, but in one illustration noted by the FT, at the London Business School, the percentage of graduates going to work in Tech has jumped from 6 per cent to 20 per cent over the past decade. In the same period, the proportion entering finance fell from 46 per cent to 26 per cent.

Large funds growing in both size and scope (for more on this, see our article 'Growing Private Market Funds' in our prior newsletter article), further increases the competition for human capital, as funds pursue their growth efforts through talent acquisition. And while fund closures have dominated hedge fund industry news of late, new funds are emerging at similar rates, according to HFR. And in certain areas like private credit, the number of funds, and therefore options for LPs, have been mounting. In private equity, a head of marketing at a leading firm said she's never seen the volume of lateral hires as high as it is now.

Pressure to Diversify

Managers are increasingly focused on diversifying their organizations by sourcing talent from varying cultural, educational and professional backgrounds, as well as diversifying across ethnic and gender identifications. As a result, more concerted efforts are being made to manage this – managers are setting up programs, working with search firms who can support their efforts, and assigning internal staff to diversity task forces. The old methods of dealing with talent informally on a one-off basis simply aren't translating to the developmental needs of the workforce of the future.

Conclusion

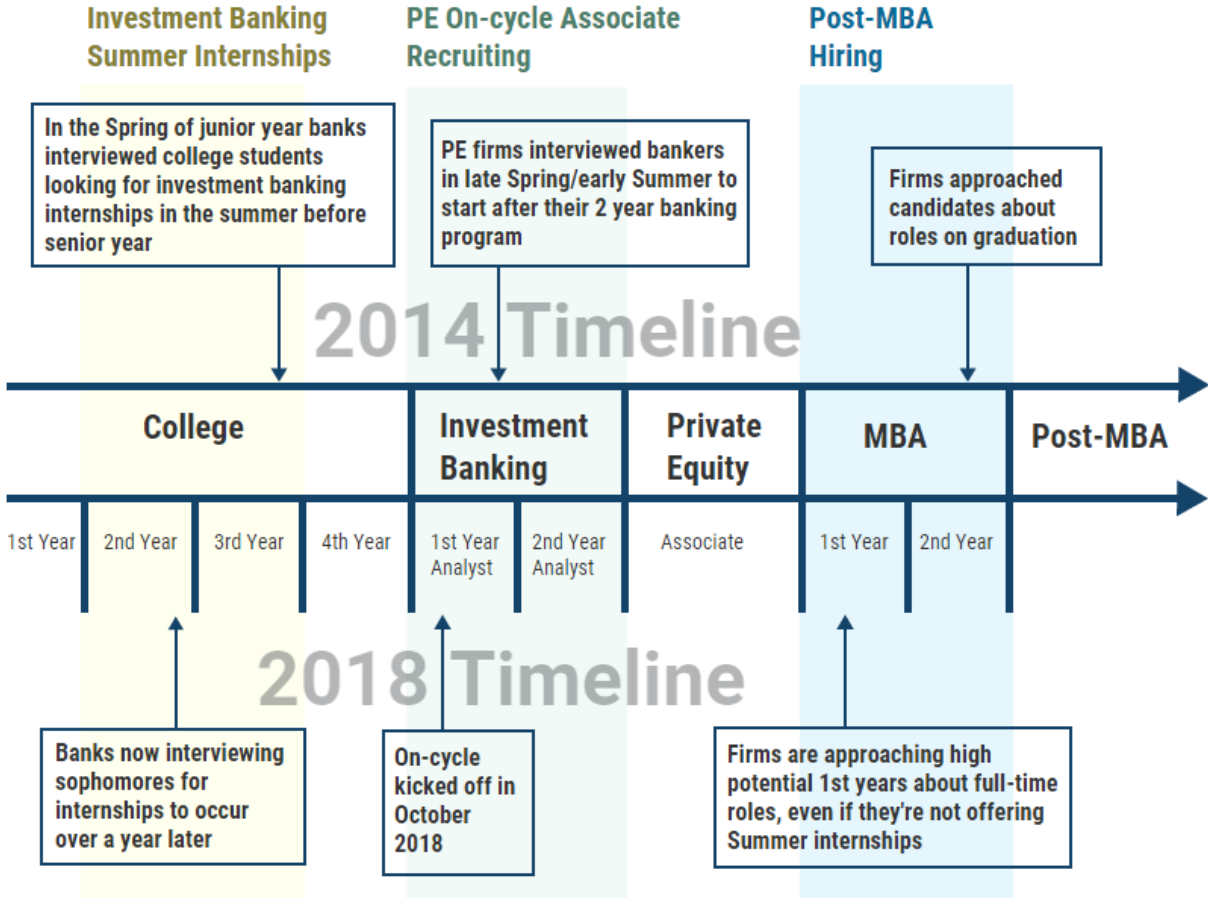
The alternative investment space has matured over the last generation, and it's become increasingly obvious that talent is a differentiating factor in performance. The best people need to be found and developed. As a PM at a multibillion-dollar money management firm put it: "A fund is only as good as the people inside its four walls. If the people don't grow, the fund won't either." LPs realize this and expect firms to put considerable effort behind their talent programs, hence the growth and formalization that we're currently witnessing.

Early Bird Gets the Worm: Why Financial Services Recruitment Deadlines are Shifting Up

So what's driving this extreme level of competition for early recruitment? How is it that firms seemed entirely comfortable with their hiring timeline up until a few years ago, when suddenly everything changed?

In our analysis, it's largely the same factors as discussed driving the formation of Talent Management programs in the prior article.

- a) Competition: Not merely in-industry competition, but Wall Street having to compete with Silicon Valley for star candidates, upping the pressure to secure top talent. With sizeable starting salaries, perks galore and tons of reputational cache, Silicon Valley Tech firms are tough to beat at recruitment. One way of doing so is by beating them to the punch, hence the push for earlier recruitment on the part of Wall Street.
- b) Diversity. In order to make the push for diversity in candidates, especially women, this necessitates earlier entry into those (arguably) shallower waters.
- c) LP pressure: As investors are increasingly looking at how firms are attracting and retaining talent, no-one wants to tell their LPs that they're losing out on the cream of the talent crop just because they're slower out of the gate than their competitors (and no-one would want to justify to their LPs such a horrid mixed metaphor.)
- d) Technological facilitation or 'ease of access': Advances in the digital age have simplified firms' ability to target candidates who might already be on the path to financial services, and scoop them up before they make themselves known through the declaration of a major or via summer internships. While the true impact is yet uncertain, recruiters argue that social media and AI technology enable them to highlight candidates who display a passion for finance, and reel them in before competitors are even aware of their interest in the space.



Effects

What's the effect of this shift of recruiting deadlines? Are people achieving their recruiting goals and therefore happier with the results? The short answer is a surprising no.

The problems are manifold: The candidates by definition are greener, which means traditional screening methods need to be adjusted. As one VP in a hiring position told us, "I now have no idea what to ask these bankers who haven't done any deals. There's some mental math, probe their hobbies, ask about their challenges if I want to act like a real HR person, and then I get frustrated because we don't actually have any finance to discuss."

More worryingly, by shifting recruitment timelines firms actually end up benefitting less diverse candidates; those privileged or well-connected enough to have been able to put together a strong financial resume sooner than their peer group. Those whose family or friends are in finance naturally land on that career choice earlier than others. Hence, the sooner firms recruit, the less time diversity candidates have to compete with those fortunate enough to be given a head start in life.

One major implication of all of this early recruitment is that the work experience becomes less valuable, and so alternative metrics like test scores and psychometric tests are elevated in importance. Additionally, given the lack of available data on candidates, firms are leveraging their relationships with external recruiters and contacts at banks and schools to supply valuable intel on which candidates might be the best fit for a given position.

Conclusion

Recruiting deadlines have moved up, but satisfaction levels all around seem to have dropped. Will the tide be reversed? Both Goldman and JPMorgan recently announced efforts to scale back their early recruitment, at least as pertains to college sophomores. Private Equity firms are turning to off-cycle hiring for their Associate hires because of their unhappiness with this year's on-cycle process. There is some pushback on the MBA front from their career services who want recruiting firms to adhere to their calendars and not 'go rogue'. And if the "early recruitment decreases diversity efforts" argument becomes widely accepted, then that will undoubtedly lead to changes. Some are convinced this is how it'll go. Matt Levine, an opinion columnist at Bloomberg wrote a piece titled "[Banks will stop hiring so early.](#)" And an HR head of a major investment firm told us, "This craziness won't last. It's only a matter of time before things swing back to normal."

Private Equity Moves

Name	Joining	Leaving
Emily Azer	GI Partners	Stonepeak Infrastructure Partners
Atticus Bieff	Softbank Vision Fund	Warburg Pincus
Michael Henkels	Comvest Partners	Bertram Capital
Jonathan Korngold	Blackstone Group	General Atlantic
Garrett Rogers	HIG Capital	Harvest Partners
Mark Segel	Stone Capital Partners	Ares Management
Michael White	Advent International	TPG Capital

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How Firms View Interview Basics

"Does the office have a keg?" might not be the first question you'd think to ask in an interview, but believe it or not, that's actually a question a PM told us he received from a candidate during a first round meeting. Interviewing basics may seem like common sense, but we've discovered through years of experience dealing with investment management candidates that when it comes to interview protocol, nothing can be taken for granted. With candidates reeling from the stress of seeking a high-profile job, the old adage of 'common sense not being too common' applies more often than we'd like to believe.



Comments like the one above intrigued us as to what's considered acceptable when interviewing these days. Does the dressing down culture in many offices also apply when interviewing? What's the protocol for thank-you notes in the digital age? What causes interviewers to get most upset by inadvertent candidate behavior?

We asked HR heads and others in the investment management space who interview regularly about how they and their firms perceive interview codes of conduct. The following is what's considered acceptable behavior on the part of candidates, what crosses the line, and what's flat-out disqualifying.

Dress Code

While most candidates arrive to the interviewer's office in a suit, occasionally some show up in a dress shirt or even something more casual. Most of the interviewers we spoke with were in agreement that if the shirt is nice – collared, somewhat formal – then that mode of dress is typically perfectly acceptable. There is a limit, of course. As one interviewer at a large LBO shop put it: "If someone shows up in a T-shirt and puff vest, the interview isn't going to go well."

Another tidbit we came away with is that non-business dress can – and should be – explained away with some context. For example, if a candidate arrives to an interview dressed casually, it is expected that they will offer a reasonable justification; something along the lines of having just come from the office, where dressing casually is the norm (and if they suddenly appeared in a suit, suspicions might be aroused). One firm relayed to us how a candidate went through the entire interview process and was on the verge of receiving an offer, only to show up to the final round interview in a T-shirt and jeans with no explanation whatsoever. This was a meaningful factor in justifying the team's potential concerns about the candidate's 'cockiness', and in the end, no offer was made.

Politeness and General Behavior

Since candidates tend to put their best foot forward when interacting with an interviewer, firms look for ways to gauge a candidate's personality when they're not under the spotlight. As a result, most firms agree that a candidate's general attitude begins when they first walk through the door and meet the reception team. "They will report back to us if someone was rude, unprofessional, or otherwise unpleasant," one HR Head at a leading NY investment firm told us, "and we will take that into account as part of the assessment process." Feedback from the front-desk team and other non-interview personnel can certainly influence a firm's decision – especially if they are on the fence about a candidate.

Punctuality is a hot button issue for many interviewers. Lack of timeliness tends to have the effect of starting the interview off on the wrong foot, which, in the eyes of a number of interviewers, makes it more challenging for the candidate to turn things around and perform well. There's a common assumption that if a candidate isn't punctual during the interview process, they're unlikely to improve on this if they were to be employed at the firm. Traffic, illness and meetings over-running (especially for more junior candidates) are generally non-issues if candidates have enough sense to let the recruiter or interviewer know if they are running late, and ideally, well in advance. Most people are granted a strike or two. Although one client did relay this horror story: "A candidate strolled into the interview ten minutes late, sat down and placed a hot Venti Starbucks on the table. Clearly he had other priorities besides being on time. We quickly

decided that we had other priorities too – like seeing the other candidates teed up for that day.” As with a casual dress code, tardiness can be explained away, but candidates need to make the effort, otherwise firms tend to assume disinterest – and when most are screening for passion, disinterest is a tough hole to try to climb out of.

Anything that speaks to a lack of honesty is a non-starter. Not being truthful with basic elements like dates, titles and prior employers tend to be immediately disqualifying. Grey areas are tougher to adjudicate on – interviewers typically assume that responsibilities are being slightly exaggerated, as are implied performance numbers. One Business Development professional at a major hedge fund explained, “It’s really miraculous. We can speak separately to all three senior analysts at a single-manager that’s closing because of negative performance, yet if you were to take on face-value the aggregate stated performance of all the analysts together, the fund would be a top performer!”

When giving reasons for leaving a prior firm, “it was mutual” is used way more often than actually is the case. Situations like this can – and typically will – be verified, so hiring managers prefer transparency and seeing people ‘owning’ their past rather than attempting to spin it.

One firm told us that when candidates can’t admit they made a mistake or try to cover something up, that can be disqualifying. “Candidates make mistakes in case studies all the time,” said one HR executive at a leading NY investment firm. “The ones that try to cover a mistake up don’t get the offer. The ones that say they see where they made an error, or where they’re not quite sure and explain why they thought something – those are the ones that get the job.”

It’s in these situations that candidates can exhibit those aspects of behavior can lead to that all-encompassing reason for rejection - “lack of cultural fit”. Whether it’s known as ‘screening for entitlement’ or the ‘no jerk rule’, many firms are looking for something similar. One Director we spoke with explained it this way, “Some of these folks treat the final round project read-out like a college debate where there are winners and losers, when what we’re really trying to determine is whether we want to have this person as a colleague. It’s a good time to hear a little humility – we don’t need a lengthy justification of mistakes they’ve made.”

Negativity

Something that all firms were in agreement on is the issue of negativity. If a candidate bashes their current employer or team, firms consider that a bad omen. The logic being that if they’re willing to speak poorly of their current employer, it’s likely they’ll be just as willing to speak ill of their next employer. Another issue arises when candidates are quick to point out flaws in their current position, but fail to offer any proactive measures they’ve taken to change the operational systems or culture. Such omissions can make a candidate seem complacent, or worse... lazy. As one HR rep at a multibillion-dollar hedge fund told us: “Generally speaking, when people have said that they’re unhappy in their job, but haven’t done anything to try to change it, that’s a red flag for us. We want to hire people who are able to communicate with their manager about what they want or need, and who aren’t just going to jump ship when things aren’t perfect.”

A candidate’s negativity can come through indirect means as well; for example, when discussing thorny issues such as compensation and role responsibilities. Hiring managers are turned off by candidates who lead with compensation when expressing their reasons for wanting to make a career switch. Even if compensation is a factor – as it often is – firms like it when candidates highlight other areas of focus as their drivers for change. Additionally, firms relayed to us how off-putting it can be when junior candidates ‘get too big for their britches.’ A human capital team member at a mid-market PE firm told us, “It’s a huge red flag when bankers say there’s nothing left for them to learn from their current manager or firm, or they’re leading with the need for a flexible work arrangement or more favorable work/life balance. For a junior, there is always more to be learned, and flexible work arrangements and work/life balance considerations are perks, not entitlements. Yes, the lifestyle may be better here, but that shouldn’t be the chief draw.”

Interestingly, when we asked if there is a pattern to the types of candidates who typically exude negative traits during the interview process, inevitably we heard the broad-brush complaints about ‘millennials.’ Some noted that the worst offenders tend to come from IT and accounting – presumably because employees can be successful in those fields without strong interpersonal skills. Still, most interviewers

feel that a person's profile doesn't give them a free pass – particularly in a smaller firm where every individual can affect the office culture.

Thank-You Notes

The general consensus seems to be that thank-you notes are appreciated, yet have little sway in whether or not the candidate actually receives an offer. “Most interviewers expect a brief thank-you email within a day of the interview, but receiving one (or not) has never changed our decision to advance or decline a candidate,” one HR head told us. Most agreed that thank-you notes should be short and sweet, and not include any supplemental information unless it was directly requested by the interviewer.

Most consider thank-you notes to be quaint, and some might say antiquated, gestures. Yet that is exactly why they are so appreciated. That said, one considerate gesture (or lack thereof) generally won't sway a firm one way or another. As one hiring manager put it: “We always joke about rejoicing when we get a ‘thank-you’ because we've found that they aren't sent nearly as much as they used to be. We would consider it best practice to send a ‘thank-you.’ Someone took time out of their day to meet with you and focus 100% of their energy and attention on you. That said, we're going to hire the best person for the job, even if he or she didn't send a thank-you note.”

Two-Way Street

Of course, highly-questionably behavior can run both ways. We know of many top candidates who pull out of interviewing processes with leading firms due to being stood up, being rescheduled multiple times or not receiving feedback post-interview for weeks. Candidates also relayed stories of firms asking them leading questions regarding age, religion, compensation etc. Those experiences influenced the candidates' decisions on firms as much as some of the aforementioned episodes influenced the firms' decisions on candidates – a reminder that both sides should be more cognizant of the impressions they're making, and how they behave in the interview room or when grabbing that final closing drink. This is becoming increasingly important give the choices top candidates have – we may look to explore this side of the coin in a future newsletter.

Final Thoughts

In general, firms found that candidates tend to act appropriately, though every once in a while they run into that one candidate who leaves a lasting impression (not in a good way). For example, this one by a senior HR professional at a multi-strategy firm: “We recently had an individual mail one of our senior investment professionals a single baby shoe with a hand-written note attached, in an attempt to ‘get his foot in the door.’” That's definitely one way of making an impression – even though it didn't secure an interview.

Private Credit Moves

Name	Joining	Leaving
Michael Broderick	Varagon Capital Partners	Capital One
Jim Clifton	Great Rock Capital Partners	PNC Capital Markets
Chris Dowd	Hartford Investment Management (HIMCO)	Barings Asset Management
Michael Fabiano	Platinum Equity Partners	GSO Capital Partners
David Flannery	Vista Equity Partners	GSO Capital Partners
Stewart Hanlon	Monroe Capital	White Oak Global Advisors
Jordan Hill	Alcentra Capital	LStar Capital
Karen Simeone	HarbourVest Partners	TCW Direct Lending

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Why is Structured Equity the Talk of the Town?

It seems like most funds these days are doing, or at least considering, Structured Equity. But the product's actually been around for some time. One-off deals of this type have been done since the '90s, though back then it might have been referred to as 'Flex Equity' or 'Flex Capital.' The asset class didn't actually form the basis of a dedicated fund until ABRY Partners launched their original structured equity fund in 2008. Since then, funds such as Huron Capital and Harvest Partners have dedicated themselves to the asset class, and helped pave the way for major players today such as Colbeck Capital, Macquarie CAF and Fortress Drawbridge.

Structured Equity is just now enjoying even wider support, as firms across a range of investment types are adopting a broader 'Asset Manager' label (see Private Markets article in our [Q4 Newsletter accessible from our media page](#).) Many are maneuvering into alternative financial solutions as a result, which tend to include structured equity.

So, with all of that said...

What Exactly is Structured Equity?

Structured Equity is a financing source that combines elements of both equity and credit investing. It also tends to include options and other derivatives to protect the investor's downside risk. These derivatives are typically linked to market indices in order to boost their portfolio's capacity for capital appreciation. Therefore they can provide investors a degree of both capital appreciation and protection. Investment sizes are usually limited to around 20% of the company, which enables closing without shareholder approval, and dependent on the size of investments, investors often get board seats.

Structured Equity deals are attractive to entrepreneurs and family-run businesses as they afford these owners the rare opportunity to retain a substantial portion of their company's equity while maintaining control while also raising substantial capital. At the same time, these owners can often take advantage of all of the perks that come along with a traditional private equity deal, including deep sector expertise, expansive networks, and the potential for follow-on capital commitments.

Who's Getting into the Structured Equity Game?

The short answer is nearly everyone; from Private Equity funds such as Harvest Partners and Blackstone, to Private Credit shops and broad Credit funds like Guggenheim via their Strategic Capital efforts. These funds have joined Special Situations stewards such as Falcon Investments, as Structured Equity has matured into an established financing source that is attracting numerous players from across the financial landscape.

- Private Equity – Structured Equity provides PE funds exposure to opportunities where the owner wishes to retain full control of the business, yet offers excellent upside on the prospect of an exit. The asset class also mitigates downside risk due to preferred treatment for investors. Additionally, if the firm refinances, the investor can often convert some portion of the deal into equity, or the firm owner will buy them out.
- Private Credit – Structured equity investing allows Private Credit funds to move higher up in the capital structure and still retain equity-like returns. The focus is on finding strong companies where the business generates recurring revenue streams or has real asset value; a strategy that offers a higher yield/enhanced returns. Though it's important to note that dedicated funds are compensated on deployed capital, not committed capital.
- Special Situations – Special Situations are often comfortable with Structured Equity because of the similarities in their approach. These firms are attracted to the hybrid debt/equity deals which mirror elements of their core efforts, but also contain bells and whistles that amplify the potential upside.

One prominent example of an investment firm that successfully used Structured Equity is Softbank, which recently announced plans to sell its stake in chipmaker Nvidia. Softbank quietly became the fourth-largest shareholder, and implemented Structured Equity deals with various investment banks as a hedge against any potential drop in Nvidia's share price. That drop came by in December as shares had plunged 48% from their October 1st peak. Thanks to the Structured Equity tranches Softbank put in place, according to [Yahoo Finance](#), the investment firm stands to make \$3 billion by offloading its stake – a 100% return on investment.

Implications for Hiring

Firms entering the Structured Equity market tend to make strategic hires that can source a robust deal pipeline. Structured Equity deal originators require a broad network of founder-run startups, family-owned businesses, and other sponsor-less firms seeking to grow without using traditional private equity or credit sources.

As Structured Equity deals are bespoke instruments, professionals must be poised and proficient enough to exhibit flexibility and creativity when interacting with individual clients. The execution of deal terms is the most crucial aspect of a Structured Equity arrangement; as a result, firms are hiring deal-leads with the confidence and clout to ensure that transactions are executed properly from start to finish. We've also noticed some firms bringing legal experts in-house to beef up their exposure to these complex structures.

As always in finance, nothing is forever. And what goes up, at some point, inevitably seems to go back down. But for the foreseeable future, as long as these firm types – PE, Private Credit and Special Situations – continue to be increasingly active in the Structured Equity marketplace, we don't foresee any slowdown in the hiring market for these professionals.

News from Odyssey

We're very happy to welcome Martha Masiarz to the team! Martha joins Odyssey after four years at Wells Fargo Securities where she worked in equity research and structured products. Martha grew up in Stamford, Connecticut and went on to receive a Bachelor of Science Degree in Finance from Wake Forest University. Martha enjoys playing both field and ice hockey in her spare time and is a chocolate enthusiast.



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