

Zurich University of Applied Sciences  
School of Management and Law  
BSc International Management

Bachelor's Thesis

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**The Athletic Advantage:**  
**From a Team Sports Elite Athlete to a Top Management Position**

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Submitted on 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 2023

## **Management Summary**

Elite team sports foster diverse soft skills that extend well beyond the sports field, offering a solid foundation for professional success. This is reflected in the rising demand and recognition of soft skills in today's workplace. Effectively applying and transferring these skills to the professional domain can facilitate the attainment of top management positions. Thus, providing a golden opportunity to transition from being a top performer in the field to becoming a top performer in the boardroom. Therefore, this paper identifies specific skills developed through team sports relevant to the professional world, emphasizing their successful integration into top management positions.

The data is gathered through a comprehensive literature review and expert interviews. The literature review explores skill development in team sports, required competencies for success in both domains, and their transferability to top management positions. By comparing the skill sets, mutually beneficial soft skills are identified that bridge both domains. The expert interviews offer valuable firsthand insights from former elite athletes who effectively applied these skills in their current roles as top managers. This thesis employs the coding technique from Gläser and Laudel to analyze the interview data.

The results confirm a correlation and underscore the transferability of soft skills in top management positions. Among the identified skills, communication, mental toughness, resilience, and preparation were most frequently mentioned by the interviewees. Resilience and the ability to perform under pressure were identified as valuable traits for addressing challenges in top management roles, while social competence was recognized as crucial for effective leadership. All experts shared leadership experience in sports, highlighting the valuable platform team sports offer for developing leadership qualities. Thus, these findings further strengthen the theory that professional team sports participation effectively develops valuable skills directly transferable to top management positions.

Overall, the study provides convincing evidence of the interconnection between skills required in elite sports and top management. The challenges and high-pressure situations throughout the athletic career are a strong foundation for thriving in dynamic business environments. However, the thesis emphasizes the significance of a comprehensive approach in which athletes not only excel in their athletic careers but also actively pursue education and gain practical work experience. While the acquired skill set is undoubtedly

beneficial, further development and refinement are necessary to effectively apply these skills in a distinct business context, which differs from the world of sports. Certain situations in the professional world may be incomparable to sports and can only be fully developed through direct application and experience in the business environment. Thus, the acquired soft skills, combined with qualifications and experiences, can provide athletes with a competitive advantage in the business world, leading to exceptional success.

# Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	INITIAL SITUATION AND RESEARCH QUESTION.....	1
1.2	RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION .....	2
1.3	STATE OF KNOWLEDGE, RESEARCH GAP, AND DELIMITATIONS .....	3
1.4	OBJECTIVE.....	5
1.5	THESIS STRUCTURE.....	5
<b>2</b>	<b>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	DEFINITION AND ROLE OF SOFT SKILLS.....	6
2.2	PLAYING TO WIN: HOW TEAM SPORTS DEVELOP ESSENTIAL SKILLS .....	9
2.2.1	<i>The Power of Growth: Maximizing Soft Skills Development.....</i>	<i>9</i>
2.2.2	<i>Unlocking Success: Skill Set and Success Factors.....</i>	<i>12</i>
2.3	BEYOND THE GAME: KEY COMPETENCIES OF CHAMPION ATHLETES.....	19
2.4	THE ART OF LEADERSHIP: KEY COMPETENCIES IN TOP MANAGEMENT .....	21
2.5	SKILL DEVELOPMENT: THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY .....	25
<b>3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	27
3.2	EMPIRICAL METHOD .....	28
3.2.1	<i>Research Design.....</i>	<i>28</i>
3.2.2	<i>Research Approach.....</i>	<i>29</i>
3.2.3	<i>Semi-Structured Interviews and Interview Guide.....</i>	<i>31</i>
3.2.4	<i>Selection of Interview Partners .....</i>	<i>32</i>
3.2.5	<i>Data Collection, Scope, and Evaluation.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<b>4</b>	<b>FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>34</b>
4.1	RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS.....	34
4.1.1	<i>Sports Career .....</i>	<i>34</i>
4.1.2	<i>Professional Career Path and Success.....</i>	<i>42</i>

4.1.3	<i>Correlation: Impact on Success</i> .....	49
<b>5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>59</b>
5.1	IMPLICATIONS .....	59
5.2	THE MAKING OF A CORPORATE ATHLETE: TRANSFERABILITY OF SKILL SET .....	61
5.3	ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION .....	63
5.4	DISCUSSION OF THE HYPOTHESIS .....	64
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK</b> .....	<b>66</b>
6.1	CONCLUSION .....	66
6.2	LIMITATIONS .....	67
6.3	FURTHER RESEARCH .....	67
<b>7</b>	<b>LIST OF REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>78</b>
	APPENDIX A – THE ATHLETES' PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE PROCESS BY ÖZDEMİR (2019) .....	78
	APPENDIX B – ATTRIBUTE RANKINGS (PROISSL, 2021) .....	79
	APPENDIX C – HEURISTIC MODEL BY GOULD AND CARSON (2008) .....	80
	APPENDIX D – SELECTION OF INTERVIEW PARTNERS .....	81
	APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	88
	APPENDIX F – INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWEE .....	94
	APPENDIX G – INTERVIEW MARIO GYR .....	95
	APPENDIX H – INTERVIEW BENI HUGGEL .....	100
	APPENDIX I – INTERVIEW HEINZ KARRER .....	104
	APPENDIX J – INTERVIEW FLORENCE SCHELLING .....	111
	APPENDIX K – INTERVIEW ROGER SCHNEGG .....	116
	APPENDIX L – INTERVIEW JOSH SIMPSON .....	121
	APPENDIX M – INTERVIEW PETER SPUHLER .....	126
	APPENDIX N – INTERVIEW HELMUT ZIMMERLI-MENZI .....	132
	APPENDIX O – MAXQDA CODING .....	136
	APPENDIX P – CATEGORIZATION OF INTERVIEW DATA .....	137
	APPENDIX Q – THE CREATION OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....	156

## **I. List of Figures**

Figure 1: Soft Skills are More Than Interpersonal Skills .....	6
Figure 2: Global Workforce Numbers at a Glance .....	8
Figure 3: Muscle Mass and Energy Consumption.....	12
Figure 4: Mental Toughness.....	16
Figure 5: Weightage for Lower Management Positions .....	24
Figure 6: Weightage for Higher Management Positions.....	24
Figure 7: Overview of Theoretical Framework.....	28
Figure 8: Skill Set to Master Challenges.....	45
Figure 9: Most Valuable Skills in Top Management.....	47
Figure 10: Theoretical Framework Interlinking Primary and Secondary Research .....	62

## **II. List of Tables**

Table 1: Psychological Attributes Vital for Success.....	20
Table 2: Ten Soft Skills Attributes Categorized from Executive Listings.....	22
Table 3: Importance of Soft Skills in Today's Workplace .....	23
Table 4: Attributes of Evaluation Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative .....	30
Table 5: Interview Partners .....	32
Table 6: Main Strengths in Team .....	38
Table 7: Valuable Skills Developed through Team Sports .....	40

### III. List of Abbreviations

AB	Abled-Bodied
AwD	Athletes with a Disability
CEO	Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CIO	Chief Information Officer
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CV	Curriculum Vitae
Covid-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
EI	Emotional Intelligence
EQ	Emotional Quotient
Etc.	Et cetera / and so forth
EY	Ernst & Young
HF	High-Frequency
HR	Human Resources
IP	International Podium
IPO	Initial Public Offering
LF	Low-Frequency
$M_{age}$	Median Age
Mgmt	Management
n-IP	No International Podium
NLA	National League A
Para.	Paragraph
$p$ value	Probability Value
$r$	Correlation
SCB	Schlittschuh Club Bern
SD	Standard Deviation
SNB	Swiss National Bank
SRF	Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview

# 1 Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis describes the initial position, along with the research question derived from it. Similarly, it emphasizes the economic relevance of the topic, provides a methodological overview, and outlines the thesis structure.

## 1.1 Initial Situation and Research Question

Christine Lagarde, the current President of the European Central Bank, Indra Nooyi, the former CEO of PepsiCo, and Irene Rosenfeld, the former CEO of Mondelez International, share a common background: they all have a history in competitive team sports before becoming successful top managers (Ingram, 2020).

It is widely acknowledged that competitive athletes are generally shaped differently by sports than their peers. Not only does sport keep the body and mind active and engaged, it also creates various vital skills for life (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). The research conducted by Pervun et al. (2022) provides evidence that it positively affects the development of positive traits, skills, identity, character, and physiological capacity. Simultaneously, it highlights the qualities that are effective on and off the sports field. Therefore, the possibility of transferring the acquired skills in top-class sports to other areas of life generated broad interest, not only for the sports industry but also for the corporate world. Since both sites are highly competitive, their success depends on the team's ability to outperform their competition. Consequently, the development of an individual's performance and leadership capabilities is essential not only for becoming a better sports player but also for leading a business (Pervun et al., 2022).

The potential of enhancing personal development through team sports is widely recognized. Yet, the current knowledge about the transferability of these skills to other areas of life, particularly in the context of career development, needs to be improved.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify specific skills developed through team sports relevant to the professional world and how they can be successfully applied in top management positions. Thereby, the research question of this thesis arises:

*What specific soft skills do team sports elite athletes gain from their athletic experience which helps them develop the necessary qualities needed for top management positions in the business world?*

Derived from the main question, the following sub-question aims to clarify the skill transferability and add to a more comprehensive understanding:

*How can the acquired abilities from team sports be effectively transferred and applied to the workplace?*

To complete the research question, the subsequent hypothesis is evaluated by drawing parallels between the potential mutually beneficial skill sets of athletes and top managers:

*Competitive team sport athletes possess a unique set of skills and qualities that make them better equipped to succeed in future top management positions compared to non-sport executives.*

To answer these questions, successful skill sets are examined, required competencies in top management positions are analyzed, and future business applications are identified.

Overall, this paper aims to improve the understanding of how the acquired competencies from team sports influence business career development and leadership qualities. Moreover, it seeks to provide a foundation for further research on the successful integration and career enhancement of athletes in the job market. The focus is on former elite athletes participating in the Swiss labor market.

## **1.2 Relevance of the Research Question**

There are several reasons why this subject is highly relevant to the economy: Firstly, in today's *war for talent*, companies are constantly searching for new talents to ensure future business success. Therefore, recruiting young talents is highly competitive and relatively limited (Williams, 2000). While there are already opportunities available in Switzerland, such as sports apprenticeships, part-time jobs, distance learning, and specialized programs, it remains challenging for athletes to take a step toward the professional world. By improving the support systems, more athletes can be integrated into the labor market (*Ausbildung Und Sport*, 2019). Integrating elite athletes can expand the young talent pool, creating additional opportunities for companies to establish a pipeline of highly talented and capable future leaders. As today's youth represent the future business decision-makers, leadership development is crucial for society. A study by Kniffin et al. (2014) revealed that athletes engaged in team sports score higher on leadership competence scales.

Secondly, by exploring the potential of competitive athletes as future business leaders, companies can obtain a competitive edge by hiring elite athletes who already hold some of the highly desirable skills (Kniffin et al., 2014). This skill set can then be leveraged to drive future business success and growth by transforming those athletes into highly valuable assets to the company.

Thirdly, by successfully integrating these skills in the workplace, companies might save resources that they would have to invest in developing candidates to acquire the requisite skills instead (Kniffin et al., 2014).

Lastly, former elite athletes might increase brand recognition which companies can systematically use to enhance their marketing activities and boost visibility. Likewise, by using the existing network of an athlete, businesses might forge new partnerships and expand their reach. This, in turn, could lead to increased revenues (Knoll & Matthes, 2016). Thus, the relationship between sports and business and how it can be linked to the economy might not only be of interest to human resource management but also to sportsmen to be aware of their exceptional competencies.

### **1.3 State of Knowledge, Research Gap, and Delimitations**

The literature on leadership skills for executives has grown significantly and has been studied extensively during the last decades. Another aspect that has been studied is the success factors of outstanding top managers, including their character traits, mindset, practices, and routines. It is well-known that athletics provides an excellent opportunity to develop and display leadership qualities (Barthold, 2014).

A recent report from Ernst & Young (EY) has focused on how C-suite women build leadership skills through sports. According to Bloomenthal (2023), *C-suite* is a term often used to describe high-ranking executives within a company, commonly consisting of the chief executive officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), and chief information officer (CIO). As a result, the report outlines that 94 percent of women in C-suite played sports, of which 52 percent practiced at the university level. Moreover, 80 percent of Fortune 500 female executives were doing sports in their childhood. According to Ingram (2020), 61 percent believe that their involvement in sports contributed to their career success, and 77 percent consider women who played sports to be good employees. This is underlined by many successful leaders, such as the

President of the European Central Bank, Christine Lagarde, who was in the French national synchronized swimming team. In addition, according to a Peterson Institute Policy Brief commissioned by EY, the annual wages of former athletes are, on average, about 7 percent higher than the ones of non-athletes (Ingram, 2020).

Despite the extensive literature on the significance of key skills for success in top management, a notable research gap remains in identifying which specific skills gained through elite team sports are most critical for success. Although numerous studies have focused on skill development in high-level sports, limited research has examined the skills gained through team sports alone. For instance, Barthold's (2014) study concentrates on sports in general without distinguishing between individual and team sports. In addition, although a wealth of information is available on skill development through sports, it is often not backed by empirical research and statistical data.

Furthermore, while scientific studies in recent decades have highlighted the impact of skill development in youth sports and the extent to which these skills translate to success in later life, they have primarily overlooked linking these skills to business success. In addition, more research needs to be conducted on the transferability of these qualities to the corporate world. Previous research about leadership skills has overlooked linking sports to the working environment and therefore missed the added value athletes can bring to businesses. While there is existing research on the development of life skills and their transferability to daily life, there is a notable gap when it comes to understanding their application in top management positions. Lastly, there is limited empirical research examining the extent to which sport plays a role in developing top management competencies.

Nevertheless, this thesis has some limitations. Firstly, the focus lies on team rather than individual sports, which has to be distinguished. Therefore, acquired skills specifically gained from individual sports are not evaluated. Secondly, the span of time of an athlete's skill development is limited to the age between 15 and 35 years since this best represents the developmental age. Thirdly, the distinction between tendencies of characteristic traits between men and women is not researched in-depth and is viewed collectively. Furthermore, the research area is geographically limited to elite team sport athletes who were previously active in Switzerland and have established a foundation in the Swiss economy. They currently operate within the Swiss job market, engaging in international activities.

## **1.4 Objective**

This thesis aims to address the existing gap in the literature review and contribute to an enhanced understanding of the multifaceted nature and importance of team sports skills transition into the business world by filling the current gap about the transferability of competencies. The objective is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. The advantages and possible disadvantages for business are analyzed. Based on the literature review between sport-specific and work-related abilities, notable traits are identified to achieve a top management position. Ideally, the hypothesis can be underlined, resulting in a conceptual framework highlighting key competencies in both domains to advance their careers.

## **1.5 Thesis Structure**

This bachelor's thesis is structured into six primary chapters: the introduction, a comprehensive literature review, a detailed methodology section, the presentation of findings followed by a discussion, and a conclusion that addresses the limitations and further research recommendations.

The literature review establishes the theoretical foundation of this thesis by providing an extensive data analysis of existing reports, studies, and journals relevant to the research question.

The methodology describes the overall systematic approach to address the research question by elaborating on the primary and secondary research methods. This section justifies and discloses the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used to answer the research question.

The findings present a comprehensive analysis of the data collected through empirical research. The subsequent discussion provides an interpretation of the results and establishes meaningful connections between the preestablished theory and the empirical findings, ultimately addressing the research question, sub-question, and hypothesis.

Lastly, the conclusion highlights the key findings of the research and acknowledges the limitations of the thesis. Additionally, it offers recommendations for future research in the field, providing helpful directions for further exploration and advancement.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to illustrate how professional team sports and business are interlinked regarding competencies. In the first step, the definition of skills and their importance are outlined. In addition to data-based reports, the crucial development period to evolve these skills is analyzed and identified through studies exploring the optimal age for competitive sports. In the second step, the skills acquired through sports are investigated, and the key competencies for success are highlighted. Subsequently, the required skill sets for top-level executives are examined and associated with top-level performers from another area: professional athletes. This is followed by revealing the most essential competencies for top management executives. Lastly, developing an athlete's obtained skill set is displayed as a golden opportunity for personal growth and career advancement.

Due to the comprehensive coverage of the rationale and relevance of the research topic, the current state of knowledge, the research gap, and the delimitations in the introduction section, there is no need for further elaboration in this section.

### 2.1 Definition and Role of Soft Skills

Soft skills are widely acknowledged as cross-cutting competencies that complement hard skills, such as technical, job-specific, or task-related knowledge, in any sphere of human life (Larsen et al., 2018). Whether they are connected to social, personal, or professional environments. The definition of *soft skills* is regarded as character traits that positively promote and enhance interpersonal interactions and relationships. Most people use them on a daily basis at all levels of life. They are commonly viewed as a collection of competencies representing how people know and manage themselves and their relationships with others. However, it is challenging to find a universal definition for soft skills (Long, 2022). According to Robles (2012), soft skills include more than just interpersonal skills, and defined them as follows:

Figure 1

*Soft Skills are More Than Interpersonal Skills*

Soft Skills = Interpersonal (People) Skills + Personal (Career) Attributes
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Source: Adapted from Robles (2012)

According to Long (2022), many other categories are frequently used to characterize them, including interpersonal skills, social self-efficacy, management competence, and

social and emotional quotient (EQ). Indeed, soft skills and EQ are interconnected concepts, yet they are distinct from each other. Correspondingly, EQ is one component of soft skills essential in building strong relationships, effective communication, and managing complex social situations. While soft skills refer to personal qualities and characteristics that allow people to interact and communicate proficiently with others, EQ refers explicitly to a person's ability to perceive, understand, and control their own emotions and to identify, comprehend, and influence the emotions of others. This highly affects communication and relationship building, enabling someone to connect with others more deeply (Wilcox, 2015). Thus, soft skills combine emotional, behavioral, and cognitive elements related to interpersonal and intrapersonal domains (Dell'Aquila et al., 2016).

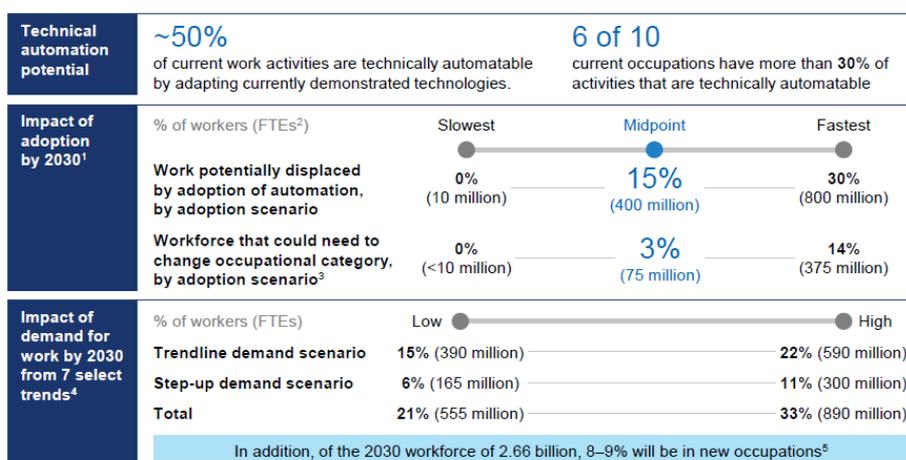
Furthermore, differentiating between hard and soft talents can be challenging. In general, it may be claimed that hard skills are typically obtained through education or practical experience. In contrast, soft skills resemble personality attributes that have been naturally developed over the course of life (Long, 2022). According to Woodruffe (as cited in Janjua et al., 2012), soft skills are related to the concept of competency, while hard skills belong to the concept of competence. Competency is a person-based conception, referring to the behavioral traits that underlie competent performances and define *how* a job is done. On the other hand, competence is a work-related conception that affects the areas of work for which a person is required to possess domain-specific hard skills to perform. Therefore, it refers to *what* people have to know and to do to achieve effectiveness in the workplace. Thus, soft-and hard skills should ideally complement one another (Janjua et al., 2012).

Researchers, managers, educational policymakers, industry, business, and organization representatives have begun to recognize the importance of soft skills in fostering individual and group growth and developing novel practices in diverse professional settings. Robles (2012) highlighted a study by Klaus (2010) which emphasized that people skills account for 75 percent of long-term employment performance, while technical knowledge only accounts for 25 percent. In addition, Robles (2012) revealed that soft skills account for 85 percent of success, whereas hard skills only contribute to 15 percent.

In today's fast-paced environment, characterized by technological advancements and artificial intelligence (AI), soft skills gain extensive significance (Dell'Aquila et al., 2016). The ongoing global automatization will substitute many work activities that humans currently perform, leading to significant job displacement in the coming years. According to Manyika et al. (2017), up to 60 percent of global occupations involve a minimum of 30 percent of constituent work activities that could potentially be automated. Besides, they predict that between 400 million and 800 million professionals could be affected by job displacement by 2030, depending on the automation adoption rate, illustrated in Figure 2. Of the abovementioned estimation of displacements, 75 million to 375 million might be forced to switch occupations and seek new employment opportunities. Consequently, there will be a transformation in the skills required for the workforce with a strong focus on developing social and emotional competencies, creativity, and high-level cognitive capabilities that are difficult to automate. As automation continues to reshape the workforce, future jobs require workers to devote more time to tasks involving communication, management, and high-level cognitive activities. Therefore, the work alongside machines becomes particularly more relevant. Thus, the growing significance placed on soft skills will become increasingly valuable and create high demand in the job market (Manyika et al., 2017). In addition, the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the significance of soft skills, such as adaptability and resilience, for companies, as they heavily rely on their personnel to successfully navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic (*Why Soft Skills and Emotional Intelligence Are More Important than Ever*, 2021).

Figure 2

*Global Workforce Numbers at a Glance*



Source: Adapted from Manyika et al. (2017)

According to Remedios (2012), organizations are striving to develop qualitatively high human capital within a fast-changing technological environment and rising business complexity. Soft skills may provide a way to achieve this goal as they are vital to enhancing employability (Cleary et al., 2006). Therefore, soft skills can be acquired and developed through interaction, personal experience, disclosure, constructive feedback, and ongoing reflection. They can be trained in *learning by doing* settings that provide an excellent opportunity for practice and constant, constructive response. Dell'Aquila et al. (2016) stated that personal experiences can be altered and internalized through a guided learning process, becoming meaningful and helping people learn how to learn.

To summarize, soft skills are gaining significance, becoming more critical for long-term employment performance than technical knowledge. The constant advancement of technology and AI will lead to a transformation in the skills demanded by the workforce, with a strong focus on developing social and emotional competencies, creativity, and high-level cognitive capabilities that are challenging to automate.

This section has outlined soft skills' significance and contribution to career longevity. The demand for soft skills is higher than ever and raises the question of whether this will develop in the future. To what extent they shape the development of professional athletes and their success is discussed in the following section.

## **2.2 Playing to Win: How Team Sports Develop Essential Skills**

Playing team sports is not just about the thrill of victory but also involves acquiring vital skills to help one succeed on and off the field (Maslen, 2015). This section provides a deeper understanding of how team sports help individuals develop these qualities. It begins by ascertaining the ideal age spectrum for developing soft skills.

### **2.2.1 The Power of Growth: Maximizing Soft Skills Development**

According to Grewer (2016), motor skills refer to an individual's ability to move, which influences most activities. Motor skills can be divided into two areas: fine motor skills and gross motor skills. Fine motor skills involve delicate activities performed by fingers or facial muscles, such as speaking or grasping, while gross motor skills relate to major body movements, such as walking or running. During childhood, motor skills develop through maturation, learning, and experience, with early engagement in sports establishing a foundation for future specialization (Oppici & Panchuk, 2022).

In adolescence, motor skills continue developing as the body builds muscle strength, primarily occurring between 12 and 18 (Grewer, 2016). This development is crucial for multiple reasons. Firstly, engaging in physical activities and team sports helps teenagers to enhance their motor skills, reducing injury risks, and improving performance. This positively affects their coordination, orientation, reaction time, feeling for rhythm, social development, strength, resilience, and ball-handling skills. Secondly, it directly impacts cognitive development, enhancing spatial awareness, problem-solving skills, and attention span (Videon, 2002). This, in turn, positively impacts their game intelligence, which is crucial for team sports. Thus, motor skills include coordination and body control, endurance and physical condition, balance, mental toughness, power and power dosage, speed and responsiveness, and agility. Clearly, these skills are of great importance for professional athletes (Grewer, 2016).

However, the aging process also plays a crucial role in the development of young athletes. Research showed that different skills peak at a particular age. The age of peak performance varies based on the attributes and skills needed to succeed in a sport (Allen & Hopkins, 2015).

The optimal age for maximum performance varies greatly depending on the discipline and the required skills (Mauney, 2012). According to Bishop (as cited in Bertram, 2018), most of today's research suggests that the majority will reach their peak in terms of endurance and muscular strength in their mid to late 20s and possibly early 30s. Accordingly, the peak performance in disciplines like sprinting and strength training is within these years, as the human body can use oxygen most effectively in its 20s.

After age 30, this ideal use of oxygen by the body decreases by around ten percent every decade. Only highly dedicated athletes can reduce this decline to about five percent. As oxygen use decreases, the maximum heart rate decreases with advancing age. Therefore, a reduced amount of oxygen is available to the muscles, which is particularly noticeable in professional sports. Moreover, the reflexes begin to slow at the age of 35, which affects the responsiveness of an athlete (Suutarinen, 2014). Besides, physical complaints increase with age as athletes might have already suffered numerous injuries. This may significantly affect their performance and ability to compete at the highest level, particularly in team sports involving intense physical contact, such as ice hockey or handball. As a result, most elite athletes retire in their mid-thirties or even earlier to

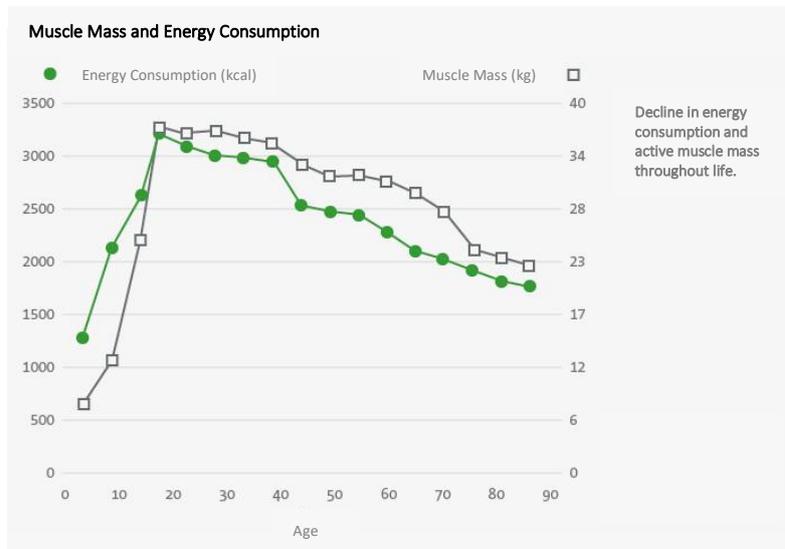
prevent long-term health consequences. Another reason for retirement is a change of interest and priorities, such as family planning. The lifestyle of a top athlete can be challenging due to demanding training, a high-stress environment, and frequent travel, which becomes more exhausting as one ages.

Even though the human body may not keep up with the top performance of previous years, it can compensate with other qualifications. This is precisely where the mindset becomes essential. Athletes, for instance, can draw on their mental strengths through learned strategies and tactics. As Professor Bishop stated (as cited in Bertram, 2018), winning competitions in sports relies not only on an athlete's speed and strength but also on their strategic approach. Thus, athletes require excellent physical abilities and the knowledge of how to use them best to win. The latter comes with experience, often related to age. Consequently, even if muscle strength declines with age, athletes can compensate by applying enhanced tactics and intelligent behavior. Thus, exercising according to an athlete's age and capabilities can even outperform younger and fitter competitors (Bertram, 2018).

Overall, professional athletes reach their peak performance between 20 and 35, depending on the sporting discipline (Neumann, n.d.). Grewer (2016) recommended starting the analysis at age 15, as most team sport athletes begin their athletic development at that age. The research is limited to age 35, as age-related performance decline tends to occur around that age (Allen & Hopkins, 2015). Therefore, the research focuses on this specific age range when examining athletes' skill sets. As shown in Figure 3, muscular mass peaks at the age of 20, decreases slightly until the age of 35, and drops more significantly after 35, underlining the reduced competitiveness of older athletes (Neumann, n.d.).

Figure 3

*Muscle Mass and Energy Consumption*



Source: Adapted from Neumann (n.d.)

### 2.2.2 Unlocking Success: Skill Set and Success Factors

According to Maguire and Thompson (2019), sports participation creates significant benefits, not only for physical and mental health but also in terms of improving social skills. Socialization through sports has been a prominent topic amongst sports sociologists. Thus, the research question arose about how an athlete's character, relationships, thoughts, and feelings might be shaped through their participation in sports (Maguire & Thompson, 2019).

According to Sakalidis et al. (2021), many advantages of playing sports have been discovered, including improved cognitive, psychomotor, and interpersonal abilities as well as enhanced physical, social, and mental health. However, there is no single definition of sport. Meier (1981) stated, “*There are few words in the English language which have such a multiplicity of divergent meanings as the word sport.*” (p. 79), creating a great range and variability in usage and applicability. He criticized traditional sociological definitions as inadequate and restrictive. McBride (1975) shared a similar view, embracing a more open and dynamic understanding of sports due to challenges posed by the diverse range of activities classified as sports.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) offers a basic definition and labels sport “*as a game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and/or as a job*” (Para. 1). The Council of Europe Charter on Sport (2001) provides an official definition of sport as “*all forms of physical activity, which*

*through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels” (Article 2).*

When it comes to team sports, the definition is extended to multiple players. According to McNeese et al. (2016), team sports include two or more players working together to achieve a shared objective against another team. The players usually have specific roles and responsibilities within the team, and their success depends on their ability to communicate and coordinate with one another effectively. Therefore, group strength depends on teamwork rather than the strength of the best individual. Consequently, they are collectively accountable for accomplishing their goals, and all individual skills are needed to achieve greater performance levels. The effectiveness of a team's performance is the outcome of the interpersonal relationships among team members, referred to as teamwork. It can be measured in various ways: member satisfaction, objective, and self-reported team effectiveness. The team engages in both cognitive and physical activities, which are interconnected and heavily rely on the environment and the engagement of each team member. Therefore, teamwork is driven by the combination of physical coordination and cognitive processing at the team level (McNeese et al., 2016).

Team sports can help develop various abilities that are beneficial in both sporting successes and personal life. It demands that players cooperate, communicate clearly, and coordinate with one another. Kaya (2014) stated that it also requires rapid decision-making skills since decisions are mostly made while the play is in motion. Most decisions are based on athletes' technical and tactical skill sets. Therefore, practicing not only enhances an athlete's mechanics but also resets their instincts, allowing them to react immediately when encountering similar situations (Kaya, 2014).

Ewing and Seefeldt (2017) found that playing team sports can enhance leadership, decision-making, and conflict-resolution abilities. According to Dobosz (1999), team sports also allow players to practice social skills, including making friends, networking, and boosting social support. Furthermore, he claims that social abilities like leadership, teamwork, and communication improve. It provides an opportunity to cultivate leadership abilities, as individuals may be expected to take the reins and lead the team by example. Also, by receiving constant feedback from the coach and team members, players are constantly exposed to criticism and suggestions for improvement and have to find new

ways to combat their weak points and set new goals. This, in turn, fosters their capability to introspect and evaluate their performance and strive for progress, leading to personal advancement and growth (Dobosz, 1999).

Furthermore, intangible skills such as endurance, resilience, grit, and the capacity to bear pressure are developed. One of the main benefits is the development of teamwork skills, as people must share ideas, effectively communicate, and collaborate to achieve a common objective. As a result, interpersonal abilities like empathy, respect, and understanding may emerge.

In addition, the ability to subordinate oneself in a group is part of a sports team, as it takes much strength to subordinate own needs to the team goals (Dobosz, 1999). Further, managing competition is a critical aspect. While no one wants to come in second or sit on the bench, a healthy level of competition is necessary for a team to progress. As long as there is alignment in responsibilities and objectives and the group meets its performance expectations, the players' identities on the field should be immaterial. This requires not only a significant amount of respect toward the team, coach, and staff but also toward the competitors. Madrigal (2019) stated that the awareness of their strength and capabilities is an essential part of game preparation and should not be undervalued.

Competition-related challenges can aid athletes in gaining resiliency, persistence, and mental toughness. These abilities enable people to overcome obstacles and recover from failures and setbacks. Failures are common throughout the career of elite athletes, who regularly face setbacks that require them to persevere (Rice et al., 2016). Each defeat presents a valuable opportunity for personal growth as athletes learn to confront challenges and extract the positives from every situation. Competitions are inherently tied to both victories and defeats, which carry significant weight in determining rankings. As a result, performance expectations are closely intertwined with competition, creating an atmosphere filled with anticipation. Thus, athletes experience constant pressure, not only from themselves but also from their teammates and staff. Also, the level of pressure from fans and sponsors increases parallel to the popularity of a sport and the amount of money involved (Rice et al., 2016).

The capability to perform when it matters most is a crucial determinant of an athlete's success, as every point during a championship carries significance, and every goal can potentially secure a spot in the playoffs. But in team sports, success depends not only on

an individual's mental state but, more significantly, on the alignment of the mental condition of all team members. Achieving this requires every team member to possess mental fortitude and focus, with a concerted effort to sustain a high concentration level throughout the game to optimize performance (Özdemir, 2019). The interim result is insignificant; what matters is the outcome. Thus, even if a team is trailing by several goals, there remains a chance of winning the game. At a certain level in sports, the outcome depends more on the mental game than the physical one. Given that most teams have comparable training approaches, there are only marginal physical differences. However, it is mental fitness that separates the *winner*s from the *loser*s in the final one percent. Bobby Jones once famously said, "*Competitive sports are played mainly on a five-and-a-half inch court, the space between your ears*" (AthleticPoetics, 2013), highlighting the importance of mental strength in sports. As a result, athletes develop various psychological competencies to withstand the pressures inherent in their sport (Özdemir, 2019). Their experiences enable them to perform under pressure with greater ease and proficiency, precisely the point at which mental fitness becomes significant (Rice et al., 2016).

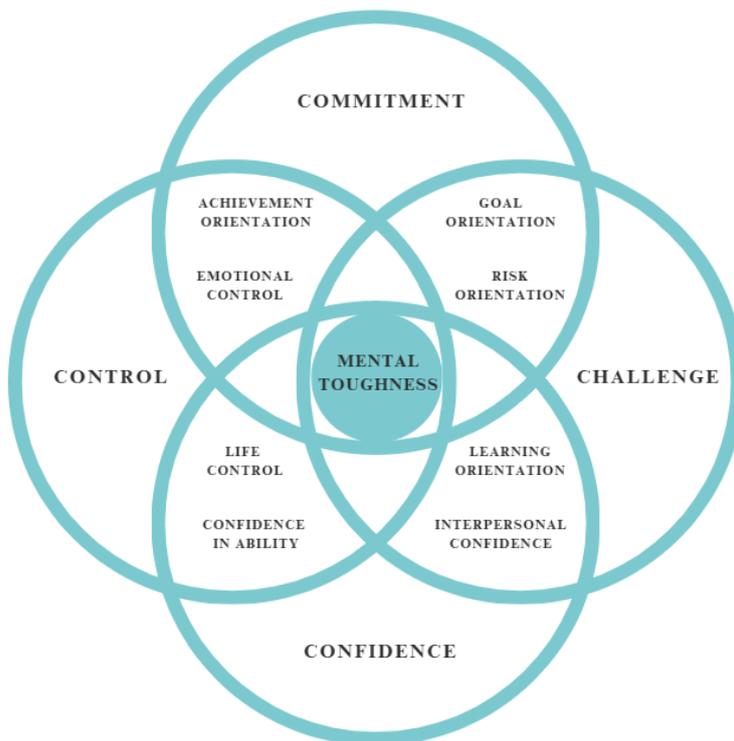
Mental fitness refers to the complete practice set aiming to maintain and improve one's mental state (Cooks-Campbell, 2022). It includes both mental toughness and mental strength. Although they may appear comparable, they are, in fact, distinct (Strycharczyk, 2021).

Mental toughness is often referred to as elite athletes or special forces constantly exposing their bodies to extreme situations to reach their limits (Cowden, 2017). It involves maintaining focus and determination during critical moments and responding effectively to challenges, stress, and pressures. Most athletes face injuries during their careers, which can create such a stressor. Putukian (2016) stated that sports injuries pose physical and psychological challenges, as injured athletes experience extreme emotions, such as shock, stress, frustration, anxiety, and lack of confidence. This emotional impact can be devastating, especially during the rehabilitation process, where no immediate progress is visible. This is highly linked to self-awareness and reflection, as it involves observing one's thoughts and feelings without personally associating with them, followed by accepting the current situation and generating positive thoughts about it (Hodges & Williams, 2019). Hardy et al. (1996) affirmed a positive correlation between the level of perceived importance and the corresponding increase in pressure levels. An excellent

example from the world of sports provides a decisive penalty after the end of regular play time (Andersson & Wolffsohn, 2020).

According to Strycharczyk and Clough (n.d.), mental toughness includes four important traits called the 4C's: control, commitment, challenge, and confidence, as presented in Figure 4. According to Ribeiro (2019), the key to success is combining all four qualities.

**Figure 4**  
*Mental Toughness*



Source: Adapted from Strycharczyk (2021)

Mental strength, on the other hand, is about emotional resiliency, which refers to the robustness of a person's mental state (*How to Build Mental Strength and Toughness*, 2022). It involves having a positive mindset and maintaining a strong belief in oneself. This may reduce the fear of failure when experiencing challenging times. A study by Özdemir (2019) revealed that to withstand short-term high-density or long-term low-density intensive training during practice, elite athletes must have psychological resilience. The detailed process of psychological resilience in athletes is available in Appendix A.

Morin (2017) suggested that EQ is a component of mental strength and can have a significant impact on athletic performance. Given the intense emotional nature of competitive sports, an athlete's feelings can influence their cognition, perception, behavior, motivation, and decision-making processes. According to Kauss (1981), how one feels affects how one plays. Hence, EQ can be the decisive factor that either *makes or breaks* a team (Birwatkar, 2014). Recognizing the emotions of team members, coaching staff, and opponents are of great importance as they impact relationships and interactions. Psychological games in sports are an excellent illustration of how to affect someone's emotions. Attempts by goalkeepers to influence emotions by intimidating and unnerving the opposition when facing a penalty are common in various team sports (Ingham, 2012).

Even though emotions are crucial to sports performance, EI has received little attention from researchers in the sports domain. Laborde et al. (2011) related higher EI to higher team sports performance, positively linking the use of psychological skills, such as self-talk and imagery. They conducted a study to investigate the impact of trait EI on thirty male handball players ( $M_{Age} = 22.5$  years;  $SD = 1.7$ ) when confronted with the stress of competition. In a lab setting, they exposed the athletes to a competition-like stressor that included 20 minutes of negative imagery and the sound of booing spectators. Therefore, a trait EI questionnaire was used, combined with measuring their heart rate variability to calculate a mental stress indicator, the so-called low-frequency/high-frequency (LF/HF) ratio. The results from repeated measures analysis of variance disclosed a substantial interaction between the time of measurement and trait EI, indicating that athletes with higher trait EI experienced a lower increase in stress compared to their low trait EI counterparts. This highlights that trait EI may help to better manage stress levels through its influence on the LF/HF ratio (Laborde et al., 2011).

Another research conducted by Kopp and Jekauc (2018) used a meta-analysis to examine the relationship between sports performance in competitive sports and EI. A meta-analysis is a set of methods to consolidate the findings of several reports into one report to produce a single, more accurate estimate of an effect (Hoffman, 2015). They have identified 21 studies about EI and sports performance in a competitive setting and calculated the correlation ( $r$ ) to estimate the effect of the relationship. A small but significant link ( $r = 0.16$ ) was found between EI and sports performance. Despite being modest, the overall effect size indicated that higher EI could be linked to higher sports

performance. Thus, the findings underlined that EI could be regarded as a weak determinant of sports performance, confirming the conclusions drawn from previous systematic reviews (Kopp & Jekauc, 2018).

Simultaneously, team sports can develop time-management and organization skills among athletes, as they often have to balance their athletic commitments with their academic or professional obligations. This can help use the time available effectively, set priorities, and operate well under pressure (Maslen, 2015). Moreover, it requires a high degree of self-discipline since elite athletes must constantly adhere to their training schedules, dietary habits, and sleep patterns (Shogan, 1999). Also, practicing self-control through consistent effort and dedication is essential to stay focused and achieving the goals set. As athletes operate in a highly competitive environment where success depends on controlled and constant efforts, they develop a strong sense of discipline to maintain their edge over their rivals (Piermattéo et al., 2018). For an elite athlete, achieving excellence involves incredible sacrifice and dedication. Athletes often have to make sacrifices to achieve their desired level of success. High-performance sport requires a significant amount of effort and time. Especially when practicing in a team, time schedules must accommodate all members. Therefore, sacrifices must be made in certain situations, often affecting an athlete's social engagement and leisure activities (Carless & Douglas, 2013). However, there is a drawback to that. This incredible sacrifice may prevent athletes from adequately examining the various roles and behaviors connected to identity formation. As a result, this may lead to a state of identity foreclosure which can cause an identity crisis after resigning from sports (Warriner & Lavalée, 2008).

All the abilities mentioned above contribute to the skill set development of elite athletes. Indeed, their success is also determined by physical characteristics, such as height, body shape, physique, proportions, musculature, genetics, etc., over which they have little control (Steyer, 2021). Several key competencies regarding the most important skills leading to success are repeatedly emphasized. They include motivation, self-confidence, optimism, focus, leadership, as well as mental toughness and strength (Hodges & Williams, 2019). To conclude, it can be claimed that teamwork skills are especially evident in team sports.

### **2.3 Beyond the Game: Key Competencies of Champion Athletes**

Burns et al. (2022) conducted an online survey to examine lifestyle practices and support services perceptions among elite and pre-elite athletes. The study also aimed to identify key performance skills that were believed to contribute to their success. Out of 331 Australian athletes in Olympic and Paralympic sports who commenced the survey, 196 were excluded as they did not fulfill the requirements either by not competing in an Olympic sport or competing more than ten years ago. Additionally, duplicates and incomplete responses were eliminated. Accordingly, the study was based on the replies of 135 athletes (77 female and 58 male) representing 25 different Olympic sports. A developmental framework was used for the analysis to categorize the athletes' performance levels. The Australian Institute of Sport developed the framework to outline the optimal progression of an athlete's pathway toward achieving tremendous success (Gulbin et al., 2013). In their prior research on this topic, Burns et al. conducted interviews with World and Olympic Champions and discovered four crucial themes related to psycho-social and lifestyle factors, namely psychological skills and attributes, interpersonal relationships, performance strategies, and lifestyle practices. These findings indicated that becoming a world-class athlete at the podium level is a complex and multi-dimensional process encompassing more than just talent and training, involving key psycho-social factors that athletes consider incredibly important. All athletes across the achievement spectrum, including those with and without a disability, regarded psychological traits as highly significant to their success. Psychological attributes previously reported by elite athletes were considered highly important by over 80 percent of the respondents. Interestingly, elite athletes who achieved at least one international podium (IP) highlighted the importance of their ability to change and resilience. Similarly, almost all athletes considered self-discipline and mental toughness crucial for success. There were no statistically substantial differences between males and females identified. However, athletes without a disability, so-called abled-bodied (AB), were more likely than athletes with a disability (AwD) to consider the ability to manage performance nerves and rituals as an essential component of their success (Burns et al., 2022). Table 1 illustrates the importance of different psychological attributes in percentage of IP/n-IP and AB/AwD athletes who agree on the psychological attributes vital for their success. To interpret the table, n-IP stands for athletes who have not achieved an International Podium, and *p* value is a statistical measurement for hypothesis testing. It assesses the compatibility of a hypothesis with the observed data by assuming

the null hypothesis is true. Thus, the stronger the statistical significance of the observed difference, the lower the  $p$  value (Beers, 2022). An asterisk (\*) is used to indicate a significant difference in values.

**Table 1**

*Psychological Attributes Vital for Success*

Psychological Attributes	IP	n-IP	$p$ value	AB	AwD	$p$ value
Ability to Adapt to Change	100	94	0.053	96	95	-
Resilience	100	96	-	98	95	-
Self-Discipline	98	100	-	99	100	-
Mental Toughness	98	94	0.188	95	95	0.489
Ability to Recover after Injury	98	89	0.052	93	86	0.129
Being Self-Aware	98	91	0.099	93	95	0.362
Ability to Manage Emotions during Competition	98	94	0.188	96	90	0.140
Goal Setting and Planning	95	94	0.392	94	95	0.423
Routines	95	87	0.190	90	86	0.272
Ability to Manage Performance Nerves	95	91	0.232	95	81	0.012*
Strategic Thinking	90	88	0.345	89	86	0.323
Reflection	90	90	0.500	91	86	0.222
Coping Skills	90	90	0.500	90	90	0.484
Problem-Solving	88	91	0.260	91	86	0.222
Breathing	88	80	0.156	85	71	0.063
Ability to Create Supportive Network	85	82	0.306	83	81	0.396
Being a Knowledge Seeker	83	78	0.264	78	86	0.226
Rituals	61	46	0.064	55	33	0.036*

Source: Adapted from Burns et al. (2022)

Qualitative data in the form of written responses from the athletes complemented the quantitative analysis. The following three open questions were asked:

1. *In achieving a medal at a benchmark event, why, in your opinion, do you believe you succeeded compared to your less successful counterparts?*
2. *What key advice/strategies would you advocate for younger athletes?*
3. *Is there anything in your sporting journey so far, that you would have done differently?*

For question one, the athletes identified a strong mindset, superior self-regulation, and effective coping strategies as critical factors. Regarding question two, they highlighted the importance of intrinsic motivation, superior self-regulation, effective coping strategies, and a positive mindset. Relating to question three, the main suggestion was to invest earlier in mental training to support developing superior self-regulation.

However, as the study does not only involve team sports but also individual athletes, specific key competencies specifically gained through team sports complement the skill set to achieve incredible triumphs. For that reason, team behavior is of great importance. According to Maslen (2015), team sports bolster the so-called five C's, namely caring,

character, competence, confidence, and connections. The core of this builds self-esteem, as a result of better social interactions leading to stronger relationships and connected to improved academic success. Ultimately, the acquired soft skills through team sports participation provide athletes with invaluable abilities which can be applied beyond the field (Maslen, 2015).

To conclude, although the specific skills required for success may differ slightly among athletes and different types of sports, the study emphasizes that specific fundamental abilities are crucial for all team sports athletes. Thus, highlighting the importance of psychological skills in high-performance sports and the requirement for a holistic approach to athlete development, like training in mental strength and toughness.

#### **2.4 The Art of Leadership: Key Competencies in Top Management**

Top management refers to an individual or a group that oversees and governs an organization at its highest level. They hold the organization's resources, authority, and decision-making capacity and are accountable for initiating changes. Top management positions may include organization owners, board of directors, C-level executives, and an organization's president and vice president (*A Definitive Guide to Top Management: Definition and Duties*, 2022). Not only do they hold responsibility for the organization itself but also for its personnel. Working with people is one of the most essential managerial duties, as management positions become redundant without people (Carmeli & Tishler, 2006). Therefore, human or interpersonal managerial skills assist top managers in maximizing the potential of the company's employees. According to Carmeli and Tishler (2006), these skills are proved to be more important to an organization's performance than intellectual abilities. In addition, the transformation from an industrial-focused to an information-based and office economy has caused many job roles to prioritize qualities such as integrity, communication, and flexibility (Zehr, 1998).

A study by Robles (2012) identified the top ten skills regarded as most crucial by top management executives. A total of 90 top-level executives received the survey, leading to a list of 517 soft skills mentioned. After analyzing the use of comparable phrases and concepts, a list of 26 soft skills was compiled, from which the ten most referenced skills were identified and selected. The top ten skills are presented in Table 2 on the next page.

**Table 2***Ten Soft Skills Attributes Categorized from Executive Listings*

<b>Communication</b>	Oral, Speaking Capability, Written, Presenting, Listening
<b>Courtesy</b>	Manners, Etiquette, Business, Gracious, Says Please and Thank You, Respectful
<b>Flexibility</b>	Adaptability, Willing to Change, Lifelong Learner, Accept New Things, Adjusts, Teachable
<b>Integrity</b>	Honest, Ethical, High Morals, Has Personal Values, Does What is Right
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	Nice, Personable, Sense of Humor, Friendly, Nurturing, Empathetic, Has Self-Control, Patient, Sociability, Warmth, Social Skills
<b>Positive Attitude</b>	Optimistic, Enthusiastic, Encouraging, Happy, Confident
<b>Professionalism</b>	Businesslike, Well-Dressed, Appearance, Poised
<b>Responsibility</b>	Accountable, Reliable, Gets the Job Done, Resourceful, Self-Disciplined, Wants to Do Well, Conscientious, Common Sense
<b>Teamwork</b>	Cooperative, Gets Along with Others, Agreeable, Supportive, Helpful, Collaborative
<b>Work Ethics</b>	Hard Working, Willing to Work, Loyal, Initiative, Self-Motivated, on Time, Good Attendance

Source: Adapted from Robles (2012)

These skills were then added to a questionnaire and sent to 182 executives who ranked them by importance. A total of 57 executives (62.6 percent) responded, rating the top ten soft skills attributes on a scale ranging from *not important (1)*, *not very important (2)*, *somewhat important (3)*, *very important (4)*, and *extremely important (5)*.

Notably, the executives' feedback revealed that integrity and communication were the two most essential soft skills in the current work environment. All 57 executives (100 percent) rated these skills as either *very important* or *extremely important*. Over three-quarters of the top managers (84.2 percent) highlighted the importance of courtesy, and over half (71.9 and 61.4 percent, respectively) indicated that responsibility and interpersonal skills were incredibly important. The frequency and percentage indicating the level of importance of each soft skill can be retrieved in Table 3.

**Table 3***Importance of Soft Skills in Today's Workplace*

Soft Skill Attribute	Not Important		Not Very Important		Somewhat Important		Very Important		Extremely Important	
	1 _____		2 _____		3 _____		4 _____		5 _____	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Integrity							4	7.0	53	93.0
Communication							5	8.8	52	91.2
Courtesy					2	3.5	7	12.3	48	84.2
Responsibility					5	8.8	11	19.3	41	71.9
Interpersonal skills					9	15.8	13	22.8	35	61.4
Professionalism					7	12.3	23	40.4	27	47.4
Positive attitude					6	10.5	25	43.9	26	45.6
Teamwork skills			1	1.8	16	28.1	15	26.3	25	43.9
Flexibility			1	1.8	12	21.1	20	35.1	24	42.1
Work ethic					14	24.6	22	38.6	21	36.8

Source: Adapted from Robles (2012)

While all soft skills are deemed crucial, corporate executives do not view all soft skills as equally important. This study discovered that the most critical interpersonal abilities for success are integrity, communication, and courtesy (Robles, 2012).

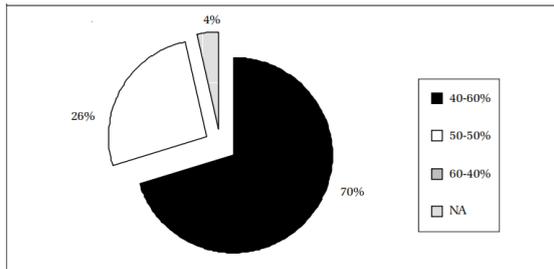
Another study by Sharma (2009) revealed the importance of soft skills for future career development. Sharma explored the significance of soft skills in obtaining employment and for future career advancement and promotions. For that, 50 middle-to top-level executives, including managers and HR professionals involved in recruiting, participated in a survey. The unsurprising results confirmed the importance of soft skills in influencing an individual's future career progression. Furthermore, all respondents unanimously agreed that strong, soft skills are essential for career success. Additionally, the majority acknowledged the existence of a skills gap between what is taught in universities and industry requirements. Similarly, 74 percent of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current workforce available in their industry, which is reflected in today's *war for talent*. The executives were also asked to rate the top three essential soft skills to succeed in the professional world. As a result, 72 percent rated communication as the most important soft skill, closely followed by teamwork with 66 percent and time management with 60 percent.

Besides, the vast majority responded positively when asked whether they take soft skills into account during the interview process. Notably, the weightage of soft skills compared to experience increases when it comes to higher management positions which can be seen in Figures 5 and 6. While only 4 percent considered soft skills to be 60 percent and

experience to be 40 percent important for lower management positions, the percentage grew tenfold to a total of 46 percent for higher management positions. Hence, soft skills outweigh experience. Consequently, soft skills are given greater priority than experience when it comes to higher management positions. This indicates a correlation between the importance of soft skills and the level of a management position (Sharma, 2009).

**Figure 5**

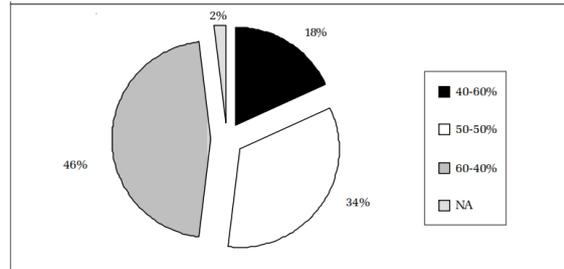
*Weightage for Lower Management Positions*



Source: Adapted from Sharma (2009)

**Figure 6**

*Weightage for Lower Management Positions*



Source: Adapted from Sharma (2009)

Even though the study primarily focused on the importance of soft skills in job search and career advancement, certain discoveries can also be applied in assessing the skill sets of senior executives. According to Sharma (2022), it is undeniable that top executives require various additional soft skills, including adaptability to different scenarios, empathy and consideration for others, the ability to solve problems and manage conflicts, and a growth mindset. Overall, the research findings identified effective communication, integrity, and courtesy as the key soft skills necessary for top-level management.

In summary, findings suggest that human or interpersonal managerial skills play a vital role in realizing the full potential of a company's employees. Furthermore, the feedback from executives revealed that integrity and communication were the two most crucial soft skills in the current work environment. Regarding success factors in top-level management, effective communication, integrity, and courtesy are being recognized as key interpersonal abilities.

## 2.5 Skill Development: The Golden Opportunity

After presenting studies on sports and top management, this section elaborates on the relationship between the two fields and emphasizes the opportunities it offers athletes.

Proissl (2021) highlighted a study conducted in Austria by the online research institution *Marketagent*, examining the factors that contribute to the success of top managers and elite athletes. The study aimed to compare the attitudes of 35 top managers and 31 elite athletes with those of 500 citizens regarding success-related factors, such as attitudes toward success, crisis handling, and resilience. The analysis revealed that there are certain personality traits and patterns of thinking that are prerequisites for exceptional careers in both sports and management. The study also emphasized the high intrinsic motivation among successful athletes and managers and their remarkable resilience in swiftly recovering from setbacks and setting new goals, distinguishing them from the general population. This was further underlined by the finding about their particularly optimistic attitude toward failure. 97 percent of them expressed a strong belief in their ability to overcome crises well, compared to 68 percent of the general population. Moreover, the study demonstrated a notable disparity in the perception of success among top athletes and managers compared to the general population. While top athletes and managers perceived success as the result of *hard work*, most citizens attributed it to *luck* or *talent*. Furthermore, a resilience barometer was presented, indicating that athletes demonstrate the highest resilience capability, followed by top management, while the general public ranks last. Hence, the higher resilience score observed among top athletes and managers highlighted their ability to tolerate frustration and failures. Overall, the study suggested that success is influenced by a combination of factors, including intrinsic motivation, resilience, high frustration tolerance, confidence to overcome crises, and a strong work ethic. The detailed rankings for each attribute in question are provided in Appendix B.

Another study by Gould and Carson (2008) examined the impact of participation in competitive youth sports on mental and physical development. The existing literature on life skills development through sports falls short of comprehensive theoretical explanations. Consequently, there is a deficit in understanding the factors contributing to the development of life skills through sport participation. To address this gap, Gould and Carson introduced a heuristic model that offers valuable insights into coaching life skills through team sports. The details of this model can be found in Appendix C. The model resulted from the general literature review analysis on psychosocial life skills in sports,

positive youth development through sports as well as extracurricular activities. Serving as a structured guide, this model summarizes existing findings and identifies transferrable skills that are valuable for other aspects of life. However, it is important to note that the model has yet to be directly tested, and further research is required to determine its effectiveness.

The literature review provides empirical evidence to support the theory that former elite athletes possess distinct advantages when entering the corporate world. Numerous studies (Brinkley et al., 2016; Dobosz, 1999; Ewig & Seefeldt, 2017; Maslen, 2015) have confirmed that soft skills acquired through team sports can be effectively transferred and applied to other areas in life. Thus, the transferability of these skills indicates that experiences gained in team sports can contribute to enhanced performance and success in the business world. Moreover, in today's business domain, soft skills have gained increasing significance, which is consistent with the studies by Manyika et al. (2017) and Robles (2012). Additionally, Sharma (2009) confirmed this by examining the growing importance of attaining higher organizational levels.

While these skills may require some adaption and refinement, they offer a solid foundation for a successful professional career (Dobosz, 1999). Although elite athletes may lack work experience and an in-depth understanding of the corporate world, their willingness to learn and improve constantly may raise their chances of success in the business world. With the right mindset, former competitive athletes can leverage their experience, related skill set, and experience to make a valuable contribution to the professional world (Brinkley et al., 2016). Many organizations recognize this potential and actively seek to recruit former athletes, offering specialized programs and resources to support their transition (Rice et al., 2016). However, it is essential to note that additional research is required to gain a deeper understanding of the specific factors and mechanisms that contribute to the transferability and effectiveness of these skills in business.

To conclude, the literature confirms that former top athletes have a golden opportunity to utilize their existing skill sets outside of sports and embark on a promising career path in the professional world.

### **3 Methodology**

This section provides a detailed description of the empirical methods utilized in this thesis. Kothari (2004) defines research's primary objective as applying scientific methods to address inquiries. The process involves collecting, organizing, and evaluating data to help bridge a research gap. Therefore, the methodology details the general approach to accomplish the objective of this thesis.

A theoretical foundation was first established by examining the available literature on team sports development to address the research question to identify the acquired skill set. Additionally, mutually beneficial skill sets for both sports and business were investigated. Drawing from the literature review, a comparison between the acquired skills from team sports and the required skill set for successful top management is conducted. The qualitative approach focusing on both athletic and professional careers and their corresponding correlation was chosen to accomplish this. Consequently, the qualitative method has been used to address the research question.

Eight semi-structured interviews (SSI) were conducted with a diverse group of interviewees for the qualitative research, covering different aspects of the research question. These interviews aimed to identify the key soft skills gained from team sports that can be successfully transferred to the business world. All interviews were compiled in written form (please refer to Appendix G-N) but have not been transcribed verbatim to improve readability by providing consistent summaries of the responses. The interviews were analyzed and coded using the MAXQDA software program (for the codes, please refer to Appendix O). Finally, the findings from the primary and secondary data analysis are assessed in relation to the research question and summarized in a conceptual framework in Chapter 5.

#### **3.1 Literature Review**

In the initial phase of this thesis, a comprehensive understanding of the current state of soft skill development through team sports and the skill set required for top management positions was obtained by reviewing relevant studies and data sets. This encompassed various studies and quantitative analyses from multiple research databases. In the concluding phase of the literature review, the identified vital traits were linked to each other to establish a seamless transition to the subsequent Chapter 4, which is the result

analysis. As the theoretical framework has already provided an in-depth understanding of the state of knowledge, there is no need to elaborate further on the methodology in this section.

An overview of the literature review's main topics to gain prior knowledge can be seen in Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

*Overview of Theoretical Framework*



Source: Created by the author

## **3.2 Empirical Method**

The upcoming section presents the empirical method selected to address the research question and sub-question and test the posed hypothesis. First, the expert interview method is presented. Then, the selection process of the respective interview partners is outlined, followed by explaining how the data was collected and evaluated. In addition to the literature analysis, expert interviews were conducted to generate novel insights into the transferability of team sports skills to the business context. The objective was to compare the distinct skill sets from both team sports and business by assessing the findings from the literature analysis alongside the expert opinions.

### **3.2.1 Research Design**

The research design is formulated after defining the research question. Rahi (2017) identified three research objectives: descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. Descriptive research aims to provide a detailed profile of events, situations, or individuals that seeks to understand how a specific phenomenon is currently operating. Explanatory research aims to explain a situation or problem frequently by identifying causal relationships, obtaining new insights, and testing hypotheses. It leads to identifying significant variables and issues relevant to the research problem, making it particularly substantial to quantitative research. Lastly, exploratory research seeks to gain novel insights and knowledge by examining phenomena from a new perspective. Therefore, exploratory research often adopts a qualitative methodology to gather various perspectives on existing problems and circumstances (Rahi, 2017).

This study employs an exploratory research design to examine the potential correlation between soft skills development in team sports and the skill set needed in top-level management. Hence, this research area holds great potential due to the vast amount of valuable and unexplored data available for investigation.

### **3.2.2 Research Approach**

The chosen research methodology lays the foundation for readers to assess the paper's credibility and subsequent conclusions. In academic research, two dominant methods are used: qualitative and quantitative (Kothari, 2004). The following paragraphs elaborate on both methods and justify using the research method applied in this paper.

### **3.2.3 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research**

Qualitative research generates in-depth, detailed, and valid process data that preserve the perspectives of study participants. According to Steckler et al. (1992), it involves the interpretation of people's observations and perceptions of events in a natural setting, providing insights into their experiences. Its main objective is understanding people's feelings or thoughts about a particular topic or phenomenon (Kothari, 2004). Qualitative research offers a subjective assessment of behaviors, views, and attitudes, and its results are typically presented verbally through interviews, followed by data and content analysis. Thus, the data is gathered through a meticulous selection of interviewees who are asked a specific set of questions (Steckler et al., 1992).

On the other hand, as the name already indicates, quantitative research refers to quantities or numbers. The quantitative research method is based on techniques used in physical sciences, such as statistical analysis, surveys, and experiments (Gray et al., 2007). According to Steckler et al. (1992), it is used to collect data on group samples to maximize objectivity by generating "*measures that are reliable, generalizable, and unbiased*" (p. 2). This method is commonly used to test hypotheses and make predictions about the relationship between variables (Steckler et al., 1992).

In essence, the application of quantitative research generates outcome data that are generalizable and may be applied to a larger population, whereas qualitative research yields comprehensive process data that uphold the viewpoints of the study participants. For improved clarity and organization, Table 4 presents a comparative analysis of the attributes of both methods.

**Table 4**

*Attributes of Evaluation Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative*

<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
Deductive: Verification and Outcome-Oriented	Inductive: Discovery and Process-Oriented
Measurement Tends to Be Objective	Measurement Tends to Be Subjective
Reliable: Technology as Instrument (The Evaluator is Removed from The Data)	Valid: Self as Instrument (The Evaluator is Close to The Data)
Generalizable: The Outsider's Perspective Population-Oriented	Ungeneralizable: The Insider's Perspective Case-Oriented

Source: Adapted from Steckler et al. (1992)

Based on the information presented, it is evident that the qualitative approach is more appropriate to address the research question effectively. This involves the collection of non-numerical data through SSI. Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative research emphasizes detailed, rich, and contextual data that can give the reader a deeper understanding of the research topic. Thus, the use of the qualitative approach is justified for this study.

### **3.2.4 Interview Analysis: Inductive vs. Deductive Methods**

There are two widely recognized research methods, namely inductive and deductive reasoning. They can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative research. However, as presented in Table 5, the deductive approach is primarily utilized in quantitative research, while the inductive method is frequently used in qualitative research (Gray et al., 2007). Consequently, research methods can be broadly classified into the following two categories:

#### *Deductive Reasoning in Quantitative Research*

In quantitative research, deductive reasoning involves starting with an established theory or hypothesis and then utilizing it to direct the data collection and analysis. As Hyde (2000) stated, this approach enables testing these pre-existing theories and hypotheses. The researcher first develops a theory or hypothesis and then designs a survey or an experiment to try it. Based on the data, predictions, and conclusions are drawn by using statistical analysis (Hyde, 2000).

#### *Inductive Reasoning in Qualitative Research*

In qualitative research, both inductive and deductive methods can be applied. In a deductive approach, the researcher starts with building categories of their analysis in

advance. According to Hayes et al. (2010), this requires using pre-existing theoretical frameworks or hypotheses and is followed by linking the data to specific groups. This enables the researcher to identify key top are vital to their study. Contrarily, an inductive approach starts with the data and lets patterns, themes, and theories naturally develop during the examination. Therefore, common themes across the data set must be identified first, and specific observations should be made before drawing any conclusions. This method allows the researcher to discover novel theories and hypotheses, leading to more complex results (Hayes et al., 2010).

Two of the most widely recognized methods for conducting qualitative analysis include thematic content analysis and narrative analysis. The thematic content analysis starts with eliminating biases and creating overarching perceptions of the data used. By searching the data naturally, common themes can be identified. In contrast, narrative analysis focuses on individual stories by interpreting and highlighting key elements of the respondent's experiences. Thus, new theories and hypotheses can be developed through both strategies (Forman & Damschroder, 2007).

To conclude, deductive analysis allows the researcher to evaluate and test the validity of pre-existing research findings and theories. In contrast, inductive analysis generates more sophisticated findings, resulting in the creation of new knowledge. Consequently, this thesis employs both deductive and inductive reasoning to analyze the data and achieve the research objective. The mixed approach allows using deductive analysis to test the initial hypothesis while also using inductive narrative analysis to identify new patterns and themes based on empirical data. The codes were created during the data analysis process, ensuring a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the research participants. This allows to identify patterns leading to success in the professional world, which then supports or contradicts the initial hypothesis.

### **3.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews and Interview Guide**

For this thesis, the qualitative method of expert interviews was chosen as SSI, which uses a mix of closed- and open-ended inquiries and is frequently followed by why- or how-specific questions (Adams, 2015). This combination of structured and unstructured interviews allows a more conversational and exploratory approach while ensuring that specific questions are covered. This method enables the interviewer to cover all relevant questions and still have the ability to ask follow-up questions to delve deeper into the

interviewee's experiences and perspectives. Consequently, SSI are an effective tool for comprehensively understanding a particular topic.

According to Bogner et al. (2009), expert interviews provide a rapid and efficient method to attain not only results but also high-quality results. Individuals with specialized knowledge or experience in the area of interest are interviewed as experts to gain a deeper understanding of the research question. The collected data is then analyzed to identify themes and patterns in the responses.

The interview guide served as the foundation for all interviewees, providing a structured framework of questions. The interview guides used for this thesis can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F, respectively. The guide is divided into five parts: Introductory Question, Sports Career, Professional Career Path and Success, Correlation: Impact on Success, and Final Question. Nevertheless, some questions were omitted depending on the interviewee, and spontaneous follow-up questions were asked. The interview was designed as an open discussion allowing the interview partners to actively share their insights and experiences on their perspective of soft skills development through team sports.

### 3.2.4 Selection of Interview Partners

This study involved conducting a total of eight SSI, composed of one female and seven male individuals. The overview of all interview participants is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Interview Partners*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Sport</b>
Mario Gyr	Investment Fund Lawyer / Investor & Member of the Board of Directors	Partners Group / Start-ups	Rowing
Beni Huggel	Co-Founder	Athletes Network	Soccer
Heinz Karrer	Chairman of the Board of Directors / Founder	Jungfraubahn Holding AG / KARFAM GmbH	Handball
Florence Schelling	Founder & CEO	Focusfinder	Ice Hockey
Roger Schnegg	CEO	Swiss Olympic	Volleyball
Josh Simpson	Co-Founder & President	Pacific Football Club Canada	Soccer
Peter Spuhler	Chairman of the Board of Directors	Stadler Rail	Ice Hockey
Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Chairman of the Board of Directors & Senior Headhunter	MPB Executive Search	No Elite Sports Background

Source: Created by the author

The interview partners are introduced in Appendix D, explaining in more detail why they were selected.

### **3.2.5 Data Collection, Scope, and Evaluation**

To ensure a representative sample, all interviewees were required to be Swiss residents who participate in the Swiss labor market. They should possess a team sports background and currently hold a top management position. Individuals from diverse sporting disciplines, including handball, ice hockey, rowing, soccer, and volleyball, were selected to ensure the coverage of various team sports. Following the selection process, the identified interview partners were contacted through various means such as LinkedIn, email, phone calls, or personal connections, and interviews were scheduled accordingly.

The total duration of all eight interviews amounted to approximately 8 hours and 45 minutes. The interview duration ranged from 30 to 120 minutes and was conducted through various means, such as in-person, via Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or phone calls. The interviews were conducted in the interviewee's native language, including Swiss German and English, to ensure high-quality data gathering. All interview partners approved the recording of the interview and authorized the usage of their names in the thesis.

Once the interview process was completed, the data needed to be analyzed and evaluated. For that, the coding technique from Gläser and Laudel (2010) was applied to analyze the interview data. The process begins with reading and re-reading all interviews to understand the content. Then, open coding is employed to identify and label strong statements or answers, allowing new categories to emerge. This is followed by clustering similar categories sharing a common concept or meaning. Constant comparison ensures consistency and refines categories. Lastly, the analysis ends once theoretical saturation is achieved. The eight interviews were analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis program for this research. The categorized interview responses can be found in Appendix P. Finally, the result analysis is presented in the subsequent chapter, namely the Findings.

## **4 Findings**

This section presents the findings of the interviews to address the research question and test the hypothesis. It involves presenting the key results derived from these interviews and providing valuable firsthand insights. These outcomes are classified into three categories outlined in the interview guide: Sports Career, Professional Career Path and Success, and Correlation: Impact on Success. Additionally, all pertinent codes generated during the data analysis process are highlighted.

The first section analyzes the expert's athletic career, providing in-depth insights and experiences regarding the development of soft skills through their respective sports. Following this, a thorough examination is presented, focusing on the factors identified by the respondents that contributed to their professional career success. Subsequently, the correlation between their team sports involvement and career success is analyzed further. The analysis explores the competencies deemed essential by the interviewees in achieving their professional goals and becoming top performers in their respective fields. The aim is to provide a thorough understanding of the factors crucial to success in top management.

### **4.1 Results of Interviews**

This section presents the interview results, focusing on the major themes and categories that emerged from the data. These themes and categories are organized based on the codes created using MAXQDA, providing insights into the experiences and perspectives of the interview participants. All data presented in this section are based on expert interviews. Since the majority of the interviews were conducted in Swiss German, the researcher undertook the translation process. The primary objective was to preserve the core message communicated by the interviewees and ensure the most accurate translation possible.

#### **4.1.1 Sports Career**

In the interviews, seven out of eight participants had an elite team sports background, enabling them to determine which soft skills were most prominently acquired through their athletic experiences. Therefore, the first part focuses on their athletic career and the related soft skills gained through team sports, starting by exploring their motivation to become a sportsperson.

### *Motivation for Becoming a Sportsperson*

Most of the former athletes had individual motives to become a competitive athlete. Nevertheless, some similarities emerged. For example, Beni Huggel (Soccer) and Florence Schelling (Ice Hockey) did not actively pursue a career as professional athletes but instead stumbled into it over time. Emerging through a step-by-step process by constantly investing more time and effort.

Moreover, Roger Schnegg (Volleyball) and Peter Spuhler (Ice Hockey) started their athletic careers for the enjoyment, friendship, and unique atmosphere in the sports hall. The experience of having thousands of spectators cheering them on was genuinely exhilarating. Peter Spuhler also mentioned the high level of intellect demanded for ice hockey. As a fast-paced sport, it is played in four blocks of five players each, all staying on the field for a maximum of one minute. Each block follows a specific strategic order, requiring pre-planned moves executed seamlessly under pressure and mental stress. This made ice hockey a valuable training ground for life.

Mario Gyr (Rowing) and Josh Simpson (Soccer) have shared similar motivations for becoming professional athletes. Mario Gyr had always dreamed of winning Olympic gold since childhood, while Josh Simpson was inspired by watching the 1994 World Cup and knew he never wanted to be anything else than a professional football player. Even though Canada was not in the World Cup at that time, his ultimate goal was to attend the World Cup with the National Team. Later, both of their dreams became true.

On the contrary, Heinz Karrer (Handball) had a competitive mindset since childhood and always strived to win, making his path to becoming a professional athlete unsurprising. Being talented above average motivated him to become even better, leading to him playing in higher leagues and eventually the highest Swiss league in Handball. He was also drawn to team sports because of the sense of belonging and working toward a common goal, always being fascinated by the integration of all team members in one team.

### *Identify Strengths of Others and Own Core Strength*

The question regarding their strength within the team and the unique skills of their team members aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how team sports helped them to identify and appreciate other people's strengths, as it provided an asset to the team. Each

team member has their strengths, contributing to the overall team's success. Thus, everyone is needed, and success cannot be achieved through a single individual alone.

The responses indicate a clear link between their ability to identify strengths in others and their participation in team sports. One interviewee did not answer the question. Thus, five out of the remaining six interviewees are convinced that their involvement in professional team sports significantly impacted their ability to identify strengths in others. However, it is important to note that this skill also extends to identifying weaknesses. With this, Mario Gyr said:

*“But you not only get to know the strengths but also the weaknesses of your teammates. Competitive sport is brutal. In business, the boundaries are fluid. Sport is non-negotiable. There are no excuses. This self-reflection is what sport brings with it.”*

Mario Gyr

Peter Spuhler also mentioned the resulting benefit of knowing his team member's strengths and weaknesses, namely lifelong friendships. In addition to this, the following statements were provided by the interviewees:

*“I am 100 percent sure that I got the skill identify the strength of others from team sports. I always thought about how to integrate other team members to be successful. Thus, yes, recognize strength in others definitely comes from sports.”*

Beni Huggel

*“We were Swiss champion back in our junior years and I spent a lot of time with my friends to whom I still have contact nowadays. I think it develops a really strong bond of friendship.”*

Peter Spuhler

Generally, over 83 percent of the respondents (five out of six) allocate this skill to their sport experience. Heinz Karrer, in contrast, is unsure if this ability is an acquired skill developed through team sports or a natural intuition, describing it as follows:

*“I always exactly knew how the others think and what they need. I can name you the strengths and weaknesses of all my team players. The one who played unfair had to me reminded, the one who got aggressive had to be calmed down. I could identify the talents and was able to promote them as a leader. Sometimes it was just a ‘throw the ball, you can do it’ needed and I used that intuitively. I cannot say if it is a developed skill or a natural intuition.”*

Heinz Karrer

In addition, the participants were asked to name their key strengths within the team. Due to the varying nature of their sports discipline, the skills mentioned by each participant varied accordingly. Nevertheless, certain similarities were found among the responses. One such similarity was the emphasis on mentality, as mentioned by Beni Huggel and Florence Schelling. Beni Huggel emphasized his mental strength, highlighting the importance of never giving up and maintaining a positive attitude even in difficult situations. Florence Schelling identified her strength as her ability to handle pressure. Secondly, as the goalkeeper is said to make 50 percent of the team's performance, her team could always rely on her as a *solid rock*, giving 100 percent and supporting her team as best as she possibly could. She also highlighted the challenge of performing when it matters the most and being mentally prepared at game time. The second similarity was the self-identification as *fighters*. With their tenacity and determination, Mario Gyr and Beni Huggel were both renowned for their fighting spirit. As for Mario Gyr, he described his strengths as follows:

*“My strengths were my good rhythm and my technique. I was a racer! As soon as the light switched from red to green, my gladiator mode started. It needed everyone in the team, we contributed equally to the team performance, and we all needed to have the same rhythm. Of course, the stroke was important, but it takes everyone at the same time.”*

Mario Gyr

Heinz Karrer identified his primary strength as having a deep understanding of his teammate's thoughts and needs. Roger Schnegg, on the other hand, considered himself a skilled coordinator who provided a solid platform for others and having the best people around him. Josh Simpson distinguished his core strength into two categories: in the locker room, his strength lay in spreading positive energy and confidence, while on the pitch, he was renowned for his power, speed, and drive to score. Peter Spuhler believed his two main strengths were his strong sense of discipline and clear leadership aspirations.

Based on the responses, it can be concluded that the majority of the interviewees attribute their ability to identify strengths in themselves and others to their participation in professional team sports. In fact, over 83 percent of the participants stated that they would allocate this skill to their athletic careers.

An overview of the respondent’s main strengths within the team can be found in the following Table 6:

**Table 6**

*Main Strengths in Team*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Main Strengths in Team</b>
Mario Gyr	Rhythm, Technique, Fighting Spirit
Beni Huggel	Mentality, Fighting Spirit
Heinz Karrer	People Skills, Understanding of Thoughts and Needs
Florence Schelling	Performance under Pressure, Reliability
Roger Schnegg	Team Player, Coordinator
Josh Simpson	Positive Energy, Confidence
Peter Spuhler	Strong Discipline, Leadership Qualities

Source: Created by the author

### *Leadership Role in Sports*

To determine their leadership potential and initial experience in leading a team, the question was posed if the participants had assumed any leadership role within their teams while pursuing their athletic careers.

All seven participants assumed some form of leadership role during their athletic career, demonstrating their willingness to take over responsibility for a team. These roles did not necessarily involve being the team captain, as leadership can manifest in various ways. Heinz Karrer was captain of the handball team *Otmar St. Gallen* until the end of his sports career. Similarly, Peter Spuhler held the role of team captain almost throughout his entire career at *Grasshopper Club Zurich*. Building upon his main strength mentioned above, he further explained his argument as follows:

*“Throughout my athletic career, I have held the position of captain in nearly every team I played for. At the youngster level, I have always been the captain. I think my characteristic traits of my strong sense of discipline, and having a certain claim to leadership were two of my main strengths. While I was physically strong, my technical skills were somewhat limited.”*

**Peter Spuhler**

Correspondingly, Roger Schnegg held a triple responsibility for over six years as a player, coach, and club president at the *Volleyball Club Münchenbuchsee*.

Moreover, Josh Simpson had no leadership position at the beginning of his career, as he was only 22. He considered himself more of a *follower* during this time. However, as he gained more experience and reached the age of 25, his role within the team changed. Toward the end of his career, he was captain of the Canadian national team and the club he played for.

However, Mario Gyr and Florence Schelling did not consider themselves as having the traditional *captain* role but rather as having a supporting function within the team. Although Mario Gyr was the stroke in the team and set the rhythm, he did not consider himself a leader. Similarly, as a goalkeeper, Florence Schelling was not allowed to cross the red line on the field, making it impossible for her to approach the referee on the other side and therefore act as captain. Nevertheless, she was on the captain's team and definitely had a team leadership role by continually supporting the team with her experience and standing up for her teammates.

Overall, the data suggest that leadership experience is common among all participants. It also indicates that the experience gained through team sports provides an excellent platform for developing leadership qualities and can translate into valuable leadership skills.

#### *Valuable Skills through Team Sports*

In a next step, the participants were asked the following question to explore acquiring essential skills through sports: “*Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?*”. All participants immediately answered this question with “*Yes, definitely.*”

Although the expert's responses varied, it was notable that the skill of direct and effective communication was mentioned by two of them. Mario Gyr and Florence Schelling both highlighted the importance of communication, and Mario Gyr put it in comparison with the strict hierarchy in hospitals: once entering the surgery room, the only thing that counts is the result, and for that, immediate feedback is required. Thus, his team followed the same principle on the boat, where unpleasant situations had to be addressed immediately. He also highlighted the significance of consistency, as his team believed it was better to be consistently good rather than being extremely good on one day and then bad again on the next. But this consistency was necessary 365 days a year. Furthermore, resilience and mental toughness were particularly emphasized by two experts, namely Florence

Schelling and Josh Simpson. In addition, Josh Simpson mentioned the importance of social competence and being able to read others. Moreover, Florence Schelling and Peter Spuhler considered preparation as highly valuable. This is closely related to Heinz Karrer’s statement, as he emphasized the highly valuable skill of having goals. He underlined this point by stating:

*“The objective was to think about what I can do that makes the possibility to achieve the goal as high as possible. A great example is the Champions League Final in 1982 where we defeated several teams which were supposed to be better than us. We aimed to reach the Champions League Final but for that we had to think about how to prepare even before the season started. Thus, we had to prepare and perform even better than before. So, questions arose about how to train, which athletic program to use, on what to focus on and especially how to measure our progress in terms of performance test. In the end, we achieved the goal and ended in the final round where we lost by many goals, but it was about reaching the goal.”*

**Heinz Karrer**

While some participants shared common skills in their answers, others provided unique insights into the valuable skills learned through their sports careers. Beni Huggel, for example, learned how to deal with different types of people and to fit into a group by playing with football players from all around the world. In addition, Roger Schnegg highlighted that Switzerland embodies the Olympic values of excellence, respect, and friendship. These are precisely the values he learned through sports.

The skills mentioned by the interviewees are summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Valuable Skills Developed through Team Sports*

Mario Gyr	Consistency and Direct Communication
Beni Huggel	Dealing with all Types of People
Heinz Karrer	The Skill of Having Goals
Florence Schelling	Transparency, Communication, Focus, Resilience, Mental Toughness, and Preparation
Roger Schnegg	Values of Excellence, Respect, and Friendship
Josh Simpson	Resilience, Drive, Mental Toughness, Social Competence and Ability to Read Others
Peter Spuhler	Discipline, Punctuality, and Preparation

Source: Created by author

In conclusion, the repeatedly mentioned skills such as communication, mental toughness, resilience, and preparation were identified as vital. Furthermore, social competence was also mentioned by some experts, albeit in varying contexts.

### *Biggest Learning from Team Sports*

When questioned about their most significant learning from team sports, the experts provided similar responses as in the abovementioned section.

Mario Gyr emphasized the importance of consistency in performance, as well as efficient time management and the ability to deal with difficult personalities. In addition, Beni Huggel mentioned people skills and teamwork, while Heinz Karrer highlighted the mentality required for success, including reflection and building healthy self-confidence. Moreover, Florence Schelling named focus and delivering 100 percent when needed. Furthermore, Roger Schnegg identified teamwork and the ability to handle pressure, whereas Josh Simpson stated resilience, drive, and mental toughness as his biggest learnings. Lastly, Peter Spuhler stressed the significance of integration, discipline, and fighting together for a common goal while also acknowledging the importance of having fun. The experts identified these skills as the most important learnings throughout their athletic careers.

### *Transition into Professional World*

To gain insights into the intersection of their athletic careers with academic education or professional work, their transition into the business world was examined.

Three out of the seven experts experienced an abrupt transition into the professional world, while for the other four, the transition went smoothly as they never fully pursued a professional career and worked or studied in parallel. Mario Gyr, for example, studied law alongside his athletic career and worked part-time in a law firm. He only took a break from both during the Olympic preparation to focus entirely on rowing. Additionally, Florence Schelling and Peter Spuhler pursued their academic studies in parallel. In Peter Spuhler's case, he also started his career in the Swiss army. In contrast, Josh Simpson faced difficulties during the transition as he lacked structure. However, it ultimately led him to develop a more organized routine through working fixed hours.

Multiple experts highlighted the significance of having another activity alongside sports, as their emotional stability and happiness would not solely depend on their athletic

success. Professional sport is highly demanding and can strongly affect an athlete's emotional state. Thus, these experts emphasized the need to find the right balance to ensure focus on both pursuits.

This serves as a bridge that connects the sports career to the subsequent topic, the professional world.

#### **4.1.2 Professional Career Path and Success**

This section aims to determine the required soft skills in top management positions from the expert's perspective and highlights the relevant competencies leading to their career success.

##### *First Top Management Position*

The purpose of determining when the experts achieved their first top management position was to identify the average age range at which such positions were attained following their athletic careers. When solely considering former top athletes, the average age at which they reached their first top management position is nearly 34 (more precisely, 33.86). However, with the inclusion of Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi, the average age slightly decreases to approximately 33 years (more precisely, 33.25).

##### *Career Challenges and Related Skills*

The experts were questioned regarding their greatest challenges encountered in their professional careers and the related soft skills that aided them in overcoming them. The responses are classified by the individual, beginning with describing their most significant challenge and the corresponding skills that proved crucial in overcoming it.

Firstly, Mario Gyr's most significant challenge was entering the professional world at a later stage, where he found himself among much younger colleagues holding the same rank. He mentioned mental strength as a crucial skill to overcome this hurdle, enabling him to set aside his ego and fully concentrate on his job performance.

Secondly, Beni Huggel identified the transition into the business world as the biggest challenge. He first had to understand that the corporate world functions differently. In sports, he has used much more explicit language and received immediate feedback. But business has different rules, which created a major challenge. Additionally, he had to learn that people and functions are not as efficient and productive as he had anticipated.

Something that does not exist in professional sports. If the training is not effective, the approach has to be changed. It is impossible to train for weeks without seeing any progress. Thus, he learned that motives vary and that not everyone wants to perform in the same way. Therefore, he cited his positive attitude, self-confidence, and resilience as primary skills that enabled him to overcome this challenge - something he already encountered while being injured.

Thirdly, Heinz Karrer faced several challenges throughout his career, including undergoing a rehabilitation procedure devising and restructuring plan, implementing job cuts, launching an initial public offering (IPO), and dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident while serving as CEO of Axpo a major energy supplier and nuclear power plant operator. One major challenge was the closure of a storage facility due to liquidity shortages located only a few meters from where he grew up. At the age of 30, he had to inform 110 employees that they would be losing their jobs. This was particularly difficult due to the personal connection he had with many of them, as they were the parents of his former school colleagues. However, he promised to find them new jobs and successfully secured new employment for 103 of them while facilitating early retirement for the remaining seven. Another severe challenge was taking over the presidium for *economiesuisse*, where he faced intense media presence, placing substantial pressure on him. He was constantly monitored and criticized, to the point where he had to redirect his mail to the police for a year and a half to have all letters scanned. This highlights the drawbacks of highly exposed top managers, as it requires the willingness and ability to cope with such demands. Regarding the skills that enabled him to master these challenges, he mentioned his drive and ability to perform under pressure. As a former top athlete, he was used to operating at peak performance for extended periods of time.

Fourthly, Florence Schelling stated proper communication as a significant challenge as Head of Sports at SCB. All statements had to be backed up with facts and arguments to be carefully formulated in a factful manner. She emphasized her willingness to learn and continuously improve as key factors in overcoming the challenge. Moreover, her resilience and capacity to perform under pressure proved crucial to her success.

Fifthly, when Roger Schnegg took over the CEO position for Swiss Volley, he faced significant liquidity issues, ultimately leading to a complete restructuring of the association. For one and a half years, he had only one free Sunday, highlighting the

immense pressure he encountered. In addition, he faced a new challenge as CEO of Swiss Olympic when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, as they had to adapt to all restrictions imposed by the government quickly. Further, Swiss Olympic was granted a financial aid package exceeding CHF 300 million that had to be fairly distributed among all clubs. He emphasized the importance of prioritizing skills in overcoming challenges, summarizing it with the quote, *“It is better to be roughly right than precisely wrong.”*

Sixthly, Josh Simpson faced his biggest challenge in people relation skills. Resolving conflict in the office made him realize the importance of having good managers in place at all levels of management. He identified his resilience and social competencies as crucial in resolving interpersonal problems.

As the seventh expert, Peter Spuhler faced various challenges during his 37-year tenure. The first significant challenge was regularly paying off the bank’s interest rate and amortizing his loan. In the mid-90s, his company set the goal to develop its own vehicles, a decision that was ridiculed by others at that time. However, being underestimated was ultimately advantageous for the company. This decision to become a rail manufacturer was undoubtedly a major challenge to overcome. Regarding his skill, he highlighted resilience and being courageous but still in a thoughtful manner as critical determinants in overcoming obstacles. Throughout his career, he successfully doubled the number of employees and revenue several times. Therefore, he always had to carefully assess potential risks while still having the courage to implement novel initiatives at the right moment. He concluded his statement with the following remark:

*“Do you know Helmut Maucher? He was the man who made Nestle great. He once said that three characteristics are necessary for an entrepreneur: courage, strength of nerves, and composure. I fully support his view. However, I would say that there is still a very essential fourth characteristic needed: passion! This makes the difference between an absolute top manager and an entrepreneur. In German, the word ‘Leidenschaft’ includes the word ‘Leid’, which means that you have to persevere and show a certain bite.”*

Peter Spuhler

Lastly, for Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi experiencing four recessions during his 36-year career created severe challenges. As an entrepreneur, he could substantially reduce costs within two months through redundancies if necessary. However, the recessions still had a negative impact on his business. He emphasized that his willingness to work hard, high

level of commitment, and perseverance were critical factors in successfully overcoming the recessions.

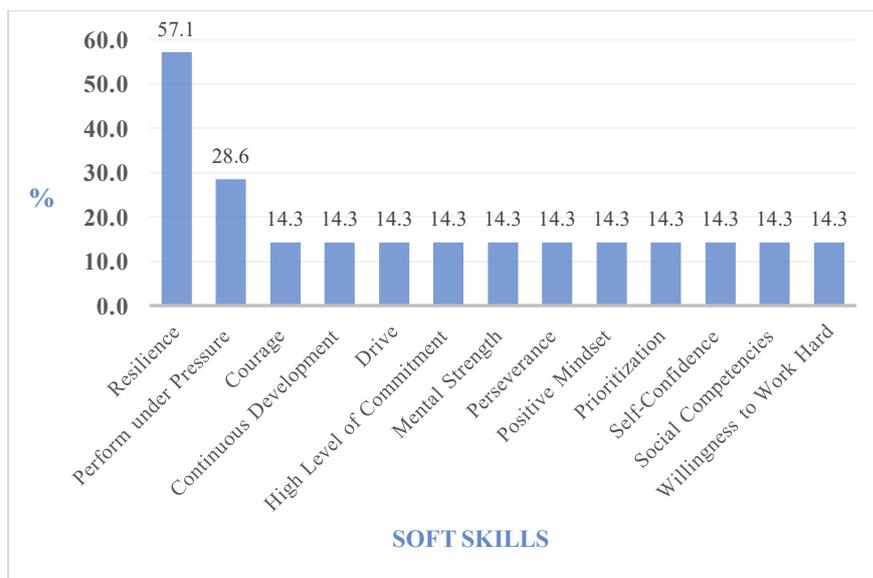
In summary, the experts have identified specific skills that are essential for successfully addressing challenges, which can be consolidated as follows:

- Resilience (mentioned by four experts)
- Perform under Pressure (mentioned by two experts)
- Courage (mentioned by one expert)
- Continuous development (mentioned by one expert)
- Drive (mentioned by one expert)
- High Level of Commitment (mentioned by one expert)
- Mental Strength (mentioned by one expert)
- Perseverance (mentioned by one expert)
- Positive Mindset (mentioned by one expert)
- Prioritization (mentioned by one expert)
- Self-Confidence (mentioned by one expert)
- Social Competencies (mentioned by one expert)
- Willingness to Work Hard (mentioned by one expert)

Figure 8 presents a summarized overview of the mentioned skills, indicating the corresponding percentage of experts identifying each skill.

**Figure 8**

*Skill Set to Master Challenges*



Source: Created by the author

Overall, resilience was commonly mentioned by 57.1 percent of the experts as a significant skill, followed by the ability to perform under pressure, cited by 28.6 percent. This highlights the importance of these skills in overcoming challenges.

#### *Most Valuable Skills in Top Management*

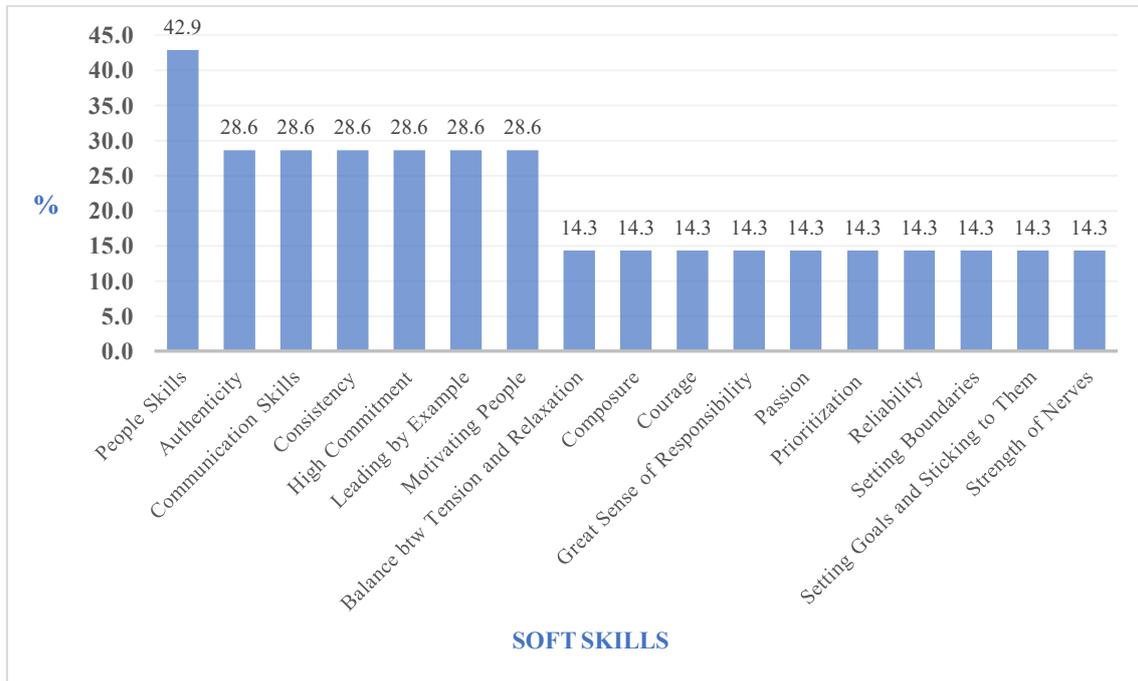
When questioned about their most essential and valuable skills in top management, the respondents provided comparable responses. This question aimed to identify the critical skills in top management that were deemed crucial from the interviewee's perspective.

- People Skills (mentioned by three experts)
- Authenticity (mentioned by two experts)
- Communication Skills (mentioned by two experts)
- Consistency (mentioned by two experts)
- High Commitment (mentioned by two experts)
- Leading by Example (mentioned by two experts)
- Motivating People (mentioned by two experts)
- Balance between Tension and Relaxation (mentioned by one expert)
- Composure (mentioned by one expert)
- Courage (mentioned by one expert)
- Great Sense of Responsibility (mentioned by one expert)
- Passion (mentioned by one expert)
- Prioritization (mentioned by one expert)
- Reliability (mentioned by one expert)
- Setting Boundaries (mentioned by one expert)
- Setting Goals and Sticking to Them (mentioned by one expert)
- Strength of Nerves (mentioned by one expert)

Figure 9 presents a comprehensive overview of the abovementioned skills, with the percentage indicating the number of experts who identified each skill as crucial.

Figure 9

Most Valuable Skills in Top Management



Source: Created by the author

Mario Gyr highlighted the importance of consistently delivering exceptional performance and having the ability to read people and their diverse cultural backgrounds. To support his perspective, he shared the following anecdote:

*“My team consisted of one guy from Ticino, one from Basel and one from Geneva. The French speaking teammate always thought that the German-speaking is making fun of him. So, I said okay let’s talk in French from now on and the problem was solved.”*

Mario Gyr

Florence Schelling expressed her uncertainty in naming a specific skill, as she is still discovering it. Josh Simpson identified people skills as the most valuable skill in his role. Managing people entails navigating diverse personalities and motivations, underlining the significance of perceiving and addressing their specific needs.

Peter Spuhler and Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi found common ground in their perspectives, including teamwork, motivation, and having a clear goal and vision.

Peter Spuhler approached the question by distinguishing between a manager and an entrepreneur. In his perspective, personally investing in a company and actively participating carries more weight than being a manager in large organizations.

Entrepreneurs, who have their entire wealth tied to the company, bear a higher level of responsibility as it directly impacts them personally. In addition, he mentioned out-of-the-box thinking. To him, it is about finding an individual profile by constantly questioning and reviewing one's actions and decisions. Moreover, it involves considering what to do differently, as going along with the crowd has rarely led to success. Further, he once again highlighted the importance of courage, strength of nerves, composure, and passion, as well as defining a clear strategy and consequently adhering to it. He referenced the quote, *"When we lost sight of the goal, we doubled the effort,"* underlying the value of setting clear goals and consistently pursuing them. Finally, he concluded his response by summarizing his primary strength:

*"I can assemble a team, motivate them to work together and move forward as a team. Compensating for weaknesses and leveraging strengths, utilizing the expertise of exceptional engineers and leaders to form the best possible team. And then integrating them as team players into the whole. Motivation means moving forward, which I learned strongly in the military. Also, lifting together under physical and mental pressure."*

Peter Spuhler

Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi differentiated between professional and soft skills. While technical knowledge and expertise must be given, he illustrated this by stating *"I mean a bricklayer must be able to build a straight wall. This is a basic condition."*

In relation to soft skills, he mentioned the importance of leading by example, demonstrating high performance and commitment, as well as having a vision and being able to share that vision in order to create a team spirit and inspire others. This is underlined with the following statements:

*"When they see that you work hard and try your best to bring the company a step forward, they will follow and do the same. Thus, it is about behaving in an exemplary manner and be authentic."*

*"In the end it is all that counts, if one person knows how to win over a team and their people, the team performance will increase. Thus, everyone is part of the company's success. The CEO or Chairman are defining the mission and strategy, but then they have to win people over to execute the defined strategy. This must be aligned in order to work out. This also requires technical expertise as new products need to be accepted by the market to be successful."*

Helmut Zimmerli

In conclusion, it is evident that top executives possess a diverse set of valuable skills. People skills emerged as the most frequently mentioned skill, underlining its significance in effective leadership. Additionally, competencies such as authenticity, communication, consistency, high commitment, leading by example, and motivating people were identified as key factors contributing to success in top management roles. Significantly, resilience and the ability to perform under pressure were consistently highlighted as critical skills when confronting challenges.

#### **4.1.3 Correlation: Impact on Success**

This section aims to connect the previous sub-chapters by determining essential skills required in both fields, sports and business. The goal is to identify whether a potential correlation exists, which is crucial in addressing this thesis's research question, sub-question, and hypothesis.

##### *The Role of Team Sports in Career Development*

To obtain a deeper understanding of the impact team sports had on the expert's career development, the following two questions were asked:

- 1) *Do you feel that your sports experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?*
- 2) *What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position?*

The results indicate that of the seven experts with a professional sports background, all are convinced that sports significantly impacted their professional career success. Regarding the specific skills that positively contributed to their journey toward becoming top executives, the following were identified:

**Mario Gyr** emphasized the importance of hard work, effective time management, and people skills, with consistency being identified as the most important factor. Additionally, dealing with defeats created one of the most outstanding learnings from sports, as victories, as well as defeats, should not be overestimated. Furthermore, he indicated that top athletes, especially from marginal sports, develop an entirely different kind of ambition which is mainly intrinsic rather than monetary or status related. Thus, they are fundamentally motivated by success rather than money.

Consequently, he shared the following statements:

*“Of course, my sporty gene helps me in negotiations. I always try to find an agreement instead of winning all the points.”*

*“The athlete’s high level of competitiveness provides an advantage because you always want to be the best which means you have to belong to the top performers.”*

Mario Gyr

**Beni Huggel** directly confirmed the question with *“Yes, definitely.”* He learned life skills such as dealing with setbacks, being disciplined, and making sacrifices. The last point is often forgotten by most. Of course, being a competitive athlete has many advantages, especially in terms of business benefits, as it opens doors and builds networks. However, he also had to give up on things that should also be considered.

**Heinz Karrer** followed up on that and stated that athletes definitely enjoy sympathy. He shared a story about a family business where he held the chairman of the board mandate. As they received an application from a handball player, the employer attended one of his games and decided to hire him based on his playing style. He reflected on this anecdote to highlight the advantage of job opportunities. He further expressed uncertainty about whether he would have taken the first job opportunity in top management without a sports background. Being involved in elite sports provided him with a certain degree of confidence.

**Florence Schelling** shared a similar view. Emphasizing the value of establishing a reputation as an athlete helped her during her professional career. She noted that her name carries significance and acts as a form of branding, which is particularly impactful for individual athletes since team sport is primarily defined by collective performance rather than individual contributions. She may not have fully recognized the importance of sponsoring events and networking during her career, but she quickly realized this when transitioning out of sports.

**Roger Schnegg** placed particular emphasis on his exceptional people skills, highlighting his ability to interact with individuals through active listening and attentiveness. He also underscored the importance of networking, as already mentioned by Beni Huggel, Heinz Karrer, and Florence Schelling. Furthermore, he regarded authenticity, credibility, and the team concept as crucial in attaining his top management position.

**Josh Simpson's** work ethic, drive, and mental toughness proved vital in reaching top management. As he started to drive Canada's growth in football investments with his start-up, he worked 18 hours a day as he had to sit on every board in the area and give speeches almost every evening. This highlighted the extent of exhaustion experienced after a few days of inadequate sleep. Hence, he argued as follows when it came to his winning traits in achieving a top management role:

*"You know, start-ups are tough. You have to believe in yourself and work hard. If you hire people and want to have their confidence you have to demonstrate that you believe in what you are doing, so that they trust you. People only follow if you believe in yourself, and they will only bring new people if you are confident to succeed."*

*"So, I am currently in a senior management position where I just got a 300 million deal as a broker. Have I ever done it? No. Can I do it? Hell yes! And that is exactly what I mean with the confidence I gained from sports."*

Josh Simpson

**Peter Spuhler** highlighted two vital factors positively influencing his entrepreneurial career, namely sports and military service. In sports, learning to fit in a team, working together toward a common goal, and being disciplined while still embracing enjoyment were identified as fundamental to becoming a top executive. Moreover, the power of concentration and the organizational skills required while studying in parallel proved crucial. Nevertheless, he stated that recognizing and seizing opportunities also requires a certain amount of chance. Being at the right place at the right moment and then having the courage to make the right decision is essential.

Overall, the insights provided by the experts outlined the impact sports had in their journey to attaining top management positions. Hence, the intersection of sports and business has been confirmed, revealing valuable lessons and insights that contributed to the professional growth and success of the experts in top management roles.

#### *Team Sports Skills: Negative Impact*

To explore the potential negative impact of skills gained through team sports on their professional careers, the following question was posed to the experts: *"Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?"*

Beni Huggel answered that his obstructive mindset might have been perceived as demanding, impatient, and occasionally harsh. In the competitive world of sports, inefficiency is unacceptable, and ineffective training approaches are immediately adjusted. Conversely, the professional world often presents situations where efficiency may not always be optimal, posing a challenge he had to confront initially. Consequently, he had to learn to cultivate patience.

Josh Simpson shared a similar view and underlined it with the following example:

*“Sport taught me to be very direct. In sports you can hit each other on the pitch and shout and afterwards you shower together. Similarly, you have the worst fights on the pitch but when you score, you hug and sometimes even kiss. Thus, sport is very emotional, in both ways.”*

Josh Simpson

Florence Schelling mentioned the challenge of accepting that things tend to be grey in the professional world, whereas in sports, results are always *back or white*. Therefore, she was missing a clear cut between *good and bad*. Additionally, the absence of immediate and direct feedback or result created a challenge, making it difficult to measure her work. Unlike a game where athletes have to perform within a focused and limited timeframe, the professional world operates on a daily basis, from morning to evening, five days a week.

Besides the skills mentioned above, Mario Gyr, Heinz Karrer, and Josh Simpson highlighted another negative aspect that relates more to the interpersonal level than their acquired skills through sports.

According to Mario Gyr, certain prejudices were interpreted negatively, possibly due to jealousy or the perception that athletes receive everything much easier. This observation is particularly notable in Switzerland, where the prevailing system is focused on rewards rather than support. He underlined his statement by comparing the reactions he received when sharing his involvement in competitive sports. While Swiss citizens often responded with comments such as *“Oh, pretty chill. You had a good life.”* Americans expressed their greatest respect. This illustrates the Swiss tendency to be highly critical and skeptical, where athletes must prove themselves to a greater extent.

Heinz Karrer shared the view that having an athletic career might trigger negative reactions in others. This might be due to the amount of fame gained through sports and, thus, the desire to make it not too easy for former athletes. Additionally, he acknowledged that his personal ambition can be overwhelming for others at times.

Similarly, Josh Simpson faced the challenge of being taken seriously for things other than his athletic abilities. Success was often perceived as a result of personal connections. Thus, he had to continually prove himself from a different perspective to establish his credibility in other domains.

*Unique Skill Set: Better prepared for Top Management?*

All experts unanimously agreed when asked about their belief if team sports provided them with a unique set of skills that made them better equipped to succeed in top management positions. Four of the seven former athletes responded to this question, strongly affirming the positive impact of team sports on their abilities and readiness for top management positions.

*Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?*

The views differ a bit more when it comes to the question of whether sports made them better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives. While two experts (28.6 percent) disagreed, the remaining five (71.4 percent) concurred with the question.

Beni Huggel and Florence Schelling disagreed, as, in their opinion, similar skills could be acquired through other hobbies or activities. Both consider sports as a school for life, however, these skills can also be attained at lower levels of sports or during a shorter period. Nevertheless, both remained convinced that sport does indeed contribute to skill development. In addition, Florence Schelling emphasized that similar skills can be cultivated in various domains. Therefore, she provided the example of solo artists and orchestras, which are similar to individual and team sports. Roger Schnegg also agreed with this perspective. According to him, these skills can also arise from a dedicated commitment to other areas such as culture, music, associations, and more, which also provide the opportunity for assuming responsibility. Nevertheless, in general, he responded affirmatively to the question.

Contrarily, Heinz Karrer emphasized that competitive sports undeniably develop highly valuable skills in top management, particularly in team sports where success depends on collaboration with others. Likewise, Josh Simpson agreed that his sports background provided him with valuable lessons and experiences that non-athletes may not have had the opportunity to develop to the same extent. Similarly, Peter Spuhler strongly believed that team sports develop practical skills such as teamwork, integration, and selflessness. In his view, former elite athletes from team sports are better equipped to adapt swiftly and effectively to new team situations.

#### *More Confidence in Former Athletes?*

Following that, the seven experts were asked if they generally have more confidence in former elite athletes from team sports compared to non-athletes or athletes from individual sports.

The experts responded relatively unanimously with “no” with the exception of two. Mario Gyr, Florence Schelling, and Roger Schnegg emphasized that this matter cannot be generalized, as it greatly depends on the individual in question.

In addition, Heinz Karrer and Peter Spuhler highlighted the central role of job requirements when evaluating a candidate. They emphasized that educational background and experience remain the most critical factor. Nevertheless, if these requirements are fulfilled, having a sports background can create an additional positive impression as it brings along certain prerequisites, such as passion. Thus, it does not necessarily lead to more confidence in general, but the individual’s personality traits are recognized and acknowledged.

In contrast, Beni Huggel and Josh Simpson expressed greater confidence in former elite athletes from team sports. As both work in the sports industry, they have a closer connection to former athletes and can immediately observe their enthusiasm when talking about their sports. For them, it is about passion: when they see the candidate’s passion, it generates a sense of trust, knowing exactly how to engage with them.

#### *Intentionally Recruiting Athletes*

Subsequently, the five experts who possess a sports background and are involved in the hiring process were questioned if they intentionally recruit athletes. Three of them (60 percent) answered the question in the negative. The remaining two experts (40 percent)

emphasized that they consider an applicant's athletic background a relevant factor, even though it is not the primary determinant in their decision-making process. Instead, they ranked it fourth or fifth on the list of important factors, alongside education and experience.

#### *Team Sports: Pro or Con?*

Subsequently, all eight experts were asked whether they perceive participation in professional team sports as a *pro or con*.

The response was unanimously declared as a clear *pro*. Beni Huggel underlined the importance as it means learning group dynamics. He described it as a constant interplay between egoism and teamwork, where athletes are both individual athletes and team players. It is a unique dynamic of teammates simultaneously being competitors and friends. Florence Schelling added that it might be a potential *con*, but only when missing out on a professional career. Thus, it highlighted the importance of a dual-career approach. Underscoring this significance, it is noteworthy that this study revealed a pattern among the participants. The majority of them, with the exception of one, pursued a university degree, diploma, or gained relevant work experience, thereby significantly contributing to their career advancement.

The experts shared the following statements:

*“Pro without question, a massive pro! It is hard and I know what it needs to succeed. It is totally correct what your thesis is about – I gave speeches about it to all the managing directors at UBS about this topic, I basically said the same thing, and they loved it! You have to go out to win or be passive and lose.”*

Josh Simpson

*“Of course, a pro. Even participating in team sport during childhood helps. When I asked these questions during an interview, HR told me that this is discriminating (which is not the case according to Swiss law). But I still continued to ask the question if they have ever participated in team sports. I have to find out more about their attitude. If they already learnt how to lose and subordinate their own ego in favor of the team – this is something, you notice relatively quickly. Of course, team sports offer an opportunity for social lounging where you hide behind the team. This is something I cannot find out during the first job interview. But if you want to play in the champions league, you have to be intrinsically motivated.”*

Mario Gyr

When asking headhunter Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi about his perspective on the positive aspect of someone's participation in professional team sports, he agreed with the other experts, defining it as a clear *pro*.

Occasionally, Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi received a curriculum vitae (CV) of candidates with a professional sports background. According to him, this is something he notices and holds significance. In his opinion, participating in the Swiss or even World Championships indicates considerable effort and dedication invested. This quality holds excellent value in today's professional environment. Individuals who have already proven themselves in such competitive areas possess valuable experiences that are highly beneficial for top management positions.

#### *Individual vs. Team Sports*

To that response, the following subsequent question was posed:

*“What is generally more required for top management positions, characteristics from individual or team sports? Respectively, are you looking more for individual or team sports characteristics when hiring for top management positions? Which do you think is more in demand?”*

Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi responded to this question as follows:

*“Generally speaking, I would say that individual sport characteristics are more demanded for CEO positions. At a certain level, one decides alone. Thus, in the end the CEO is often alone and has to take crucial decisions by himself. I see it more as a marathon runner who is running the 42km by himself. You are quite often alone as entrepreneur or high-level executive, thus the whole responsibility also lies with you. But of course, before entering a CEO position you mostly start with a management position which requires more traits from team sports. Good management works as a sports team: working together toward a common goal. It does not matter who passes the ball, who plays or who scores, it is the outcome that matters. Overall, I think you cannot say something is better or more important than the other. It requires both.”*

Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi

#### *Correlation to Business*

In the context of this thesis, an essential aspect arises in understanding how the acquired skills and experiences can be effectively transferred and applied in the business world. This section highlights valuable interview statements regarding the correlation to business and contributes to addressing the research question.

Heinz Karrer referred in his interview to the acquired skill of having goals and working toward a common goal as a team, which can be directly applied to business. Setting goals and defining what is needed to achieve them is highly valuable in both fields. He further elaborated on this point by stating:

*“What kind of skills do I need? Which people do I need who bring the required passion, effort, and knowledge? Which special skills do I need to motivate my team? This includes all business aspects: handling people and having an understanding for their situation, strategic processes as well as compliance. Every mistake made will set you back by 10 steps. Therefore, it is in the interest of the whole company to avoid as many mistakes as possible and do things right from the beginning. Also, reputation is crucial. If you have a bad reputation that creates a significant problem. Moreover, it is about how to create a culture that everyone can identify with. The main goal is to target a goal and to think through the process.”*

Heinz Karrer

Moreover, he emphasized the importance of recovery as a significant correlation to business. He noted that recovery is required in sports and business, as avoiding it is neither desirable nor reasonable or logical. Thus, recovery is an integral part of performance.

Josh Simpson highlighted the transferrable skills of grid, determination, ability to adapt, and drive. As he works across different continents, he does not have fixed working hours and requires a work-life integration, working when necessary. This integration is something he learned from football, where his personal and professional life seamlessly merged. He further stated:

*“Being in a football team is like being in a company. Finding your way through that company. I try to be respectful and caring. I mean, I own the company so nobody can fire me, right? Thus, I treat people with the best incentives as I did as an athlete.”*

Josh Simpson

Peter Spuhler emphasized the skill transferability of the art of teamwork, role discovery, taking on responsibility, and finding a balance between individual and team interests. According to him, success in sports results from a collective effort, calling for discipline, understanding, and embracing setbacks as opportunities for growth. He also highlighted the importance of bringing passion to work. In his view, these qualities can be effectively applied in the professional environment.

According to Roger Schnegg, the second and third-best athletes are equally important for society, as they develop the same skills as the top athletes. In fact, they often have to work even harder to prove themselves, as they never reached the top. Thus, they carry the same competitive mindset and dedication as a top athlete but often begin their education or professional career earlier due to not reaching the top level in sports. Notable examples of athletes who have made significant contributions to society include Urs Schaeppi, former CEO of Swisscom, and Philipp Hildebrand, former head of the Swiss National Bank (SNB).

## **5 Discussion**

In this chapter, the key findings derived from the interviews are integrated with the literature discussed in Chapter 2 to analyze the research question and examine the hypothesis proposed. A conceptual framework is introduced to illustrate the findings and outlines the key soft skills identified in the context of sports and top management.

Finally, this chapter provides a comprehensive response to the research question and critically discusses the initial hypothesis.

### **5.1 Implications**

This thesis aimed to identify the interplay of sports and business and how the acquired skills positively affect an athlete's future career development. Firstly, the research reveals that most experts (83 percent) recognize their enhanced ability to identify strengths in themselves and others as a direct result of their involvement in professional team sports. This skill is particularly advantageous in the business context as it enables top executives to allocate tasks effectively, build high-performing teams, and leverage the unique capabilities of each team member to achieve organizational goals. Thus, by understanding and leveraging the strengths of others, professionals with a background in team sports can make valuable contributions to creating a collaborative and productive work environment. In turn, this ability fosters effective teamwork, maximizes the potential of individual employees, and ultimately leads to increased overall success. However, the six responses do not reflect absolute representativeness, partly due to the inclusion of only one woman and the small sample size, which is insufficient to draw a definitive conclusion.

Moreover, by identifying initial leadership experiences among the participants, the data reveal that this is a common feature, indicating that team sports provide an excellent platform for developing valuable leadership qualities and skills. This finding highlights the significance of team sports in fostering a sense of responsibility and guiding a team toward a shared goal. Therefore, the participants benefited from a solid foundation in leadership, allowing them to navigate complex organizational dynamics effectively. As a result, this experience proved highly valuable in their journey toward achieving top management positions.

Further, the experts identified various skills developed by participating in elite team sports. Communication, mental toughness, resilience, and preparation emerged as the most frequently mentioned skills among the participants. Additionally, social competence was recognized as an essential skill of effective leadership. Thus, these findings provide empirical support for the theory that participation in professional team sports can effectively develop valuable skills directly transferable to top management positions. The expert's identification of resilience and performing under pressure as the most essential skill in addressing challenges further reinforces this view. The study by Burns et al. (2022) confirms this assumption by identifying an identical set of skills. By linking them to their requisite skill set in top management, the participants emphasized the importance of people skills as vital in effective leadership, followed by authenticity, communication, consistency, high commitment, leading by example, and motivating people. These skills are highly beneficial in top management as they foster strong interpersonal relationships, leading to cohesive teamwork and a positive work environment, driving an organization's performance, and achieving desired outcomes. This is further supported by the study conducted by Robles (2023), which emphasizes the importance of these skills in the context of effective leadership in top management.

In summary, all experts with professional sports backgrounds are convinced that sports significantly impacted their professional career success. Therefore, the existence of a correlation between sports and business has been established. However, it is important to note that confirming a definite intersection between the two domains is challenging from an academic perspective. Further, it is crucial to acknowledge that the findings of a single study cannot conclusively prove a causal relationship, given the limitations in representativeness and generalizability of a single study. However, there is a clear tendency for skill transferability from competitive sports to top management positions, providing further support to the view that skills and experiences acquired through professional team sports can be successfully transferred to the business domain. Consequently, all respondents unanimously perceive participation in professional team sports as a clear advantage.

Nevertheless, professional sports create a potential drawback when hindering opportunities for a professional career. Thus, highlighting the importance of a dual-career approach. Although team sports offer a unique skill set, the experts emphasized the importance of education and professional experience alongside their athletic career to

facilitate a smoother transition into the business world. The data further indicates that respondents typically attained their first top management position at the age of 33, coinciding with their retirement from professional sports. This highlights the level of commitment and responsibility required in such roles, where absolute focus is essential and combining elite sports becomes unfeasible.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact of professional team sports on the development of valuable skills and experiences that are transferable to top management positions. These insights contribute to a better understanding of the intersection between sports and business and underscore the value of leveraging athletic experiences in professional career paths.

## **5.2 The Making of a Corporate Athlete: Transferability of Skill Set**

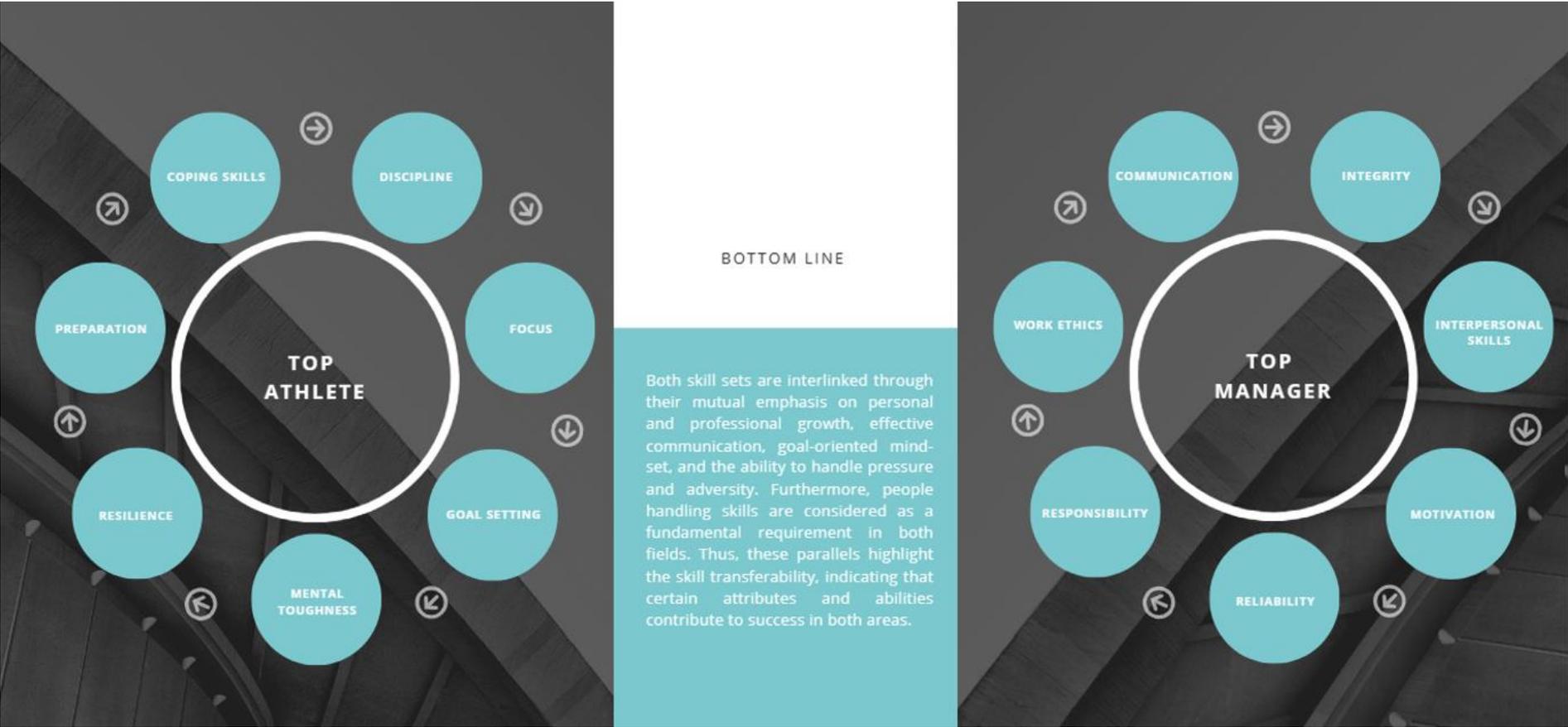
The findings are consolidated in a conceptual framework, revealing the shared skills between professional team sports and top management. This framework is developed based on the contextual knowledge derived from a combination of primary and secondary research. The comprehensive examination and compilation can be found in Appendix Q.

In the first step, the literature review and qualitative analysis were utilized to analyze and identify the key skills from both domains. These skills were then compiled, and common skills identified by using a contingency table. In the next step, the intersecting seven skills of both areas were emphasized and presented in the framework, providing a visual representation of the most essential skills. Figure 10 displays the visual representation of the conceptual framework.

To conclude, the interconnection between the skills required in elite sports and top management is evident through their shared emphasis on personal and professional growth, effective communication, a goal-oriented mindset, and resilience in the face of challenges. Both fields demand individuals to display discipline, focus, and the ability to inspire and motivate others while sustaining integrity, reliability, and a strong work ethic. Additionally, effective people-handling skills are crucial. This interdependence underscores the significance of these skills across different contexts, highlighting their influential role in achieving success.

Figure 10

Theoretical Framework Interlinking Primary and Secondary Research



Source: Created by the author

### 5.3 Answering the Research Question

This thesis aimed to identify the skill set acquired through elite team sports, which can be transferred to and applied at the highest business level. This section addresses the research question by presenting the findings in Chapter 4 to provide a comprehensive response. The following research question and sub-question served as a guide throughout this thesis:

1. *What specific soft skills do team sports elite athletes gain from their athletic experience which helps them develop the necessary qualities needed for top management positions in the business world?*
2. *How can the acquired abilities from team sports be effectively transferred and applied to the workplace?*

The previous findings confirmed a potential connection between elite team sports and the development of specific soft skills that are beneficial for top management roles in the business world. Hence, in answering the research question, the data revealed the particular skill set acquired through team sports. These skills include effective communication, strong interpersonal and coping skills, authenticity, consistency, high commitment, leading by example, motivating people, a certain degree of composure, courage, a great sense of responsibility, passion, prioritization, reliability, goal and boundary setting, resilience, mental toughness, discipline, and focus.

In conclusion, it can be confirmed that athletes encounter numerous challenges and high-pressure situations throughout their athletic career, developing adaptability, resilience, and mental toughness, providing a solid foundation for navigating fast-paced and dynamic business environments. This is particularly evident in moments when athletes encounter unexpected challenges that demand immediate adaptation. However, it is essential to note that while these skills serve as a strong foundation, further development and refinement are required to effectively apply them in the distinct business context, which differs from the world of sports. Certain situations in the professional world may be incomparable to sports and can only be fully developed through direct application and experience in the business environment.

Regarding the sub-question, the following can be concluded:

The acquired abilities from sports can be effectively applied to the workplace through various strategies. Firstly, former athletes can leverage their strong communication and interpersonal skills to collaborate effectively and establish positive relationships with colleagues. Moreover, their developed resilience and performance-oriented mindset can contribute to remaining focused and motivated in the face of challenges, which can have a contagious effect, spreading a positive attitude and encouraging others. This, in turn, contributes to a strong team spirit throughout the office. Additionally, their prior leadership experience equips them to motivate and inspire others, serving as role models while leading by example. Sports have already highlighted the importance of a good image and exemplary behavior, which translates to the business world, where similar standards are expected. Further, athletes' exceptional discipline and time management skills enable them to meet deadlines promptly and make challenging decisions effectively. Furthermore, athletes can thrive in high-pressure and demanding business environments through preparation techniques and mental toughness. Thus, by recognizing and consciously applying these skills to business, athletes have the potential to effectively contribute to their professional career success and might even surpass their peers. In conclusion, these transferable skills can potentially provide athletes with a competitive advantage in the business context, equipping them with the necessary tools to achieve remarkable success when effectively applied.

#### **5.4 Discussion of the Hypothesis**

The hypothesis stated that competitive team sport athletes possess a unique set of skills and qualities that make them better equipped to succeed in future top management positions compared to non-sport executives. Based on the research and findings presented, competitive team sport athletes do possess specific skills that can contribute to their success in future top management positions. Furthermore, the unanimous affirmation of experts further strengthens the positive impact of team sports on athletes' abilities and readiness for top management roles. Additionally, with an affirmative response rate of 71 percent, most experts stated that sports made them better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives. Thus, the hypothesis can be partially confirmed. However, it is important to note that while the majority of participants supported the hypothesis, it does not necessarily provide complete confirmation and there may be variations among individual experiences and perspectives.

Therefore, while the hypothesis is confirmed to a certain extent, it is crucial to recognize that success in top management also depends on various other factors such as education, experience, and individual talent. These specific qualities can also emerge through active engagement in other domains, such as music, culture, or other pursuits. Therefore, it can be summarized that active involvement in a dedicated endeavor and investing significant effort, time, and passion, can lead to the positive development of similar skills and prepare individuals in different ways for future top management positions. Hence, team sports undeniably provide a solid foundation which can be advantageous, however, it does not guarantee automatic success in business.

## **6 Conclusion and Outlook**

Based on the literature review, the findings, and the discussion, the subsequent chapter presents a concise conclusion and outlines the limitations of this study. Finally, the thesis concludes with the identification of future research directions.

### **6.1 Conclusion**

The bachelor's thesis provides strong evidence supporting the correlation of competencies between sports and business, aligning with previous research on this subject. The comprehensive data collected in this study have revealed the soft skills cultivated through team sports, which hold significant value in top management positions. By identifying these skills, the thesis emphasizes the added value that athletes bring to the business world. These findings serve as an important reminder for athletes to recognize the extensive skill set acquired throughout their athletic journey. This should empower athletes to navigate any potential limitations they may perceive in their educational or professional background, resulting from their high commitment to sports, as they possess a distinct set of transferable skills that are highly valuable in a professional setting. By acknowledging these skills, athletes can confidently leverage their strengths and competencies to succeed professionally. However, the thesis also highlights the importance of integrating education and work experience in dual-career paths as essential prerequisites for attaining top management roles. The study revealed that most participants, except for one, pursued a university degree, diploma, or gained relevant work experience, significantly contributing to their career advancement.

Thus, the thesis emphasizes the significance of a comprehensive approach in which athletes not only excel in their athletic careers but also actively pursue education and gain practical work experience. This integration allows athletes to acquire the knowledge and competencies required as top managers. Hence, athletes who understand the value of both can deliberately manage their dual-career paths, maximizing their potential for success in top management positions and therefore establishing a solid foundation.

In conclusion, this thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the correlation between sports and business competencies. Moreover, it confirms the value of the specific soft skills developed through team sports and emphasizes the importance of combining them with qualifications and experiences to attain top management positions. By

leveraging their unique skill set and pursuing a balanced approach to personal and professional development, athletes can achieve remarkable success in their careers.

## **6.2 Limitations**

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations to this thesis. Firstly, the study primarily concentrates on team sports and does not consider skill development in individual sports that may develop similar competencies.

To ensure objectivity in the qualitative research, all interview partners were asked similar questions, although minor adaptations were made, particularly for the headhunter without a sports background. Follow-up questions were used to gain deeper insights into specific areas. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that qualitative data allows for subjectivity and multiple interpretations. Despite efforts to ensure objectivity, the personal subjectivity of the researcher in selecting interview partners and formulating questions may introduce some degree of bias. Additionally, the limitation of the sample, consisting solely of successful former athletes, may present a potential bias in the results, potentially contributing to a tendency of supporting the initial thesis.

Furthermore, participants were selected based on their sports discipline rather than the industry sector. Moreover, the span of time of an athlete's skill development is limited to the age between 15 and 35 years since this best represents the developmental age. Also, the distinction between men and women is not researched in-depth and viewed collectively. Additionally, the scope of the study was geographically limited to elite team sports athletes who were previously active in Switzerland and currently operate within the Swiss labor market, engaging in an international environment.

## **6.3 Further Research**

While this thesis has a limited scope, it provides a solid foundation for future research. Therefore, taking a more critical perspective, a comprehensive assessment of the overall success of former team sport elite athletes would require a substantial amount of data. This would include information on the current job positions of these individuals to draw any definite conclusions regarding the broader impact of team sports on professional achievement. This provides an opportunity for further research to generalize the relationship between sports and career success and explore it in a broader context.

Moreover, the distinction between men and women creates an opportunity for further research to examine the career chances of former female and male athletes by comparing the career advancement opportunities based on gender. Besides, only one female expert was interviewed, highlighting the need for broader representation and inclusion of more athletes to fully capture the female perspective. There are notable differences between men's and women's competitive sports, particularly concerning the support system and financial remuneration. Hence, it is recommended to differentiate between men and women, as female athletes often pursue dual-careers due to inadequate earnings to maintain a full-time professional athletic career.

Additionally, there is potential for different categorizations and extensive examination of team sports, exploring differences across various disciplines. Further, the research area could be expanded by adopting a global perspective and thereby extending its applicability.

Furthermore, there is room for the interpretation that competitive athletes inherently possess different personality traits. This suggests investigating whether these individuals engaging in professional sports already exhibit other characteristics, such as being highly ambitious, etc., as they would not pursue competitive sports otherwise. This may already influence who enters professional sports, aside from natural talent.

In conclusion, these findings emphasize the need for additional research to expand the scope of this thesis and gain a deeper understanding of the implications and nuances related to the transfer of soft skills from sports to the business context.

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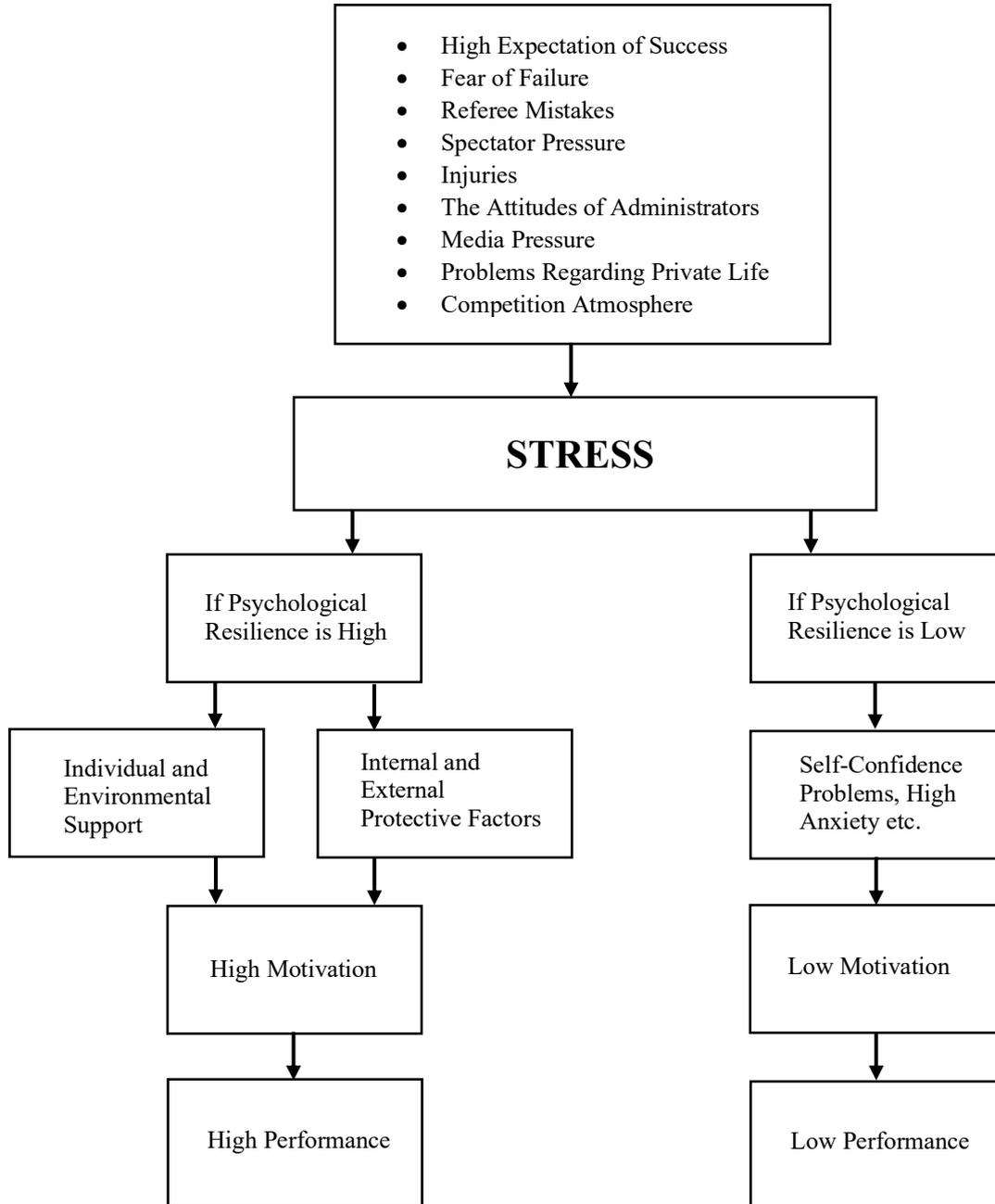
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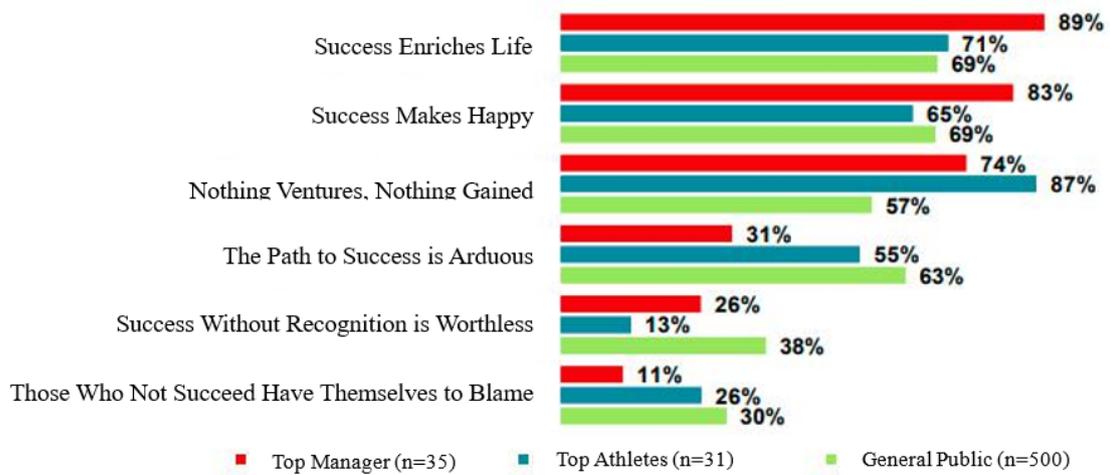
## 8 Appendices

### Appendix A – The Athletes' Psychological Resilience Process by Özdemir (2019)

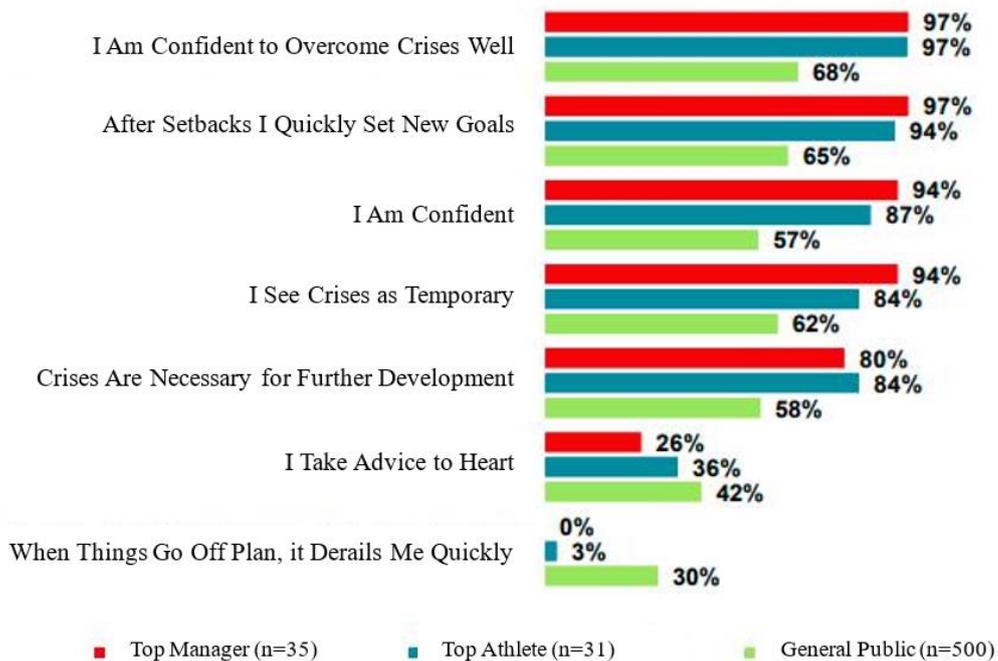


## Appendix B – Attribute Rankings (Proissl, 2021)

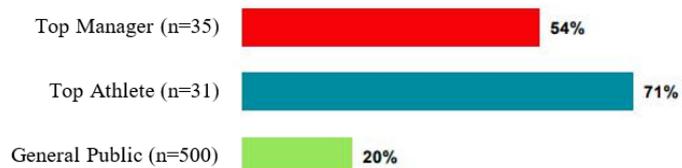
### Attitude Toward Success



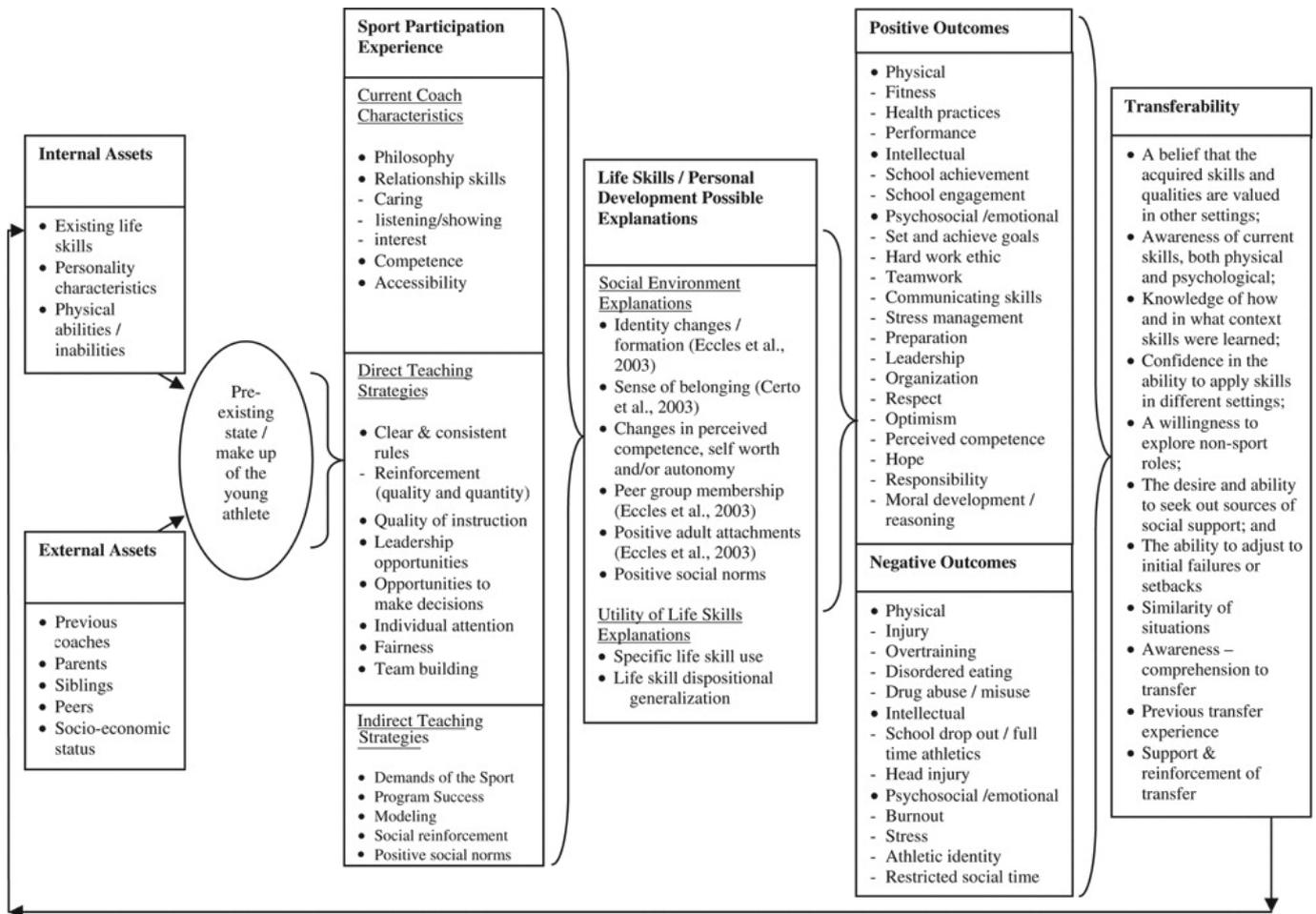
### Handling Crises



### Resilience Barometer



## Appendix C – Heuristic Model by Gould and Carson (2008)



## **Appendix D – Selection of Interview Partners**

### *Mario Gyr*

Mario Gyr is an Investment Fund Lawyer at Partners Group, a public private equity firm founded 25 years ago. He covers the Austrian, French, Italian, and Swiss markets in four main categories: Private Equity, Infrastructure, Debt, and Real Estate. Besides his legal work, he made private investments in start-ups where he currently sits on the board of directors for one company while being a shareholder in another. Prior to his professional career, he was a successful rower. Despite the challenges, he completed his master's degree in law while competing and working part-time at a legal office. After coming in 5th at the London Olympic Games in 2012, his team won Olympic gold in Rio in 2016. In 2018, he retired from competitive sports to focus on his professional career. His success in both fields makes him a valuable interview partner and reflects the importance of determination, teamwork, and resilience. Thus, his journey as a competitive athlete and his transition into the professional world offers valuable lessons on how to make successful career transitions.

### *Beni Huggel*

Beni Huggel is a former Swiss football player and entrepreneur. He began his professional career at the age of 21 as a defensive midfielder and quickly established himself as a key player for FC Basel. He won seven Swiss championships and five Swiss cups with his team and participated several times in the UEFA Champions League. Today, he still makes valuable contributions to the world of football as a speaker, coach, and football expert for Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF), a Swiss public broadcasting organization. Furthermore, he is co-founder of the Athletes Network, an organization dedicated to supporting athletes to build business networks and integrate them into the professional world. Through his athletic career and Athletes Network involvement, he demonstrated his commitment to supporting and promoting athletes beyond their careers. His football career, combined with his expertise in the intersection of sports and business, make him a valuable interview partner. Moreover, his work with the Athletes Network provides him with unique insights into the challenges faced by athletes transitioning into the labor market.

### *Heinz Karrer*

Heinz Karrer is the founder of KAFAM (Karrer Familie), a company that covers all his mandates. He has approximately ten mandates and works as a lecturer or speaker from time to time. One of his mandates includes serving as the president of the board of directors for Jungfraubahn Holding AG. He is a former handball player for Pfadi Winterthur and Otmar St.Gallen and won the Swiss championship twice. In addition, he represented the Swiss national team 53 times and competed in the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, where the Swiss team placed 7<sup>th</sup>. Following his handball career, he started his professional career at the age of 27, serving as the director of a sporting goods suppliers association. He then took over the lead for Intersport Schweiz AG before becoming the CEO of Intersport Holding AG. Later, he served as chairperson of the CEO and member of the executive committee for Ringier. After three years, he joined Swisscom for the Marketing and Sales division as well as the executive committee. Five years later, he became CEO of Axpo Holding AG for 12 years. After being approached by a notable entrepreneur to lead the presidium for economiesuisse, he stepped down from his role as CEO of Axpo and assumed control of the executive committee for the following seven years. In addition to his professional activities, he held several mandates as chairman for numerous executive boards. Today, he focuses on four pillars:

- 1) Chairmanships of the board of executives and foundations
- 2) Investment activities: supporting start-ups and SMEs
- 3) Lecturer and coach at higher education institutions and continuing education
- 4) Provide free assistance to friends and acquaintances with job-relevant questions as a means of giving back

His extensive professional experience as CEO and chairman of the board of directors makes him a valuable source of knowledge on business and leadership topics. His experience as a former athlete also provides a unique perspective on the importance of mindset and mental strength in achieving success both, on and off the court. As a top-level executive, he has also faced various challenges that require a strong mindset and the ability to perform effectively in a high-pressure business environment. All these qualities make him an excellent interview partner for this thesis.

### *Florence Schelling*

Florence Schelling is a former professional ice hockey goalkeeper, playing for 25 years at different levels. She has played 190 international matches and participated in eleven World Championships and four Olympic Winter Games. At the Winter Olympics in Sochi 2014, she won a bronze medal with her team and was recognized for her outstanding performance as the Most Valuable Player and best goalkeeper and was selected to the All-Star team of the tournament. She studied economics in Boston, where she played for the university's ice hockey team, the "Huskies." She also did her master's in business administration in Sweden and played for Linköpings HC before retiring from sports. Later, she became the head of sports at the Swiss ice hockey club *Schlittschuh Club Bern* (SCB) as the first female in history to lead a male professional sports team. She has worked in various industries and positions in different countries. In 2022, she founded her company "Focusfinder" to help clients work more efficiently, identify their drive, and set clearer goals. Florence has repeatedly demonstrated her ability to maintain a strong focus and perform at her best in high-pressure situations. Hence, her remarkable success in sports, combined with her experience as a coach and her previous top-level positions, make her an ideal interview partner for this thesis. Her achievements in both athletics and business provide a unique perspective, and her experience can offer valuable insights for succeeding in both fields.

*Roger Schnegg*

Roger Schnegg was a volleyball player in the Swiss National League A (NLA). He has played as a setter for the Swiss National Team and was promoted to the NLA four times with different clubs. Later in his athletic career, he served as a player-coach and club president for seven years. After working in various marketing positions, he became a sports official and served as the CEO of Swiss Volley in 2002. Following this, he was appointed director and led a restructuring process to create a new strategy due to debt issues. He currently is the CEO of Swiss Olympics, overseeing the organization's activities and strategic direction. Swiss Olympic is the umbrella organization for Swiss sports federations and is responsible for coordinating Swiss participation in the Olympic and Paralympic Games. His background in athletics as well as his current role as CEO of Swiss Olympic, makes him a valuable interview partner for this thesis. His experience as an athlete, coach, and sports official, combined with his leadership positions, provide a unique perspective on the relationship between athletics and business. Through his work with Swiss Olympic, he has gained valuable insights into the challenges athletes and sports organizations face.

### *Josh Simpson*

Josh Simpson grew up in Canada. As there was no professional football at that time, he went to the US University of Portland to study Finance and Real Estate and to play soccer on a scholarship. Later, he was drafted into the major league soccer and joined the Canadian National Team. Later, he played professionally in several countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Turkey, and Switzerland, where he had a personal connection due to his Swiss mother. He concluded his professional football career with the Young Boys in Berne, Switzerland. He worked in banking at UBS in Berne and was promoted to Client Relationship Manager at UBS in Zurich. He later decided to build his own company, where he currently holds a senior management position, and just landed a 300 million deal as a broker. He currently also holds the following positions:

- Co-Owner and President of the Pacific Football Club in Canada
- Partner at SixFive Sports & Entertainment, a private equity company that owns football clubs
- CEO of a Family Office which manages the wealth of soccer players
- Shareholder and member of the board at Grundeigentümerversand CH, one of Switzerland's largest associations covering the needs of property owners and investors in the Swiss and North American market
- Co-Founder and managing partner at Schwanau Invest AG

Thus, with his experience as an international professional football player and success in various top management positions, Josh offers valuable insights into the sports industry and the business sector. His transition from a professional athlete to a successful businessman further highlights his ability to adapt and succeed in different fields. These experiences make him an ideal interview partner for this thesis.

### *Peter Spuhler*

Peter Spuhler is a Swiss entrepreneur widely known for owning Stadler Rail, a manufacturer of rail vehicles. He started playing ice hockey at the young age of six, having grown up near the Dolder Grand ice rink. Subsequently, he pursued an approximately 20-year ice hockey career at the Grasshopper Club Zurich. Simultaneously, he started his academic education at the University of St. Gallen, where he studied economics. He retired from ice hockey after graduation and began his career in the Swiss military, and joined the *Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft* (SBG), today's UBS, for an internship. Later, he joined Stadler Fahrzeuge AG in Bussnang in an operational leadership role before taking over the company as CEO with 18 employees. Over the years, Stadler Rail developed from a local rail vehicle manufacturer to a competitive market participant with a global presence, employing more than 13,000 people today. In addition, he served as the fraction leader in the National Council and was the spokesperson for the Committee on Economic Affairs and Taxes for over 12 years. Today, he holds numerous Board of Director mandates and is Chairman of the Board of Directors at Stadler. His extensive athletic experience and remarkable success as an entrepreneur provide valuable insights into the intersection between sports and business. In addition, his leadership roles in politics and as longstanding CEO of Stadler Rail offers a unique perspective on organizational management, strategic decision-making, and the challenge of running a successful international company. His inspiring career transition to a highly accomplished businessman and visionary leader can be considered a powerful example and makes him a highly valuable and insightful interview partner for this thesis.

### *Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi*

Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi is an experienced headhunter with over 36 years of experience in the industry. He began his professional journey with a commercial apprenticeship at an agricultural cooperative. After completing his apprenticeship, he spent six months in Paris to learn French. He returned to Switzerland to complete his mandatory military service and started working at an advertising company. While working there, he also pursued his education as a marketing manager. After a brief stint at Bindella, he saw a personal consulting ad that eventually led him to become the CEO of MPB Executive Search, which has now become an independent company with over 14 employees and locations in Basel, Berne, and Zurich. With his extensive background in headhunting and management, Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi is a valuable resource for identifying the required skills for top management positions. While he may not have a professional sports background, his career trajectory and experience in executive search and headhunting make him a valuable interviewee for this thesis. As the founder and former CEO of MPB Executive Search, he has decades of experience identifying and recruiting top talent for high-level positions in various industries.

## Appendix E – Interview Guide

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### Mindset & Mental Strength: From an Athlete to a high-performing Manager

##### Research Question

What specific skills do team sport elite athletes gain from their athletic experience which help them develop the necessary qualities needed for top management positions in the business world?

##### Sub Question

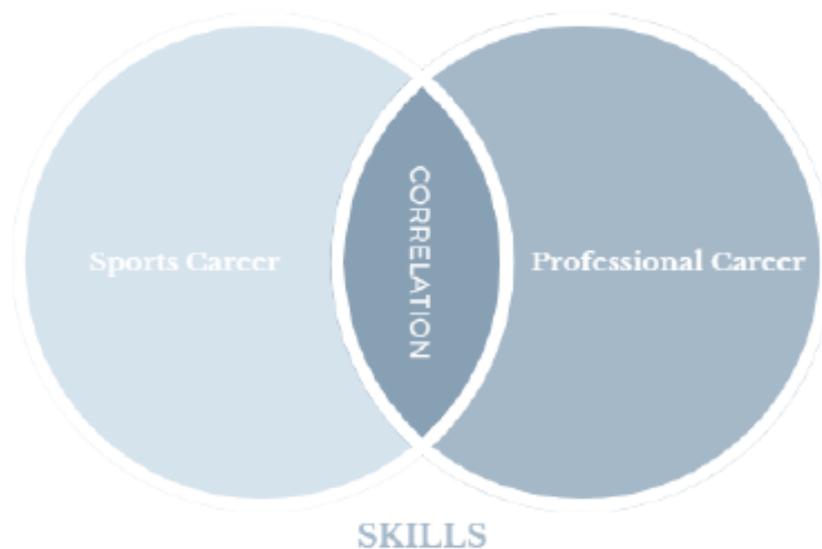
How can the acquired abilities from team sports be effectively transferred and applied to the workplace?

##### Hypothesis

Competitive team sport athletes possess a unique set of skills and qualities that make them better equipped to succeed in future top management positions compared to non-sport executives.

##### Objectives

- Identify skills acquired through team sports
- Learn more about the experiences of team sport athletes and how these helped them succeed in their athletic career = key skills for success in sports
- Detect notable traits to achieve top management positions = key skills for success in business
- Examine the possible transfer of valuable skills developed through team sports to top management positions in the business world
- Identify the real-world application and success stories in the professional world that serve as an example



**Introduction**

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments. May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record. As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

**Background Information**

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	
<b>Role</b>	
<b>Company</b>	
<b>Industry</b>	
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	
<b>Interview Duration</b>	
<b>Interview Language</b>	EN / DE
<b>Format</b>	In-Person / Online

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: "May I quote you on that by name?"

### Introductory Questions

*Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself?*

### Sports Career

*Can you tell me about your sports career?*

- Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?
- What was the reason that you have started playing \_\_\_\_\_?
- **What motivated you to become a sports person?**
- Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?
- **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**  
What were special skills of your team members? The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people's strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?
- Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?
- Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?
- Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?
- Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports?  
Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?
- What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?

## Professional Career Path & Success

*Please describe your career path*

- **What is your current job position?**
- **How long have you been working for this position?**
- **Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?**
- **How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?**
- **Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?**
  
- **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**
- **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**
- **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**
- **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**
- **How do you personally define "career success" and which specific skills do you see as key factors?**
- **In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?**
- **Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?**

### Correlation: Impact on Success?

- **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**
- **Can you provide an example or success story?**
- **What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?**
- **Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?**
- **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**
- **Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?**
- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**
- **What are your thoughts on the statement that "annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes"?**
- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**  
**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**  
**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**

### Final Question

- **What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?**

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

"Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?"

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

Give: handwritten note with extra expression of appreciation & a small gift

### List of Abbreviations used

## Appendix F – Interview Guide for Interviewee

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### Mindset & Mental Strength: From an Athlete to a high-performing Manager

##### Research Question

What specific skills do team sport elite athletes gain from their athletic experience which help them develop the necessary qualities needed for top management positions in the business world?

##### Sub Question

How can the acquired abilities from team sports be effectively transferred and applied to the workplace?

##### Hypothesis

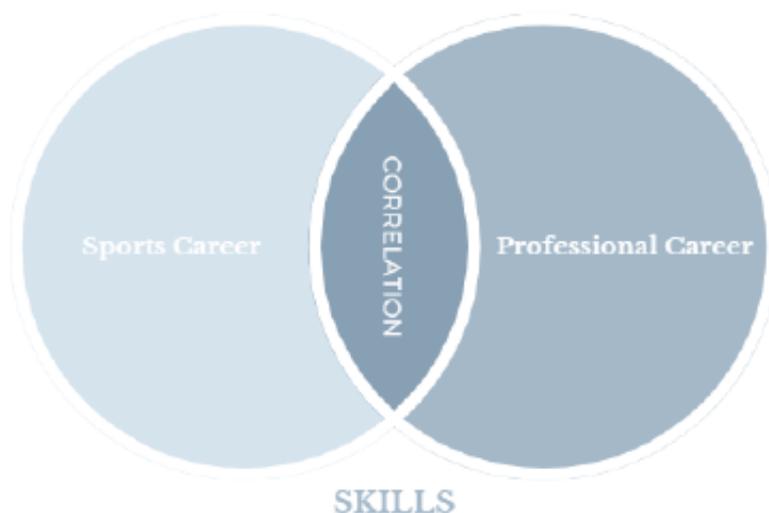
Competitive team sport athletes possess a unique set of skills and qualities that make them better equipped to succeed in future top management positions compared to non-sport executives.

##### Background Information

The main objective of this thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine if there is a correlation between the key drivers for success in team sports and business and how these competencies could be transferred and implemented in the business world.

Thank you for your participation!

Michelle Chevalier



## Appendix G – Interview Mario Gyr

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record.  
As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

→ agreed on using his name but omit detailed information about transactions – send thesis as PDF

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

### Background Information

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	Mario Gyr
<b>Role</b>	Investment Fund Lawyer
<b>Company</b>	Partners Group
<b>Industry</b>	Finance
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	Rowing
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	28.04.2023, 12.00
<b>Interview Duration</b>	1.20h (Lunch)
<b>Interview Language</b>	DE
<b>Format</b>	In-Person

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)  
Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Introductory Questions

**Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself.**

*Well, I work as an Investment Fund Lawyer at Partners Group. Before, I was working at Credit Suisse but got then approached by a Headhunter. Until then, I never hear about Partners Group, but I decided to take on the new challenge. Partners Group is a private equity firm. I cover mainly the French, Italian, Austrian and Swiss market. Our four main categories include: private equity, infrastructure, debt, and real estate. It is a public company, founded 25 years ago. The role of banks is changing, banks used to be responsible for M&As but this is changing nowadays. It is mainly private equity that covers the industries.*

*I also made two or three investments in start-ups. In one of them I am still in the board of directors and in another a shareholder. It is highly interesting to first-hand experience the massive growth of such small “two-people” companies. It is a very exciting area that I work outside of my legal activity, almost as a hobby for a good balance. The question I still ask myself is: Am I a corporate kid or an entrepreneur kid? I am still not sure though.*

### Sports Career

**Can you tell me about your sports career?**

*I played football for a long time as a child and always wanted to be world and Olympic champion. I was with FC Luzern until I was 14, when I got injured. I had to reorient myself and started with rowing. I was rather lankly in*

physique, but I had a good technique, stamina, and bite. I just had to gain more muscles. In 2012, we came 5th at the London Olympic games before finally winning Olympic gold in Rio in 2016.

At the beginning we did not earn anything but toward the end we got paid very well. Next to rowing I was studying MLaw in Lucerne, of course I had a bit longer than my peers, but I managed to get my master's degree. In addition to that, I worked 20% in a legal office which was a nice change. In the Olympic years I took a break from studying to fully focus on rowing (mentally and physically). My Italian or German rowing colleagues were in the armed forces during their careers which was one of the only options in their country at that time and also stayed after their career. In 2018, I then retired from competitive sport to fully focus on my professional career. I have to admit that our success at the Olympics opened certain network opportunities which I would not have without my sports career.

**Follow-up Question: How important is a good network for your career?**

A good network is good per se. The difficulty lies in being able to distinguish good from bad networks. The good ones give you chances you should take. Ultimately, however, you have to prove yourself, always and everywhere. It takes discipline, perseverance, and focus. Then the luck factor is also small, and success is never a coincidence.

- Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?
- What was the reason that you have started rowing?

➤ **What motivated you to become a sportsperson?**

*It has always been a childhood dream of mine to win Olympic gold. I mean, what could be nicer than rowing on the Rotsee on a beautiful may morning? It is literally the most beautiful thing on earth. You experience such strong emotions that you will never experience again later in this depth. Of course, also the downsides but the emotions are truly unique.*

- Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?

➤ **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**

What were special skills of your team members? The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people's strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?

*My strengths were my good rhythm and my technique. I was a racer! As soon as the light switched from red to green, my gladiator mode started. It needed everyone in the team, we contributed equally to the team performance, and we all needed to have the same rhythm. Of course, the stroke was important, but it takes everyone at the same time.*

*Yes definitely. But you not only get to know the strengths but also the weaknesses of your teammates. Competitive sport is brutal. In business, the boundaries are fluid. Sport is non-negotiable. There are no excuses. This self-reflection is what sport brings with it, which is missing in large companies. I mean, the companies' big brains have never faced headwind.*

➤ **Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?**

*I was the stroke, who set the rhythm but everyone had their task so I would not say that I was a leader in particular.*

➤ **Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?**

*Consistency is super important. In sports it is crucial whether you have a good day or not, which is less the case in business. For us, it was more important to be consistently good than to be extremely good on one day and then bad again the next day. But this consistency was needed 365 days a year. Also, direct communication was essential. I always compare it to a hospital: there you have a very strict hierarchy but as soon as you are in the surgery room, this is forgotten. The only thing that counts is the result and for that you need immediate feedback. We had the same principle on the boat. There is a certain aggressivity toward each other during the race because everyone is under pressure to perform. This requires also to address unpleasant situations. Nobody likes conflict but you still have to face it.*

➤ **Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?**

*We had 18 to 21 training units per week, accumulating to around 30 hours of training.*

**Follow-up Question: Were you recognized as professional athlete with this training effort?**

*It depends a bit. The effort we put into rowing was enormous. I mean, where does the money come from? From Swiss Olympic, because we did not receive anything from the rowing association. Later, with the search for sponsors, we got a little bit more. In 2012 we received CHF 40k for the year but had to cover all the expenses. Four years later we got CHF 400k but to be honest our performance was not really that much better than before*

when we trained just as hard and often. The performance was almost the same, but Switzerland has a reward system and not a promotion system which makes it harder for athletes. After 2012 we had Redbull as sponsor which was very lucky for us. But I have to admit, that our training was exactly like 10 years before when we did not get anything for it.

Former top athletes develop a completely different kind of ambition which is mainly intrinsic. They are mostly not after money & status symbols. They are fundamentally not motivated by money but by success. Usually, the very successful athletes are down to earth. Most of the time it is the top 5 to 10 that are the bigger "assholes". They have to prove themselves all the time. But once they achieve a big title, that behavior might change as they are seen now.

Modesty: hard work pays off! Use your time in the office - be efficient and have a good time management, be able to deal with difficult characters, and the most important: consistency! I am the first to stand up after a defeat which is one of the greatest learnings from sport. Dealing with defeats learn you to not overestimate victories as well as defeats.

- **Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports?  
Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?**

I studied Law in Lucerne next to my athletic career. Law is actually a grateful study for athletes. You receive a bunch of books knowing that you must know everything in half a year. In the end all that counts is the exam. Next to it, I was working 20 percent in a law firm. This is something I recommend all athletes as they are often caught in the sports bubble only. They reduce themselves to sports only which is also why their happiness is purely dependent on their athletic success. If they are injured, everything tends to be bad but if you just broke a new record, everything seems to be perfect. It is highly volatile and by establishing a second mainstay, you might be much more balanced. But of course, if you do too many things at the same time, you cannot fully focus on your sport so the probability to become successful declines. It is all about finding the perfect balance of your focus.

- **What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?**

Consistency! Have a consistent good performance, you might have a bad day but at least try to make it up to an average day. Also, I learnt to be efficiency and have a good time management. Additionally, being able to deal with difficult characters is highly crucial. You have to understand how they think and deal with them in a respectful manner.

#### Professional Career Path & Success

Please describe your career path.

- **What is your current job position?**

Investment Fund Lawyer at Partners Group

- **How long have you been working for this position?**

This summer it will be three years

- **Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?**

It is interesting as it is a global business. We have calls with all types of time zones which makes the meeting schedule a bit difficult. From a Swiss perspective, big companies or institutions can come to us (PK or HNWI) and then we negotiate the legal terms with the counterparty. We are only responsible for the legal terms, the commercial terms are done by someone else.

Of course, my sporty gene helps me in negotiations. I always try to find an agreement instead of winning all the points.

- **How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?**

- **Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?**

We are based in Switzerland but of course I have to travel a lot. I am often in London, Luxemburg, or Milan for handling transactions. I usually take the first flight in the morning and then return in the evening or go on Monday morning and fly back on Friday evening.

- **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**

(not applicable – adapted the question to which position is the highest ranked so far)

I would say my current position is the highest so far. I am a warrior, and I am project based responsible for legal. Of course, I am not alone, there are four others responsible for the project. I am not sure if I really strive to

achieve a top management position for now. Again, I relate to the question if you are an entrepreneur kid or a corporate kid.

➤ **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**

*It bothered me at the beginning that i was on the same level as 5 years younger employees. As I entered the professional world at a later stage, it was difficult to get used to be surrounded with younger people with the same rank.*

➤ **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**

*This is relatively easy to answer in sports: performance counts! I had to put away my ego which required mental strength. Knowing that there will always be better and smarter people than you helped. I mean, there are brilliant people working for Partners Group. It is not always working perfectly, and everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. Sport takes everyone the same way – everyone is treated equally. You have to get a feeling for people and if you are good at what you are doing, you will always move forward. The question is: what is your motivation? It requires a different approach if you want to achieve a CEO position than if you want to negotiate the interesting transactions. The latter for me is like sitting in a driver seat – you move something. Thus, it is important to choose your seat!*

➤ **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**

*Consistency! Deliver a consistent good performance every day. Even if you have a bad day, try to achieve an average performance. The athlete who is frustrated after training and goes home pissed will not get better. The one accepting the bad training in the morning but still goes on the spinning bike for a short period of time will automatically improve.*

*In addition, also learn to read people (and being aware of international differences). My team consisted of one guy from Ticino, one from Basel and one from Geneva. The French speaking teammate always thought that the German-speaking is making fun of him. So, I said okay let's talk in French from now on and the problem was solved.*

➤ How do you personally define “career success” and which specific skills do you see as key factors?

➤ In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?

➤ **Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?**

*Not really, but I have 2-3 coaches which I would recommend to everyone. The first coach is one of my best colleagues who made the youngest partner at McKinsey ever. He was able to win CS over for the London office which was why he got promoted to partner. He was the one saying that I should take the opportunity from the headhunter and encouraged me to switch jobs. Another coach is a partner at Partners Group who told me first you have to be satisfied with you otherwise you will never achieve a big career. He highlighted the importance of a good work-life balance. And the third one was actually my nutritionist who answered my future direction by asking some question during our session. All of them provide me with some guidelines.*

**Correlation: Impact on Success?**

➤ **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**

*It helped me get in, stay in and especially helped showing that hard work always pays off. Are you the one who takes on a fuck-off project even if someone else already screwed it up? Do you push off the blame or take responsibility? I am the guy who tries to find a solution together and DO it! And I really mean it. There are many people saying yes, I will do it but you actually have to do it.*

*My advice: build the foundation first and then build on it. It may take several years to build it but do not start with the roof because then you can be sure everything will collapse at a certain point.*

➤ Can you provide an example or success story?

➤ What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?

➤ Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?

➤ **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**

*Age! You cannot have the same work experience as your peers. This is a fact you cannot deny. Also, there are certain prejudices that are interpreted negatively. Might be related to jealousy or that they think you get*

*everything much easier. This is especially the case in Switzerland. If you tell a Swiss guy that you did competitive sports, they usually answer with "ah pretty chill – you had a good life". But, if you tell that an American, he has the greatest respect for you. This is the downside of Switzerland. Swiss people tend to be extremely critical and have a certain scepticism. I feel, you have to prove yourself much more then.*

*Something I also learnt from sports is the importance of direct communication and confrontation.*

- Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?

- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**

*I think yes, certainly internally, externally I do not know. You have more experience with difficult situations. Thus, you learnt to never give up. Life is not a sprint, it is a marathon, you have to be able to deal with defeats.*

- **What are your thoughts on the statement that “annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes”?**

*Yes, I agree. I think it has several factors. One thing is for sure that you know your worth. Salary negotiations are a balancing act between arrogance and gamble vs modesty and contentment. You have to estimate yourself correctly. There is a certain level of competitiveness as the bonus is based on performance. For example, there is a ranking once a month. The first time I got upset because I was only ranked second globally. This athlete attitude provides an advantage because you always want to be the best which means you have to belong to the top performers.*

- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**

*No, I am not biased, but you can feel a difference in general. After having a negative experience, you evaluate it differently. If you had a bad experience with an individual athlete, you focus much more on the negative traits of individual sportsmen. This just happens automatically.*

**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**

**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**

*Of course, a pro. Even participating in team sport during childhood helps. When I asked these questions during an interview, HR told me that this is discriminating (which is not the case according to Swiss law). But I still continued to ask the question if they have ever participated in team sports. I have to find out more about their attitude. If they already learnt how to lose and subordinate their own ego in favor of the team – this is something you notice relatively quickly. Of course, team sports offer an opportunity for social lounging where you hide behind the team. This is something I cannot find out during the first job interview. But if you want to play in the champions league, you have to be intrinsically motivated. If they hide, they will work on less interesting projects – it is up to them.*

#### Final Question

- **What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?**

*Find your purpose - what motivates you - what do you want?*

*There might be many hard years where you have to go through which have certainly become more difficult in recent years.*

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

“Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?”

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

#### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

Give: handwritten note with extra expression of appreciation & a gift

#### List of Abbreviations used

HR: Human Resource

## Appendix H – Interview Beni Huggel

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record.

As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

→ agreed on using his name and send thesis as PDF

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

### Background Information

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	Beni Huggel
<b>Role</b>	Speaker, Coach, Football Expert SRF and Co-Founder Athletes Network
<b>Company</b>	Athletes Network
<b>Industry</b>	Sport Management
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	Soccer
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	21.04.2023, 09.30
<b>Interview Duration</b>	30min
<b>Interview Language</b>	DE
<b>Format</b>	Phone Call

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Introductory Questions

Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself.

### Sports Career

Can you tell me about your sports career?

➤ Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?

➤ **What was the reason that you have started playing soccer?**

*I started playing football at the club only at the age of 12 which was rather late. My parents were not really for it, but I had always been enthusiastic about it. Actually, ever since I can remember, I have been a big soccer fan.*

➤ **What motivated you to become a sportsperson?**

*I first played at the amateur level with around 16 to 17 years. I always stood out of the crowd and once my coach said I belong in the Swiss Super League and should rather play at FC Basel. I was laughing at that time because I never imagined playing with the big ones. So, he then organized some trial trainings and that was how I got into FC Basel. It was not because I wanted but more that I landed there due to my coaches' effort.*

- Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?
- **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**  
 What were special skills of your team members? The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people's strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?  
*My main strength was my mentality. The mental strength of never giving up and always stay positive no matter how bad the situation got. I was definitely well known as the "fighter".*  
*I am 100% sure that I got the skill "identify the strength of others" from team sports. I always thought about how to integrate other team members to be successful. Strikers in football are usually highly sensitive and freethinker. So, I permanently tried to recognize their emotions and to intervene early enough if needed. During the game I tried to integrate them and reconcile disputes between team members. I also gave some inputs to the coach when I saw that someone was doing particularly good and tried to convince him to give it a chance.*  
*But yes, recognize strength in others comes definitely from sports.*
- Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?
- **Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?**  
*Yes, definitely a lot. One of the most valuable skills I have learnt is to deal with all kind of people. I have played with soccer players from all around the world. South Africa, South Korea, Latin America, Europe etc. – thus, to fit into a group under the team's conditions and to find a basis relatively quick in order to succeed was crucial. Also, not looking for excuses and blaming others but rather identifying things I could have done better and take responsibility for your actions. That is what it needs in a team to work together. Everyone has his role and, in a team, you need everyone to win. For example, strikers get more compliments and fame than defenders, but they are equally important so sometimes you need to ensure to praise the ones who do not get compliments that often.*
- Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?
- Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports?  
 Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?
- **What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?**  
*People skills and teamwork*

### Professional Career Path & Success

Please describe your career path.

- What is your current job position?
- How long have you been working for this position?
- Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?
- How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?
- **Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?**  
*Yes, from 2005 to 2007 I was under contract with the German first division club Eintracht Frankfurt.*
- When and how did you first enter a top management position?
- **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**  
*That was definitely the transition into the business world. It was my passion and not playing soccer anymore at a relatively young age was a big challenge. The corporate world functions so differently and I first had to understand and accept the way it works. In sports, you use a much more direct language and receive immediate feedback. I acquired mental toughness in sports, but business has different rules which created a major challenge.*  
*Additionally, I had to learn that there are people and functions which are not really efficient and productive. That is something that you do not have in sports. If the training is not effective, you have to change the approach. You cannot train for several weeks without seeing progress. Each practice has a goal and impact. Thus, I learned that there are also other motives to do something and not everyone wants to perform in the same way.*
- **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**

*I am a highly positive and optimistic person. I have a certain confidence in myself and that there is always a solution to a problem. There is no “I cannot do it». You need resilience and to find ways to solve an issue. And staying positive during these challenges is definitely not easy but you have to be confident to succeed. That was also something I have learnt from injuries.*

- What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?
- How do you personally define “career success” and which specific skills do you see as key factors?
- In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?
- Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?

#### Correlation: Impact on Success?

- **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**

*Yes, definitely. It helped me by gaining life skills and also as soccer is a sport that touches people emotionally, I was very warm welcomed in certain places. This is also an advantage in business. People like to talk to you which provides you with a certain degree of fame and makes it easier to get in touch with new people. I also learned, to deal with setbacks, being highly disciplined, and to sacrifice. The last point is something people often forget. There were many things I could not do during my free time which other people could. I do not want to complain but sacrificing is definitely part of being a professional athlete.*

- Can you provide an example or success story?
- What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?

- **Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?**

*Well, since I am not that long in this position it is hard to say. But I would say that the most important for my position is to be reliable for your environment. Employees and clients need to know what they can expect so that there are no undesirable surprises. This stands for quality.*

- **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**

*At the beginning, the obstructive mindset may manifest as demanding, impatient, and occasionally harsh. Those accustomed to achieving rapid progress must learn to cultivate patience first. In the competitive world of sports, inefficiency is unacceptable, and ineffective training is immediately adjusted. Conversely, professional life presents numerous scenarios where efficiency is not always optimal, a challenge that must be addressed initially.*

- Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?

- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**

*No, I do not think so. People without sports background can gain exactly the same skills – just maybe in a different area of life. Of course, sport is like a “life school”, especially team sports. But you can also acquire these skills on a lower level or during a shorter amount of time. That can already have an impact. Therefore, not necessarily but I am convinced that it helps.*

- What are your thoughts on the statement that “annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes”?

- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**

*Absolutely. Of course, I am in the sport industry, but I check if they do sports and what kind of sports. I also ask how many times they practice and if I can identify the glow in their eyes when talking about it. It is about passion and when I see that they are passionate and that it is important for them, it creates a certain trust.*

**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**

*Yes*

**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**

*Definitely a pro! It means learning group dynamics. In sports you have to subordinate yourself and adapt to the team. You have to prove yourself every day. With age, your role might change. It is a constant interplay between*

*egoism and teamwork. You are basically an individual sportsman and a team player. Your teammates are your competition and your friends at the same time, and it only works together. This creates an incredible basis for life.*

#### Final Question

➤ **What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?**

*Especially when applying to sports: never lose the joy in what you are doing. Joy needs to be in the foreground. Enjoy it as long as possible because as long as you have joy in what you are doing, performance will follow automatically. It is exactly the same in sports. The outcome and progress come by itself as long as you love what you are doing. Passion and joy are the basis for success.*

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

“Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?”

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

#### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

#### List of Abbreviations used

#### Informational Background

During his impressive football career, Beni won the Swiss Championship and the Swiss Cup. He also played in the UEFA Champions League, the UEFA Europa League, the European Championships and the World Cup, and was named Swiss Footballer of the Year in 2010. He retired from professional football in 2012, and is now in high demand as a speaker, as a coach, and as a football expert for SRF. Despite struggling early on following his retirement, his optimism and fighting spirit helped him overcome any obstacles in his way. A firm believer in the saying ‘nothing ventured, nothing gained’, the Basel man knows only too well that to achieve your goals, you have to take your future into your own hands.

Benjamin "Beni" Huggel (\*July 7, 1977 in Dornach) is a former Swiss football player and coach. His position was defensive midfield. He is a resident of Münchenstein and grew up there. Huggel became a professional football player relatively late, at the age of 21. Prior to that, he had completed training as a landscape gardener. He soon established himself as a regular player for FC Basel, winning seven Swiss championships and five Swiss cups with the team, and playing several times in the UEFA Champions League. Huggel now works as a sports expert and co-commentator for Swiss television, and since January 2018, he has been an expert commentator for the Swiss national team's matches. Furthermore, he is co-owner of the Athletes Network, supporting athletes by integrating them into the professional world during or at the end of their career.

Played 14 years professional football, including being a coach for following positions:

2011–2012	End of athletic career
2012–2013	FC Basel U-21 (Assistant)
2013–2014	FC Basel U-14
2014–2015	FC Luzern U-16
2015–2016	FC Black Stars Basel

## Appendix I – Interview Heinz Karrer

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record.

As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

→ agreed on using his name and send thesis as PDF

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

### Background Information

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages, and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	Heinz Karrer
<b>Role</b>	Chairman of the Board of Directors at Jungfraubahn Holding AG and owner of the company KARFAM GmbH (Board of Director Mandates)
<b>Company</b>	Jungfraubahnen Management AG and KARFAM GmbH
<b>Industry</b>	Management Consultancy Service
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	Handball NLA
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	12 April 2023, 15:30
<b>Interview Duration</b>	2 hrs
<b>Interview Language</b>	DE
<b>Format</b>	In-Person

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Introductory Questions

**Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself.**

*I lived in Winterthur for 20 years – my purpose of life has always been sports and I could not imagine a life after my athletic career.*

*I have decided to play handball at the age of 13-14. After secondary school, I have started my apprenticeship at the Schweizerischen Bankgesellschaft (SBG). I always knew about the importance of continuing education and decided to continue my broad training with catching up the “matura” for adults in Zurich. After the recruit school at the military service, I wanted to study geography since I have always loved mountains, rocks and glaciers. I was enrolled in both, Geology at ETH Zurich and Economy at HSG. Since the academic path for a geologist at ETH was super long, I decided to rather join HSG. After the Olympic games in Los Angeles, I received an offer from our sponsor Adidas to become the director of the Sporting Goods Suppliers Association. Since I was only 27, deciding to a management position was not easy. I am not sure if I would have seen myself as capable of such a challenge if I would not have played competitive sports. I assured to stay for 3 years but after 2.5 years I received an offer from a former federal council to lead Intersport Schweiz AG where I stayed 3 years. The last 5 years, I was the CEO of the whole Intersport Holding AG which was publicly listed. Through a friend, I landed at Ringier as chairperson of the CEO and member of the executive committee. After 3 years I resigned due to an internal conflict about culture, values and company interaction with employees. I suggested to the CEO to get rid of few people who were taking advantage of the system but since he could not due to a close relationship to one of them, I decided to leave. Within one hour, the medias knew*

about it and it became public. Then, I directly received a call from the CEO of Swisscom which I got to know 14 days before. I had to decide between 3 jobs but after my family holidays I decided to join Swisscom for the division marketing & sales and the executive committee where I stayed 5 years. I had a very close relationship to the management team which I still see regularly today. But I was looking for a CEO position since I wanted to more bring in my values. After a 7-month sabbatical, I joined Axpo Holding AG (energy corporation) as CEO even though I did not have any clue about the energy industry. They were looking for someone with experience in liberalization which I gained during my time at Swisscom. I had huge respect since I was missing knowledge about the industry. I asked for an extensive introduction, where I could learn about the whole company and business for 2 months without being in charge of any CEO activities. I stayed at Axpo for 12 years which was super interesting and I could not think about a more complex company than Axpo. I would have not imagined to leave the company any time soon but then I received a request from a highly notable entrepreneur called Rolf Soiron. He was also in the board of management for many large companies such as Lonza etc.). He asked me to take over the presidium for economiesuisse within our 1.5hrs coffee. Since they were in the middle of a reorganization, they were looking for people with business experience in a highly political environment. I said that I have to think about it and when I went to the mountains for a birthday celebration, I had a long car ride and hike to talk about it with my wife. On our way back home, she said “you definitely want to accept the offer”. She knew it immediately when I was talking about it. But that meant that I have to hand over operative responsibility since I would not have any time left. Parallel to my 6 years at economiesuisse I had several mandates as chairman for several boards of executive. Today, I focus on 4 pillars:

- 1) Chairmanships of board of executives and foundations (2 each and other 8 mandates with vice chairmanships and supervisory board)
- 2) Investment activities: supporting star-ups with their ideas which is strategically not reasonable but gives me pleasure
- 3) Lecturer and Coach: higher education institutions and continuing education
- 4) Supporting friends and acquaintances with job-relevant questions to give something back “pro bono”

I have 3 sons and a wife which is a teacher and tour guide in Thun. We also host a Ukrainian foster son and Ecuadorian godson.

1<sup>st</sup> son: 32 years old and works for the Swiss Economic Forum

2<sup>nd</sup> son: 31 years old and is a regisseur

3<sup>rd</sup> son: 27 years old and works in cyber security

**Follow-up Question:** Which activity is your favorite?

*I really like to pass on know-how and experience as well as to support people. On the other hand, I am also passionate about my first pillar to think entrepreneurial, to win which is related to success but also to motivate and inspire people.*

*You have a goal and a team, and it is about how to motivate the right people to achieve the goal. What do I need to achieve it? How can I prepare & what needs to be done?*

## Sports Career

Can you tell me about your sports career.

➤ Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?

➤ **What was the reason that you have started playing Handball?**

*I was very sporty, practicing several sports at the same time until the age of 12. Soccer was also an option, but I had a PE teacher who played handball and a good friend of mine invited me to my first handball game of Pfadi Winterthur where I was fascinated which resulted in asking my parents if I can go to handball.*

➤ **What motivated you to become a sportsperson?**

*It was this competitive thinking which I had since I was a kid. I always wanted to win and I was above-average talented which motivates you to become even better. I was thinking about individual sport, but it was the sense of belonging and working toward a common goal which led me to team sports. Also, the integration of all team members was something I really liked.*

➤ **Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?**

*Ernst “Zullu” Züllig, handball player at Pfadi Winterthur. I watched my first handball game and was immediately a huge fan of his skills, especially his jumping power.*

➤ **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**

*What were special skills of your team members? The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people’s strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?*

*I always exactly knew how the others think and what they need. I can name you the strengths and weaknesses of all my team players. The one who played unfair had to be reminded, the one who got aggressive had to be calmed down. I could identify the talents and was able to promote them as a leader. Sometimes it was just a "throw the ball, you can do it!" needed and I used that intuitively. I cannot say if it is a developed skill or a natural intuition.*

➤ **Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?**

*I was captain and had team responsibility. At Otmar St. Gallen, I was captain until the end of my athletic career.*

➤ **Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?**

*Definitely. Highly valuable for me was the skill of having goals. The objective was to think about what can I do that makes the possibility to achieve the goal as high as possible. A great example therefore is the Champions League Final in 1982 where we defeated several teams which were supposed to be better than us. We aimed to reach the Champions League Final but for that we had to think about how to prepare even before the season started. We had to prepare and perform even better than before. So, questions arose about how to train, which athletic program to use, on what to focus on and especially how to measure our progress in terms of performance test. In the end, we achieved the goal and ended in the final round where we lost by many goals, but it was about reaching the goal.*

*This can be applied 1:1 to business. Setting goals and then defining what is needed to achieve this goal. What kind of skills do I need? Which people do I need who bring the required passion, effort, and knowledge? Which special skills do I need to motivate my team? This includes all business aspects: handling people and having an understanding for their situation, strategic processes as well as compliance. Every mistake made will set you back by 10 steps. Therefore, it is in the interest of the whole company to avoid as many mistakes as possible and do things right from the beginning. Also, reputation is crucial. If you have a bad reputation that creates a significant problem. Moreover, it is about how to create a culture that everyone can identify with. The main goal is to target a goal and to think through the process.*

➤ **Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?**

➤ **Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports? Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?**

*My transition to the business world was super abrupt. I stopped playing handball when I was 27 and immediately took over a management position for which I had to terminate my study after 2 years. I did work next to handball since I did not want to earn any money except covering my expenses. I had some odd jobs such as taxi driving where I was flexible with the shift schedule. But since I always had fun in what I was doing it was never difficult to adjust to the new situation. I always do what I like most and find pleasure in the new role. I had to make various difficult decisions where I was confronted with a totally new situation the next day but the dedication of giving 150% remains the same.*

➤ **What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?**

*I think that would be the handball technical and psychological mechanisms to be successful. This working toward a common goal as a team can be applied 1:1 to the world of business. It has been always difficult to watch my kids games from the side line where I could not make an impact. I really had to pull myself together since I could not understand how such mistakes can be made on the field (either made by a player or by a coach). I have the urge to make an impact and bring a team forward.*

*Additionally, the preparation and mental state for a game confronted me to have critical discussions with myself and build healthy self-confidence at the same time.*

**Follow-up Question: What was your ritual before a game to get ready?**

*For me it was first about knowing myself in order to find out what works best for me. Expectations played a crucial role, recovery and easy gymnastics was key but also the nutrition before a game. For me it was individual responsibility to be ready when the game starts. It is all about the 60 minutes and that is all everyone should focus on. We always went to a restaurant before the games to have a casual exchange to set the focus without the inputs of the coach. But as in the business world, preparation is key!*

*Important correlation to business to me is the aspect of recovery. You also need recovery in business. Never relaxing is neither desirable nor reasonable or logical. Recovery is part of performance.*

## Professional Career Path & Success

Please describe your career path.

➤ **What is your current job position?**

*I have the company KAFAM (Karrer Familie) which I founded together with my wife. It includes all mandates I*

have. It covers my insurance and salary but is mostly important for my pension fund payments. I have approximately 10 mandates and work as a lecturer or speaker from time to time.

- How long have you been working for this position?
- Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?
- How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?
- Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?

➤ **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**

*That was actually at the age of 27, directly after my handball career where I was asked from our sponsor Adidas to take over the role of the director of the Sporting Goods Suppliers Association. Only 2.5 years later I ended up taking over the director position of Intersport Schweiz AG.*

➤ **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**

*Let us divide it per job:*

**Intersport**

*After 3 years of being the director of the subsidiary, I was asked to take over the lead for the holding company which was close to insolvency at that time. We had significant liquidity shortages and with the young age of 30 I had to undergo a rehabilitation procedure and come up with a restructuring plan. I decided to play with open card and requested a meeting with the bank (today UBS) and the revision auditor (today EY). I openly explained the current situation and showed a plan how we intend to fix it. Interestingly, until today I have a strong relationship to both colleagues and together we succeeded by a hair's breadth.*

*Additionally, we had many storages we had to close down due to liquidity shortages. One of them was in Winterthur Grütze, only few meters away from where I grew up. At the age of 30, I had to stand in the front of 110 employees and tell them at 8am that they are going to lose their jobs. I knew many of them privately since they were the parents from former school friends of mine. But I promised that we are going to find them new jobs and I always keep my word. In the end, we managed to find new jobs for 103 of them and 7 retired early.*

**Ringier**

*I was in a tricky situation at Ringier where I had to convince the CEO to move in the right direction. This meant to get rid of 2-3 people who were just taking advantage of the system. I told him that I cannot tolerate that but the decision is on him. If he cannot, it is fine but then it will be without me. And that was how it ended. He could not fire them since he had a close relationship to them but that meant for me to leave the company.*

**Swisscom**

*I joined Swisscom at a difficult time where we were facing 8,000 job cuts, the liberalization where all clients wanted to leave and launching the IPO in ZH and NY at the same time. I had investor meetings for 3 weeks straight and still had to lead the business parallel to it.*

**Axpo**

*In March 2011 there was the Fukushima accident. You can imagine what chaos we experienced in the energy industry, having several nuclear power plants. My phone was vibrating the whole meeting and I already thought it is broken. After the meeting, I saw all the messages and news articles. So, on Friday we observed the situation and on Saturday we created a crisis unit and activated the crisis modus. At the beginning we met twice a day, then daily and in July on a weekly basis. The main question was if nuclear power plants are still safe. We were swamped with media inquiries. We did a lot of information screening and talked about technical updates and possible learnings. We had to verify our equipment to find out if we used the same materials and products as Fukushima. From a political perspective, we had to get directly in touch with the federal council. Communication during crisis is key and we had to ensure that people trust us. This meant providing immediate information even though we did not know much at that time. You cannot say anything you do not know so we had to hire 12 more people who were just taking care of all information requests. We immediately organized meetings in large sports halls for the general public to talk about nuclear power plants and their safety. We openly communicated what we know and what we do not know at that time and responded to all questions raised. I was only sleeping 3 hours a night at that time and at the beginning I thought I am totally fine but after 3 weeks I realized what it was doing with my body. So, I had to consciously sleep 5-8 hours a night. The interesting part was that you get to know the people very well during time of crisis. Everyone deals with crisis differently and we had to ensure that people trust us and always trust your own people. We had many highly skilled people and I never doubted that we cannot make it – I always believed in the system and our personnel. The main goal was of course to avoid the shutdown of the nuclear power plants which would have been caused by the panic reaction. In the end, we managed to create a relationship of trust with Doris Leuthard and the political parties.*

*There is a saying «target first, shoot afterwards» but politics usually shoots before targeting. To me it is important to decide at rest. Think about it and take your time to come up with a reasonable decision. Before I decide, I want to understand everything.*

### **Economiesuisse**

*The difficult part at economiesuisse was that you are measured immediately. It is all about winning the vote. I think there is nothing more measurable than economiesuisse. We won 17 out of 20 votes and we had to win all relevant votes in the parliament all 3 months.*

*Important: people do not need to like you, but they need to trust you. There was also a high media presence. I was in the focus 24/7 which put a lot of pressure on me. I was constantly watched and criticized. The media really drag my name through the mire, clearly below the belt. It is important how you personally deal with death threats and fake news. For 1.5 years we even had to redirect our mail to the police who scanned all letters. You have to be willing and able to handle such burdens in top management positions. This is the downside of highly exposed top management positions.*

- **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**

*Definitely my sportsman genetics which means running at the performance limit for an above-average amount and for an extremely long time. This need for drive almost makes you addicted. You have to be comfortable in high pressure situations and need to do it with pleasure. Additionally, I am a people person. I like people and I like it even more to motivate, support and empower them. To find the most suitable people and being able to keep them is a real skill. It is also important to never avoid conflict. Always address a problem immediately, factual but fair.*

- **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**

*Having a great sense of responsibility and a great willingness to perform. Also, high authenticity, above-average communication skills are needed as well as having the will to act as a role model and leading by example.*

- How do you personally define “career success” and which specific skills do you see as key factors?
- In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?
- Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?

### **Correlation: Impact on Success?**

- **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**

*Sportsmen definitely enjoy sympathy. It brings advantages which you should take advantage of. The media presence comes as a plus and people generally like to get in touch with you. I am not sure if I would have taken the first job opportunity in management if I would not have had a sports background. It gave me a certain degree of confidence that I can do it.*

*There is a funny story of a family company where I have the chairman mandate. They had an applicant who played handball. So, the boss went to see a game and decided to hire him because of his way of playing.*

- Can you provide an example or success story?
- **What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?**

*Power of concentration at a specific time and the organizational skills to juggle all balls at the same time.*

- Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?
- **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**

*You will face moments where your sport career triggers negative reactions in certain people. It might be due to a certain amount of fame you gained from sports or the desire to make it not too easy for you.*

*Also, ambition can be difficult sometimes. But it is a question about proportionality, handling and using a filter in certain situations but yes it can definitely over roll somebody.*

*Yes, I am ambitious – sorry for that?*

- **Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?**

*Yes, indeed (already mentioned above).*

- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**

*There are in fact many handball players in top management positions. It is much more pronounced in handball compared to other team sports such as soccer or ice hockey. Is this a coincidence? I do not know. It might be that handball does not enjoy as much fame as other sports which requires more effort for their professional career. But competitive sports definitely develop skills which are needed in top management positions. Especially when looking at team sports where you need other people in order to succeed.*

- What are your thoughts on the statement that “annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes”?

- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**

*Not in general, most important are the requirements for the job. But if they meet the requirements then it does create an additional positive impression. Basically, it does not lead to more confidence in general, but the personality traits will be acknowledged. Their experience and background are still the most important factor.*

**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**

*No*

**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**

*Definitely a big con!*

#### Final Question

- **What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?**

*Education, education and education – and continuing education! I am a bad example for that but it is required nowadays and highly important to succeed in the labor market. You have to have that in mind before, during and after your sports career.*

*«Gump eifach nöime ine» – have the courage to try*

*If you are not certain about something, create a cost-benefit analysis for each decision to go through the criteria in a systematic manner (location, foreign countries, status, money etc.)*

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

“Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?”

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

#### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

Give: handwritten note with extra expression of appreciation & a gift

#### List of Abbreviations used

IPO: Initial Public Offering

ZH: Zurich

NY: New York

## Informational Background

### Education

- 1983 Matura on the second way of education
- 1978 Commercial apprenticeship at a banking company

### Professional Career

- 2013 to 2020 President economiesuisse (the umbrella organization representing the Swiss economy)
- 2014 to 2020 Member of the Bank Council of the Swiss National Bank (SNB)
- 2014 to 2019 Chairman of the Board of Directors Kuoni Group
- 2002 to 2014 CEO Axpo Holding AG
- 1997 to 2002 Member of the Executive Board of Swisscom AG for the Marketing & Sales Division
- 1995 to 1997 Chairman of the Executive Board Ringier Switzerland and member of the Group Executive Board Ringier AG
- 1990 to 1995 Chairman of the Executive Board Intersport Holding AG
- 1987 to 1990 Managing Director Intersport Schweiz AG
- 1985 to 1987 Managing Director Sporting Goods Suppliers Association

### Main Occupation

- Self-employed, owner of KAFAM GmbH (board of director mandates)

### Mandates within the Jungfraubahn Group/Membership of Committees

- Chairman of the Board of Directors Jungfraubahn Holding AG

### Management and Supervisory Activities

- Member of the Board of Directors Ringier Sports AG
- Member of the Board of Directors Gregor Furrer & Partner Holding AG
- Chairman of the Board of Directors IFBC AG
- Member of the Board of Directors TenEx Holding AG
- Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors Palace avenir AG
- Vice President of the Board of Directors Mürren Investment AG
- President Board of Trustees UniBE Foundation
- President Board of Trustees Hasler Foundation

### Sports

Former handball player Pfadi & Otmar St. Gallen, RL & RM, two-time Swiss champion and 53-time Swiss national player, 1984 participation in Olympic Games in Los Angeles (7th place).

### Private Life

Enthusiastic mountain sportsman, married in second marriage, father of three grown-up sons

## Appendix J – Interview Florence Schelling

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record.

As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

→ agreed on using her name and planning to meet in person during the summer to hand over thesis

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

### Background Information

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	Florence Schelling
<b>Role</b>	Entrepreneur, Speaker and Mentor Expert Sport vs. Business, Leadership & Motivation
<b>Company</b>	Focusfinder
<b>Industry</b>	Sports
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	Ice Hockey
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	21.04.2023
<b>Interview Duration</b>	50min
<b>Interview Language</b>	DE
<b>Format</b>	Online (Zoom)

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Introductory Questions

**Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself.**

*Well, my background is ice hockey. I have played for 25 years at different levels. From being a professional to attending three Olympic games, winning the Bronze Medal with my team. Next to it, I was always working 100% or studied. I have a master's degree in business administration and worked in different industries and positions in various countries.*

### Sports Career

*Can you tell me about your sports career?*

➤ Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?

➤ **What was the reason that you have started playing Ice Hockey?**

*Both older brothers of mine played ice hockey and they needed a goalkeeper to train. So, they put me in the goal and that was how I got there. I loved it and decided that I want to join ice hockey too.*

➤ **What motivated you to become a sportsperson?**

*I did not choose it actively, it just came with time. It was a step-by-step process. I early realized that I am talented. Not only in ice hockey, but generally in sports. I did swimming, soccer and even athletics and all kept telling me how talented I am. But ice hockey was just most fun, I loved team sports and that you go through high and lows together. The needed speed, the agility, dynamics as well as the precision made it highly attractive to me. I always invested more time and effort. With reaching higher levels, I had to train more frequently so it just happened automatically. It is basically embedded in the system, the better you get, the more you train.*

➤ Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?

➤ **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**

What were special skills of your team members? The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people's strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?

*I would say I got two main strengths:*

*First, I knew (or still know) how to deal with pressure to perform. Secondly, it is said that the goalkeeper makes 50% of the team. Thus, my team knew that they can rely on me as I was solid as a rock. They knew, I will give 100% and support them as good as I possibly can. It is difficult to perform then when it is needed and be ready at game time.*

**Follow-up Question: Your performance at the Sochi Olympic Winter Games was incredible and highly impressive. You made it to the all-star team of the tournament and even got voted as the tournament's MVP and the best goalkeeper. How did you prepare yourself to reach your full performance?**

*Well, Turin were my first Olympic games in 2006. You can imagine as it is the first time you attend the Olympics that it is overwhelming. I was like a tourist discovering everything since it was my first time. The second Olympics in Vancouver was then a bit different. As I had experience from Turin, I did not have the urge to be a tourist and could focus more on ice hockey. During my third time in Sochi, I could profit from my experience from the last two Olympic games as I already experienced it twice before. Therefore, my focus was 100% on ice hockey and the upcoming games. I shared that with other players who also attended other Olympic games before so we kind of lived it and guided the other players who joined for the first time. Acting as a role model and motivate them was a great team performance. Additionally, we won our first bronze medal at the World Championship two years before which really pushed our confidence. This had a huge impact on the team morale. So, I guess my performance then was highly related to the fact that it was not my first time and the focus I could set.*

➤ **Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?**

*I was never captain but in the captain's team. In ice hockey you cannot be captain as a goalkeeper because you are not allowed to cross the red line. This makes it impossible to go and talk to the referees on the other side. This is internationally not allowed, just the US has an exception where it is possible. But I definitely had a team leadership role and always supported the team with my experience. What I always did was standing up for my teammates.*

➤ **Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?**

*Yes, a lot. How to put a team together, to assign the roles within a team in order to function. It is difficult to assign different roles so that they get accepted by everyone. For that, transparency and communication are key. You have to get to know all players and know how to deal with them. Thus, communication is highly crucial as I learned as a player as well as a coach.*

*Additionally, as a goalkeeper I learnt how to stay focused. Preparation, resilience, performance pressure as well as the reflection of games, trainings and situations are other key competencies.*

*I have to admit that it was extremely difficult to me to name these skills at the first place because for us athletes, it is just normal. With time, I realized that what was normal to me, was very special to others.*

➤ **Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?**

*Usually, we practiced Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. In addition, we had two to three games a week and sometimes we even trained in the morning. There was only one day off a week, but this did not mean that I was actually free. I still had to work or study so it was just a training-free evening.*

*Something which was highly important to me was the financial compensation. I never wanted to be financially dependent on sports. I knew that I had my education or job so ice hockey was more a hobby. Of course, a time-consuming and high intensive one but still a hobby. The only time I felt like a professional athlete was actually at the Olympics. It was nice to experience but I was glad to come home to my "normal" life. If you fully focus on sports and only on sports there is just too much free time which is unused which I personally would see as being ineffective.*

**Follow-up Question: How about recovery? Do you feel that you had enough time to fully recover?**

*Yes and no. Since I mostly slept at home except if we had training camps from the national team, I feel that I had my routines and recovery. For me it was enough.*

➤ **Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports?**

**Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?**

*I always worked 100% or studied next to it. So, it was not that much of a change.*

➤ **What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?**

*Focus: deliver performance when it is required and of course being able to perform 100%*

## Professional Career Path & Success

Please describe your career path.

➤ **What is your current job position?**

*I founded my company in 2022 when I realized that I have actually something to offer. I was thinking about how to transfer my knowledge and how this can help others in achieving their goals. My business is based on that, therefore the name "Focusfinder". I wanted to pass on my experience as an athlete and coach as well as my former job positions to support people to find their optimal focus. I help my clients to work more efficiently, set clearer goals and steps and putting everything "under one hat". This is achieved through individual coaching, workshops and input presentations. I also work with athletes to find their ultimate goal and to identify their drive. Knowing their drive helps to understand their motivation which is the "motor" of their success and creates their daily incentives to do what they are doing.*

*What I really love about my job is that I work with so many different personalities, that with each client I learn something else. It is like a symbiotic relationship; we can both learn from each other. As a coach, I realized that.*

➤ **How long have you been working for this position?**

*Since 2022*

➤ Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?

➤ How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?

**Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?**

*I studied economics in Boston and played at the universities ice hockey team "Huskies".*

*Afterwards, I did my master's in business administration in Sweden and played for Linköpings HC and then retired from sports. I also have some work experience abroad.*

➤ **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**

*That was when I started my role as head of sports at the Swiss ice hockey club SCB in Berne. Even though I was the first female in history leading a male professional sports team, I did not regard it as something special. For me it was just a job. Unfortunately, it ended in some sort of chaos as it was during Covid-19 and the media did not have anything to talk about. My dismissal created therefore the perfect headline opportunity which was a bit unfortunate.*

➤ **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**

*The whole communication creates a huge challenge. You provide the knowledge and vision and with that you have to put together a team. It is very difficult to communicate in a way everyone is happy. You cannot say something is based on your gut feeling or that you think that might be the best way to go. Everything has to be underlined by facts and you have to formulate your arguments carefully and fact-based.*

➤ **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**

*My willingness to learn and my eager to always improve myself definitely helped me to overcome the obstacles. Continuous development was crucial. Also, I always regarded it as a challenge with the knowledge that it will not be easy, and nothing will be given for free. But this resilience and being able to perform under pressure definitely helped to master the situation.*

➤ **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**

*Oh, difficult. To be honest, that is something I still have to figure out. I do have joy in working individually with clients. This enables me to fully commit to someone. I think this is highly related to the focus topic – focus only*

on one person.

- **How do you personally define “career success” and which specific skills do you see as key factors?**
- **In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?**
- Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?  
*No, a role model itself but I had a clear definition for myself how I want to be. I had different coaches and bosses and tried to take the best from all of them. Thus, no idol but I loved to analyze other goal keepers and take the best things from each of them and tried to apply it. That is what I personally identified as “best”.*

#### Correlation: Impact on Success?

- **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**  
*Definitely. As an athlete I was not unknown, but I made myself a name which helped me in business. Sponsor events and networking were not really interesting as an athlete but gets very important afterwards. I was not fully aware of that during my sports career but with time I realized the benefits and opportunities they create. It is like branding. My name stands for something. Of course, this is even stronger as individual athlete since in team sports you are mainly defined as a team rather than an individual. But that is exactly what you have to use.*
- Can you provide an example or success story?
- What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?
- Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?
- **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**  
*In sport, results were always black or white. In contrast, in the professional world a lot of things are “grey”. I was missing this clear cut between “good and bad” and that I got no immediate and direct feedback or results. This made it really hard to measure my work. I did not know where I stand within this grey zone. It is not like a game where you have to perform within these important but limited 60 minutes. It is rather a period of time, starting every day, morning to evening, 5 times a week.*
- Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?
- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**  
*No, not in general. Before attending the secondary school, I would have said yes but after I joined the culture and sport school, I realized that other hobbies develop similar skills. We had musicians in the class and since I worked with them, it became clear to me that also other hobbies develop similar skills. In music, you have solo artist or orchestras, similar to individual and team sports. I would say, sport is definitely a competitive advantage but rather over people who are not participating in something specific.*  
*Funny example here is that I had a client from the organization committee from the fan club of FC Zurich called “Südkurve”. I have to admit that I never thought about how much organization is needed for that. They regularly meet to create the banners and have to synchronize the songs etc. which needs a whole choreography to support the sportsmen. They also have their leaders and rankings which is similar to business.*
- What are your thoughts on the statement that “annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes”?
- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**  
*No, I would say that I rather get to know the person itself. This is something you cannot generalize; it is about the person and not just their background.*  
**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**  
**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**  
*Both, but generally I would say as a pro. If you are a professional athlete “only”, you definitely miss out on the professional experience. You have to understand the topics, but you cannot learn these in each position. I had a dual-career and I would not want to miss that.*

## Final Question

- **What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?**

*Start early especially regarding the communication with players and coaches (mit Händ und Füess)*

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

“Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?”

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

## Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

## List of Abbreviations used

US: United States

## Informational Background

[https://mykeynotespeaker.net/redner/florence-schelling-20?gclid=CjwKCAjw6IiiBhAOEiwALNqncXGCpkw\\_V1FsredAoBxu04FozpsD8TQcqK3xHB9wI\\_cL7bXgdW6alBoCLIQQAxD\\_BwE](https://mykeynotespeaker.net/redner/florence-schelling-20?gclid=CjwKCAjw6IiiBhAOEiwALNqncXGCpkw_V1FsredAoBxu04FozpsD8TQcqK3xHB9wI_cL7bXgdW6alBoCLIQQAxD_BwE)

## Appendix K – Interview Roger Schnegg

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record.

As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

→ **agreed on using his name and send thesis as PDF**

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

### Background Information

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	Roger Schnegg
<b>Role</b>	CEO / Director
<b>Company</b>	Swiss Olympic
<b>Industry</b>	Sports
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	Volleyball
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	21.04.2023
<b>Interview Duration</b>	60min
<b>Interview Language</b>	DE
<b>Format</b>	Online

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Introductory Questions

Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself.

*My sport background is volleyball. I have been promoted to the NLA four times, each time with a different club, and have never been relegated. I was a regular player in the NLA with only 18 years, stopped quickly at the age of 21 and then started again after travelling with 22. Then, I was player coach (6-7 yrs) and club president in Münchenbuchsee where we managed to get promoted from the first league to the NLA. From 1992-1993 I was playing for the Swiss National Team as setter. Then I stopped abruptly and did my HWV (FH today) diploma.*

*I then started in the event industry at BEA Expo and was later promoted to the position of Head of the Trade Fairs & Events department in the marketing division for Forum Fribourg. After a brief stint as a Marketing Project Manager, I became a sports official and CEO for Swiss Volley in 2002. I was then approached by Swiss Volleyball to become their director in 2002. They were actually in need of restructuring as they had high debts. I had to conduct a situation analysis and create a new strategy to propose at the general assembly. Then, I was asked to become the CEO for Swiss Olympic, where I am still working today.*

*My son was a professional tennis player and was performing well until high school. Then he fortunately realized that it might not be enough or what he really wants. My daughter rides horses and plays volleyball. Today, sports are still important, but age-appropriate of course. Until 2-3 years ago, I also played volleyball as a hobby. We were relatively good for our age and could have even been promoted to the national league A. I also played beach volleyball as first generation and was among the top 5 Swiss players.*

## Sports Career

Can you tell me about your sports career?

- Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?
- **What was the reason that you have started playing volleyball?**  
*Classic example, through my parents. My dad was playing volleyball. I first played table tennis from 7-14 and then switched to volleyball. I was always a team player and more a team sport athlete by character.*
- **What motivated you to become a sportsperson?**  
*Fun! Also, the unique atmosphere. Imagine having 1000 spectators who cheer you. As well as friendship, my friends from that time are still my best friends today.*
- Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?
- **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**  
What were special skills of your team members? The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people's strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?  
*Yes, I totally agree, you also have to step down as the team is in the foreground. My position was also important as I was the team control center and playmaker. Every second ball comes to me, so I needed to have a good overview. Also, as coach player I had to coach the team and was still part of the team on the field. Today, I try to lead my team as I did as coach player. I am still responsible and have to make decisions, but I try to do it together with my team. I still have to pull strings, but I do it after talking to my team.*  
*And I do not take myself too seriously.*  
*My strength is that I know that I have no strength. I understand a bit of everything, but I am not a professional at something. Therefore, I need the best people for each topic/division around me and give them a platform. I would see myself more as a coordinator.*
- **Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?**  
*Coach player and club president at the same time for several years.*
- **Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?**  
*Basically yes. Switzerland lives the Olympic values of excellence, respect, and friendship - exactly the values that I learned from sports. Sport and business have many parallels. The second and third best are just as important for society. They learn to perform at a high level from an early age, to live a structured life, but also to develop resilience, sacrifice, setback handling, respect opponents, and work within a team, which are important skills. The number one desire for the course at that time was: universities teach us to avoid all risks, but we wanted to teach the opposite - to take reasonable risks.*  
*Top athletes who didn't quite make it to the top are also very important. They carry the backpack of competitive sports with them and then realize after their education that it is not enough. They then start their professional career or studies with these skills and often shape society (Schaeppli from Swisscom or Hildebrand and former SNB chief, who was a swimmer).*
- **Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?**  
*3-4x per week*
- **Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports? Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?**  
*I was never a real professional. I completed a commercial apprenticeship and then served in the military. Back then, elite sports were not as advanced and fast-paced as they are today.*
- **What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?**  
*Teamwork as a team sport athlete and handling pressure*

## Professional Career Path & Success

Please describe your career path.

- What is your current job position?

- How long have you been working for this position?
- Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?
- How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?
- Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?

➤ **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**

*Leadership reference: Train a high-level volleyball team at the age of 27-28 while also serving as the president of a club with over members.*

*I then completed my diploma thesis on tourism at HWV and was employed by the company I worked with during my thesis to implement it internally. Then, I worked four days at the welcome counter for a holiday exhibition in Bern and was approached by a job placement firm which was in search for a new manager. My boss who was sitting next to me then said take him, he works good and that was how I entered the next position. It is ironic, I went straight from the "Inföhüsl" of a holiday fair to a managing position for all trade shows in Berne with 20 employees under me. It was a challenging 3-year period, but I still maintain contact with my former colleagues.*

➤ **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**

*As mentioned above, it was difficult because I did not have a lot of specialized knowledge and it was hard for me to deal with my boss as we did not share the same values and leadership style. I often took it very personal when he was talking to me disrespectfully.*

*Additionally, my start at Swiss Volley was also hard. I had a lot of time pressure and much work to do. For 1.5 years I had one free Sunday only. That was crazy as I had to reorganize the whole union. From 16 people we had to reduce to 6 and we ended up firing 14 of them and hire 4 new employees since we could not continue working with the old work force. That was particularly difficult as I knew most of them privately.*

*Also, Covid-19 made it very difficult to adapt to all restrictions given by the state and the money we have received. We got over CHF 300m to distribute fairly to all clubs.*

*And of course, the overall situation also plays a crucial role. I always say everyone has an energy level of 100%. You can put more than 100% for a while but not in the long run. But sometimes you only put 70% in something which is also not fun because then it is getting boring. Long-term you should try to stay at around 100%.*

➤ **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**

*There is an incredible variety of topics to manage in my role, and accordingly, I have to prioritize them. Someone once said, "Better to be roughly right than precisely wrong," (Lieber grob richtig als im Detail falsch) which is kind of my motto as a CEO in a management position.*

*You have to distinguish between what is important and what is not worth putting much energy into. While you definitely have to identify unimportant things, usually a problem is always important to someone, so you have to convince them that overall, it is not that much of a burden, so that they understand.*

➤ **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**

*Find the right balance between tension and relaxation = find your mix  
Prioritizing and setting boundaries.*

- How do you personally define "career success" and which specific skills do you see as key factors?

➤ **In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?**

- *People person: I can handle people very well - I like all people and they mostly like me too*
- *Good listener & the importance of networking*
- *Be authentic & credible!*

- Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?

**Correlation: Impact on Success?**

➤ **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**

*Team concept – together! -> performance as well as social*

*I feel better being part of a group and I am certain that a group will always outperform the individual. It is also very exciting to bring together many different people with the same interest but different personalities.*

- Can you provide an example or success story?
- **What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?**  
*I would say the same as in the previous question. Skills that helped me throughout my >20 years career as CEO or director.*
- Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?
- **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**  
*I always thought it would be nice to play an instrument, but I never learnt to do so. I sometimes regret it as I think it would be nice to play guitar at home or in some situations. I even went travelling for a year for this reason I did not even miss out on that. I never had to give up anything for sport. Also, I was never very open for other sport disciplines as I was committed to volleyball. I think I should have been more open to other sports and make use of these synergies.*
- **Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?**  
*Yes, team concept and teamwork.*
- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**  
*Generally, yes. Unless someone is strongly committed to another area such as "culture, association, music, etc." It doesn't have to be high-performance sports, it can also be an engagement in a club that offers a great opportunity for young people to take responsibility, which is extremely helpful as a life school.  
We recently launched "Club Management": it includes 8-10 online modules for sports managers. In the end, there are 2 days of in-person training, and after 2 years of engagement in a club, you will receive an official diploma, which we want to have recognized by economiesuisse.*
- What are your thoughts on the statement that “annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes”?
- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**  
*No not really, single or team sport does not really matter to me. But if they engaged in a club parallel to their studies/work, I do prefer them over someone who “just” studied.*  
**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**  
*No, not specifically. I want people with the same values but different skill set. Having different knowledge and basis is needed to progress. Shared values are important, especially when it comes to social interaction. People who think different than me are challenging my view which is super interesting. Because then I learn something new. In the end, I can still decide but at least I got some different ideas and approaches.*  
**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**  
*Yes, but I would not differ from individual sports because both need to perform = School of Life*

#### Final Question

- What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

“Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?”

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

#### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

[List of Abbreviations used](#)

[Informational Background](#)

CV

1992-1995: Business Economics degree HWV

1996-1998: Head of the Department of Fairs and Events at BEA Bern Expo

1998-2001: Head of Marketing at Forum Fribourg

2001-2002: Marketing project manager

2003-2008: Director of Swiss Volley

2009-2011: Head of the Sports Department in Bern

2012 – today: Director of the National Olympic Committee and Swiss Olympic (11.5 years)

## Appendix L – Interview Josh Simpson

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record.

As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

→ agreed on using his name and send thesis as PDF

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

### Background Information

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	Josh Simpson
<b>Role</b>	Co-Owner & President of Pacific Football Club Canada Partner at SixFive Sports & Entertainment Shareholder and Member of the Board at Grundeigentümer Verband CH Co-Founder and Managing Partner at Schwanau Invest AG
<b>Company</b>	Several Companies/Holdings
<b>Industry</b>	Sport Management & Real Estate
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	Soccer
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	21.04.2023, 09.30
<b>Interview Duration</b>	90min
<b>Interview Language</b>	EN
<b>Format</b>	In-Person

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Introductory Questions

**Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself.**

*I am married and have four kids. My oldest is twelve years old and my youngest just turned two. I live with my family in Seefeld, Zurich. We moved back from Canada to Switzerland for several reasons a few years ago, but the most important reason was that I have so many businesses here that I need to be closer. My mother is Swiss, but I grew up in Canada. My wife is American, so the kids have all three passports.*

### Sports Career

**Can you tell me about your sports career?**

*I grew up in Canada. At that time there was no professional football. So, I took a first step and went to a university in the US to study Finance and Real Estate (2001-2004). I have received a scholarship and played on the men's soccer team. Afterwards, I was drafted to the major league soccer and got into the Canadian National Team. From there I went international and played in the UK, Germany, Turkey and in Switzerland (2004-2015 professional football career). My last club before retiring was the Young Boys in Berne, Switzerland.*

*= clear cut with start at bank to get a structure*

- Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?
- **What was the reason that you have started playing soccer?**  
*I just loved it. I was good at it, and it made a lot of fun.*
- **What motivated you to become a sportsperson?**  
*That was when I watched the World Cup in 1994 and I knew that I never want anything else than to be a professional football player. Canada was not in the World Cup, so my biggest dream was to attend the World Cup with the National Team. Canada only attended in 1986 and 2022 but just qualified for the Cup in 2026. So, they are definitely making progress, but I am just a big investor now.*
- **Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?**  
*That was definitely Rivaldo and Carlos, two Brazilian soccer players who were just incredibly good.*
- **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**  
What were special skills of your team members? The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people's strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?  
*Within the Team (change room): positive energy and confidence*  
*On the Pitch: power, speed, and the drive to score*
- **Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?**  
*Of course, not at the beginning, since I was only 22 years old. So, I was more the follower. But by the time I got 25-26 years old I was more experienced and had a different role. In the end of my career, I was captain of the national team and in my club.*
- **Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?**  
*Yes, definitely! Resilience, drive, and mental toughness. That is actually a good one, mental toughness is really crucial. But also, social competence and being able to read other people.*  
*Funny story actually, I had a teammate who just started his first job after retiring from soccer. So, he worked as kind of a travel agent for the VIPs at the World Cup in Qatar. I was literally surrounded by the highest top-level people and his behavior and coolness was just incredible. I was truly fascinated, also about the way he talked to them. He was so confident and could just read them. I mean, it is not easy to tell somebody at that level that they just have to be patient and need to wait for the plane to arrive, but he did it with such a coolness that I was highly impressed. That demonstrated to me the importance about reading people and treat them respectfully.*
- Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?
- **Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports? Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?**  
*Full time student and parallel in the men's soccer team. My transition was not easy. I was playing in Berne, so I looked for a job there. That is when I started working for UBS at the lowest banking level. My boss was actually surprised that I was willing to do this job, but I just said as long as I do not need to be at the counter and can-do client meetings, I am fine with it. That was actually a pretty hard time. I remember when I had to buy several suits since I could not imagine going to work like that. First, I thought it was a joke. But it really helped me to get a structure and working during fixed hours.*
- What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?

### Professional Career Path & Success

#### Please describe your career path.

*Well, I started in banking at UBS Berne and was then promoted as Client Relationship Manager at UBS in Zurich. That was when I realized that I can do much more and much better if I build a company of my own. So, I am currently in a senior management position where I just got a 300 million deal as a broker. Have I ever done it? No. Can I do it? Hell yes!*

*And that is exactly what I mean with the confidence I gained from sports. I know that I got something they want so I just need to bring them together.*

*(he just received the meeting confirmation of both parties during the interview)*

➤ **What is your current job position?**

- *Partner at Sixfive, a private equity company which owns football clubs (Vancouver & Pacific) which is currently my “baby”*
- *= diversified global football investment fund seeking investments in high growth markets, under managed European clubs, and distressed or turnaround opportunities*
- *Officially CEO of a Family office (multi-family office of soccer players) which is my main business, and we have many holdings inside the FO*
- *Swiss property owner association (propertyowner.ch)*
- *= one of Switzerland’s largest associations covering the needs of property owners and investors in the Swiss and North American market*

*I am working in different continents, so I have no fixed working hours. This needs a work-live integration because you have to work then when it is needed. I do not know if I got this from football or not but there my private and professional life melted together. You have to train, to do it over and over again and just keep going. Everything is aligned with the sports, your recovery, your diet, your lifestyle etc.*

- How long have you been working for this position?
- Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?
- How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?

➤ **Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?**

*Yes, in Canada, UK, Turkey and Switzerland.*

➤ **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**

*That was five years ago at the age of 35. I founded the Pacific Football Club and hired 55 people within 6 months. That was an incredible growth phase and very challenging.*

➤ **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**

*People relation skills, for sure. I do not like it to say it but I often have more problems with women than men (being direct). It is difficult if you have a conflict in the office, to resolve it in a way that everyone is happy. Even today, I cannot tell you how to deal with that. Not only in Canada, but also in Switzerland. Something, I have learnt is managing people and that you need to have good managers in place. They are like someone’s parents. That was a big learning, that we need levels of management.*

*I think that it is said that “each person can only properly manage eight people right”, not 100% sure about the number but this demonstrates the importance of having good managers.*

- Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?

➤ **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**

*People skills = soft skills*

*If you manage people, you have to deal with different personalities and their incentives vary a lot. You have to feel what they need.*

*I nice example is the Managing director I hired at the Pacific Football Club – Paul. Since I could not be around that often, I had to hire someone to be in charge. Sometimes he comes to the office and brings donuts for everyone. With that, he just made everyone having a better day. It is simple but can achieve so much.*

- How do you personally define “career success” and which specific skills do you see as key factors?
- In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?
- Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?

**Correlation: Impact on Success?**

➤ **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**

*Yes. Work ethics and drive helped me the most. I started football with nobody and nothing, working 18 hours a day. I had to sit on every board in the area, give speeches and that every evening. It was very hard and needed a lot of mental toughness. If you do not sleep a lot six days in a row, you realize how tired you get.*

- Can you provide an example or success story?

- **What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?**

*You know, start-ups are tough. You have to believe in yourself and work hard. If you hire people and want to have their confidence you have to demonstrate that you believe in what you are doing, so that they trust you. People only follow if you believe in yourself, and they will only bring new people if you are confident to succeed.*

- **Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?**

*Transferrable skills to business: Grid, determination, ability to adapt, and drive function.*

- **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**

*Not going to the office from morning to evening. I learned it at age of 35. Putting on a suit and get up in the morning was hard. Definitely not similar to my former sportsmen lifestyle.*

*Also, sports taught me to be very direct. When it comes to my kids, I tell my son wtf was that? And then my wife looks at me and says how can you say that. I do not know if it is because she does not have a professional sports background, but I am used to be direct. In sports you can hit each other on the pitch and shout and afterwards you shower together. Or you have the worst fights on the pitch and when you score, you hug and sometimes even kiss. Sport is very emotional, in both ways.*

*Also, it took time until people took me seriously for something else than being an athlete. If you succeed, they kind of have a mindset "how did he achieve this?" or "It must have been vitamin B". You have to proof yourself again but that time from a different perspective.*

- **Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?**

*I can confidently say "yes". Being in a football team is like being in a company. Finding your way through that company. I try to be respectful and caring. I mean I own the company so nobody can fire me, right? Thus, I treat people with the best incentives.*

*At the bank, I have learned what it is like to be in that world – not my world. Everything is too structured and inefficient, and I felt that I could do the work of a whole day within two hours if I wanted to. But there is always somebody asking you things, or you have these meetings to attend. That was when I realized, that with my skill set, I can already do what I want to do, take better care of my clients by having more flexible offers and make a better job and salary.*

- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**

*I think it does, of course I have a sports background but there are so many things that I have learnt from that time that non-athletes could not have experienced.*

- **What are your thoughts on the statement that "annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes"?**

- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**

*Absolutely, I already know how to treat them. They do know not to take everything too seriously and I can really grab the guy.*

**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**

*No, I do not have the luxury of line ups of people as a start-up. Our salaries are at the lower end spectrum in the industry but therefore, it only attracts people who really love the job and work with passion.*

**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**

*Pro without question, a massive pro! It is hard and I know what it needs to succeed.*

*It is totally correct what your thesis is about – I gave speeches about it to all the managing directors at UBS about this topic, I basically said the same thing, and they loved it!*

*You have to go out to win or be passive and lose.*

## Final Question

- **What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?**

*Never stop learning! I met ten soccer players from YB yesterday. They are my clients, so we went for lunch at*

*12am, ate until 2pm and then went for a coffee and walked around until 4pm. So, when I asked them what plans they have for the day, they had literally none. One had to go and get a document for the taxes, and another had to grab take-away food for him and his girlfriend. They do not do anything the whole day! Except training of course, but it does not hurt to take some interest and learn something. Especially if you have so much time available. My advantage was that I studied before I started being a professional football player.*

*I bough my first real estate when I was 20 years old so, learned quickly how that hobby can make me money.*

*And it goes without saying that you have to work hard.*

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

“Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?”

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

Give: handwritten note with extra expression of appreciation & a gift

### List of Abbreviations used

FO: Family Office

## Appendix M – Interview Peter Spuhler

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

May I record this interview? If yes, thank you for letting me record.

As soon as the research is completed the recording of the interview will be deleted.

Your answers will be used for research purpose only and will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. With your permission, I would mention your valuable insights in the thesis and add a little bit of background information about my interviewees and their experience. Would it be okay for you to be mentioned by name or would you prefer to stay anonymous/use of pseudonyms?

→ agreed on using his name and send thesis as PDF

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

Let me quickly provide you with some background information beforehand:

### Background Information

The main objective of my thesis is to identify relevant skills acquired through team sports leading to success in the professional world. Both, advantages and disadvantages will be analyzed. For this, I first need to identify the skill set developed through team sports. In the next step, I will discover notable traits relevant to achieve top management positions. Lastly, I will examine how these competencies can be transferred and implemented in the business world.

<b>Interview Partner</b>	Peter Spuhler
<b>Role</b>	Chairman of the Board of Directors
<b>Company</b>	Stadler Rail & PCS Holding AG (Peter Christoph Spuhler)
<b>Industry</b>	Manufacturer of Railway Rolling Stock / Rail Vehicle Construction
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	Ice Hockey
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	03.05.2023, 09.00
<b>Interview Duration</b>	45min
<b>Interview Language</b>	DE
<b>Format</b>	In-Person (On-site in the office at Stadler Rail in Bussnang)

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Introductory Questions

**Before we begin, it would be nice if you could tell me a bit about yourself.**

**Adapted question to interview:** I usually start with this open question. Of course, I was already able to read and inform myself properly, but I would like to offer you the opportunity to introduce yourself in your own words.

He read the one pager and immediately started talking about the correlation:

*Regarding my experience in top management (as an entrepreneur), two significant factors have greatly influenced me. Firstly, my involvement in sports, specifically ice hockey and handball. Secondly, my military service as a grenadier in the mountain company which was highly performance-oriented in the 80s.*

*With regards to sport, I had to decide between ice hockey and handball at the age of about 14 or 15. In retrospect, I believe that I would have been better suited for handball and perhaps more naturally talented in that sport, but ultimately, I chose to pursue ice hockey.*

*In sports, one learns the art of teamwork, discovering their role, taking on responsibility, and finding a balance between individual and team interests. Success in sports is the result of a collective effort, which also calls for discipline, understanding one's role, and embracing setbacks as opportunities for growth. Ice hockey, in particular, demands high levels of intellect. It is a fast-paced sport played in four blocks of five players each, along with a goalie. Each block has a specific strategic order and can stay on the field for a maximum of one minute. All moves are pre-planned and*

must be executed seamlessly under pressure and mental stress. These skills are transferable to the workplace, making ice hockey a valuable training ground for life.

#### Sports Career

Can you tell me about your sports career?

➤ **Which competitive sport did you practice in the past?**

*Ice Hockey*

➤ **What was the reason that you have started playing Ice Hockey?**

*Well, I grew up next to an ice field as my father was chef at the Dolder Grand. I have always been on the ice during winter and started with ice hockey when I was around five or six. I was always fascinated by the atmosphere in the ice stadium and everything around it. The large number of fans, the equipment preparation in the cabin etc.*

➤ **What motivated you to become a sports person?**

*Well, I have never become a full-time professional player, even though that was the goal. I was good but never talented enough to be a professional ice hockey player. Playing ice hockey in Zurich while studying in St. Gallen made it difficult to fully concentrate on either pursuit. Thus, I could not focus properly on one thing. Ultimately, I made the decision to retire from ice hockey at the end of my studies.*

➤ Did you have an idol which you admired throughout your athletic career? If so, who and why?

➤ **What were your strength in the team? Why did it make you so valuable for the team?**

*Throughout my athletic career, I have held the position of captain in nearly every team I played for. At the youngster level, I have always been the captain. I think my characteristic traits of my strong sense of discipline, and having a certain claim to leadership were two of my main strengths. While I was physically strong, my technical skills were somewhat limited.*

**What were special skills of your team members?**

The reason I ask is that I assume you were also aware of other people's strength and could easily identify and appreciate them since you saw it as an asset for your team rather than a competitor – what do you think?

*I think yes. Especially during my early years. I was not a great student, but sports helped me develop confidence and a sense of purpose. Sports have the power to keep young people off the streets and provide them with direction and meaningful leisure activity.*

*We were Swiss champion back in our junior years and I spent a lot of time with my friends to whom I still have contact nowadays. I think it develops a really strong bond of friendship.*

➤ **Did you have a leadership role within your team? If so, which role?**

*Almost throughout my whole career, I have been captain at Grasshopper Club Zurich.*

➤ **Do you feel that you have learned valuable skills from your sports? If yes, which ones in particular and why are they important to you?**

*Absolutely! Discipline and punctuality were definitely two key factors for success, including being prepared for training with sharpened skates and sticks ready. On the ice, discipline meant following tactical guidelines and putting aside personal ego to fully integrate into the team. It has always been a delicate balance between personal ambition and teamwork. Emotions also play a significant role in ice hockey as they can greatly influence the outcome of the game. Thus, the power of emotions is highly valuable to turn a game around.*

➤ **Training Effort: How many times a week did you train?**

*Back then it was not like it is today. We used to have three training sessions per week and one to two games. During my junior level in handball it was about two times per week.*

➤ **Educational Background: Did you work or study parallel to sports? Was your transition into the professional world gradual or rather abrupt?**

*I was never 'just' an ice hockey player, I also studied in parallel and started my career in the Swiss army.*

➤ **What was your biggest learning throughout your sports career?**

*Integration, discipline, and fighting together for a common goal. Of course, having fun is also important in the end.*

## Professional Career Path & Success

Please describe your career path

➤ **What is your current job position?**

*Chairman of the Board of Directors at Stadler Rail and other companies as well as several Board of Director mandates.*

➤ **How long have you been working for this position?**

*I handed over my CEO position at Stadler Rail at the end of 2022. But, for Stadler Rail, I work since 1987. Thus, about 37 years.*

➤ **Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?**

*Chairman of the Board of Directors at Stadler Rail, PCS Holding AG (Peter Christoph Spuhler), Aebi Schmidt and others. I am also in the Board of Director at Rieter, TSA and others. I have been vice president of the Board of Directors at ZSC Lions for a long time. But it was time to hand over the mandate to younger generations.*

*Info: PCS Holding A - a family office investment firm based in Frauenfeld, Switzerland. The firm looks after the investments of Peter Spuhler with 13 investments.*

➤ **How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?**

➤ **Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?**

*No, my parents could not afford sending me abroad. If I regret something or if I would have done something differently, it would have been to work abroad for two to three years. I had a semester abroad but never worked overseas. Today, of course, I travel a lot internationally.*

➤ **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**

*Well, I led Stadler Rail the moment I entered and then became the owner in 1989 with the loan granted by the Thurgauer Kantonalbank. However, with my entry into operational management in 1987, I was already in a leadership position.*

➤ **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**

*Oh, there were challenges during my 37 years. At the beginning, it was certainly paying off the interest and amortizing the loan regularly. In the mid-90s, our goal was to develop our own vehicles. At that time, everyone laughed at us, but that is the best thing that can actually happen to you: being underestimated. That was then, but of course, does not happen anymore today (laughs). The decision to become a rail vehicle manufacturer was definitely a big challenge when looking back.*

➤ **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**

*I would say that I am very resilient as well as courageous but still in a thoughtful manner. We have doubled our number of employees and revenue several times. You have to carefully consider what possibly can go wrong. But at the right moment, you need to have the courage to implement it if you have a good gut feeling.*

*Do you know Helmut Maucher? He was the man who made Nestle great. He once said that three characteristics are necessary for an entrepreneur: courage, strength of nerves, and composure. I fully support his view. However, I would say that there is still a very essential fourth characteristic needed: passion! This makes the difference between an absolute top manager and an entrepreneur. In German, the word 'Leidenschaft' includes the word 'Leid', which means that you have to persevere and show a certain bite.*

➤ **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**

*I can assemble a team, motivate them to work together and move forward as a team. Compensating for weaknesses and leveraging strengths, utilizing the expertise of exceptional engineers and leaders to form the best possible team. And then integrating them as team players into the whole. Motivation means moving forward, which I learned strongly in the military. Also, lifting together under physical and mental pressure.*

➤ **How do you personally define "career success" and which specific skills do you see as key factors?**

*I do believe that setting a goal and sticking to it is important. There is a saying, 'When we lost sight of the goal, we doubled the effort.' Defining a goal with the team and working toward it is crucial. And, above all, not letting daily events distract you from achieving the goal. We operate in a long-term industry. The question then becomes, what do we want in terms of technology, what resources do we have available, and then consistently sticking to it.*

- **In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?**

*Courage, strength of nerves, composure, and passion! Defining a clear strategy and consequently sticking to it with the whole team.*

**Follow-up Question: Regarding the saying ‘Are you a corporate or an entrepreneur kid?’ When did you realize which area you prefer?**

*I was certainly not the easiest teenager. My parents had a lot of trouble with my academic career. I knew early on that I would not just fit into a large company. I needed a certain amount of freedom to be able to unfold and develop myself. The studies were certainly also decisive in this respect. My internship at SBG was abstract. I like numbers, but in the end, I also like a product that is sustainable and visible. Banking services were not really tangible for me.*

- Did you have a role model throughout your professional career? If so, who and why?

#### Correlation: Impact on Success?

- **Do you feel that your sport experience helped you throughout your professional career? If so, how?**

*Yes, certainly with learning to fit in a team, working toward a common goal as well as discipline and fun.*

- Can you provide an example or success story?

- **What specific skills gained through team sports helped you to achieve a top management position? Why did it make you successful?**

*I definitely believe so, but it also takes a certain amount of luck, or more accurate the chance, to get and see the opportunities. Being in the right moment at the right place and then having the courage to make the right decisions.*

- **Which specific skills would you identify as necessary and highly important for top management positions?**

*I have to differentiate between a manager and an entrepreneur. Someone who invests their own capital and is fully involved means more than just being a top manager of a large company. Their entire wealth is then tied up in the company and they cannot run away that easily.*

*Personally, I think that nowadays people focus too much on side issues (such as compliance, sustainability checks, gender quotas which are all topics prescribed by the legislator) and no longer have the focus on the essentials. The essential goal of a company is to be able to survive in tough international competition. Do you have the technology? Are you well positioned? What does the competition in the market look like?*

*(minute 27 of the recording)*

*What you have to submit in reports today, is insane. Personally speaking, it would be a big advantage to take a step back regarding the regulations. This would significantly improve the survivability of companies and, above all, guarantee it.*

*In addition, an entrepreneur must have an "out of the box" mindset. Not always standing against the current but also not always going along with the crowd. It is about finding your own profile, constantly questioning, and reviewing everything you do. What can you do differently? Going along with the crowd has rarely made anyone successful.*

- **Are there any skills from your athletic experience that might had a negative impact on your professional career? If so, which ones and why?**

*Well, with rising age you do feel the negative effects of sports (laughs). I have osteoarthritis in both knees. The physical wear and tear are certainly a disadvantage of sports (did not specifically address negative soft skills).*

- **Do you feel that team sports provided you with a unique set of skills that made you better equipped to succeed in top management positions? If so, why?**

*Yes, I would say so. Referring to the above-mentioned skills learned through sports.*

- **Do you feel that they made you better prepared for top management positions compared to non-sport executives? Is there a difference from your experience? If so, what kind of difference?**

*I do believe that team sports teach you many things such as teamwork, integration, putting your own ego aside and more. I think that a team athlete can adapt to new team situations and fit in better and faster.*

- What are your thoughts on the statement that “annual wages of former athletes are on average higher than the ones from non-athletes”?
- **Do you have more confidence in a former team sport athlete rather than a non-athlete or individual sport athlete?**

*I do believe that if someone has participated in sports, they bring certain prerequisites with them. Of course, education and experience are necessary to overcome difficult moments. They also need to bring passion to their work. These qualities can be excellently applied in the professional environment.*

*(minute 32 of the recording)*

**Follow-up Question: When hiring employees, was it a factor that you positively considered if someone came from a sports team?**

*Yes, this is definitely a factor to consider. Of course, it is not the main factor, but maybe about four to five on the list of important factors, alongside with education and experience.*

**Do you specifically hire team sport athletes?**

*Yes, we currently have an assistant who played in the first German handball league. There are several former professional athletes among us.*

**Do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**

*Yes, that is a pro. Of course, one has to consider the compatibility of the sport with the work schedule if the person is still active, but we also have reduced hours. Thus, we can always find a solution.*

#### Final Question

- **What advice would you give to young athletes aspiring to leadership positions in their careers?**

*Education is becoming increasingly important. That is why it is important to complete an education alongside being a professional athlete. I see a lot of examples in ice hockey, where I am very close to, where players do nothing during their professional career. Then there is the risk that they will fall into a hole after their career. I also see many positive examples where players study alongside their professional career. Of course, it takes longer, maybe six to seven years instead of four, but at the end of their career, they have a good education. At ZSC Lions, there are maybe four or five players who are doing distance learning.*

*Also, it is important to consider what to do afterwards and to work toward it. There are only few Swiss team sports players who earn so much that they do not have to work for their whole life. But those who live in Switzerland still have to work afterwards. Thus, it is important to foster these characteristics learned from sports that are fundamental prerequisites for business.*

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

“Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?”

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

#### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

Give: handwritten note with extra expression of appreciation & a gift

#### List of Abbreviations used

## Informational Background

Peter Spuhler, also known as Stadler Patron, was born in Seville (ES) in 1959 and spent his school years in Zurich after his family moved to Switzerland. At the age of six, he started his ice hockey career of around 20 years with Grasshopper Club Zurich. Today, he supports his favorite sport as Vice President of the ZSC Lions with idealistic and financial commitment. From 1980 to 1986, Peter Spuhler studied business administration at the University of St. Gallen. At the same time, he started his career in the Swiss Army, commanding the Mountain Grenadier Company 12 from 1991 to 1995, and the Mountain Fusilier Company III/148 from 1996 to 2000 = Captain.

After a traineeship at Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS), today's UBS, Peter Spuhler joined the operational management of Stadler Fahrzeuge AG in Bussnang in 1987. After just under two years, he took over the company with 18 employees and CHF 4.5 million in sales. Over the years, Stadler Rail developed from a local rail vehicle manufacturer into a competitive market player with a global presence, which today generates sales of more than CHF 3.2 billion with more than 12,000 employees. Furthermore, Stadler Rail's stock market listing in April 2019 represented one of the biggest milestones in the company's history.

After the turn of the millennium, Peter Spuhler began to become involved in other companies. In 2006, he became the majority shareholder of the Swiss Aebi company and merged it with the German company Schmidt. Together with Michael Pieper, Peter Spuhler also restructured the crisis-ridden Rieter company. As the largest shareholder with almost 20 percent of the shares, Peter Spuhler was elected to Rieter's board of directors in 2009. In 2011 Autoneum was detached from Rieter as an independent company and successfully listed on the stock exchange.

From 2012, Peter Spuhler diversified his portfolio and added three leasing companies to it: Estonia Train Finance, Nordic Train Finance and Austrian Train Finance. In addition, in 2018, the portfolio was also strengthened in the locomotive sector by founding the European Loc Pool with Bank Reichmuth as a partner.

From 1999 to 2012, Peter Spuhler sat for the SVP Thurgau as parliamentary group spokesman in the National Council and was spokesman for the Committee for Economic Affairs and Taxation. As a representative of the business community, he has primarily championed Switzerland as a center of industry in Bern and has been a strong advocate for financial and economic issues. Due to the currency turmoil that hit Stadler Rail hard, Peter Spuhler relinquished his political mandate as of 31 December 2012 in order to focus on the company in its entirety. The Board of Directors has appointed Markus Bernsteiner as the new Group CEO of Stadler with effect from 1 January 2023. In future, Peter Spuhler will once again concentrate on the position of Executive Chairman of the Board of Directors.

### About Stadler

Stadler has been building trains for 80 years. The provider of mobility solutions in rail vehicle construction, service and signalling technology has its headquarters in Bussnang, eastern Switzerland. It has a workforce of around 13,000 based in various production and engineering locations as well as more than 60 service locations. The company is conscious of its social responsibility for sustainable mobility and therefore stands for innovative, sustainable and durable quality products. The product range in the field of mainline railways and city transport includes high-speed trains, intercity trains, regional and suburban trains, metros, tramways and trams. Stadler also manufactures main-line locomotives, shunting locomotives, and passenger carriages. It is the world's leading manufacturer in the rack-and-pinion rail vehicle industry.

Spuhler was born in Seville in 1959. His father was a chef - most recently head chef at the famous luxury hotel "Dolder Grand" in Zurich. His mother ran an underwear factory. Spuhler was not a good student, but nevertheless made it into the student council and probably had a reputation as a daredevil even as a boy: His scout name was "Bismarck"! He passed the Abitur at an evening high school. He then studied business administration at the renowned University of St. Gallen (HSG) and had a career as an ice hockey player - as captain of the Zurich field hockey club Grasshoppers - and as an officer in the Swiss army.

"I learned a lot in the military," he admits. The importance of teamwork, for example. Or strategic thinking. Even today, his annual three-day planning sessions on Lake Constance resemble a military strategy game. With battle plans on market segments, products and sales territories, and an assessment of the opponent's capabilities.

As a captain, Spuhler had led a company of mountain grenadiers, an elite force and probably a pretty wild bunch. He regularly slept with his grenadiers in snow bivouacs at minus 20 degrees and boasted that he had climbed every peak in the Grisons with them at the time. He was well received by the troops. Even when he once led his men in the wrong direction for hours and their shoulders were already bloody from the backpack straps. He apologized, gave them a few bottles of wine, and everything was fine again.

Spuhler's most important goal was not growth, but economic survival. He had already learned at the university in St. Gallen: Growth as a strategy in itself is nonsense; growth should always be the consequence of a superior strategy.

Spuhler's secret to success? "I have to be able to do three things as a boss: hire the best people, keep costs under control and bring in orders." Spuhler proved to be a gifted marketer.

However, the entrepreneur, who was used to success, also had to accept defeats. For example, in 2010, when the Swiss Federal Railways SBB gave preference to the Canadian competitor Bombardier in the tender for the new Intercity double-decker trains - a two-billion deal. For Spuhler, this was "like losing the championship in your own ice hockey stadium in the last two minutes.

**Overview PCS:** <https://pcs-holding.ch/beteiligungen/>

## Appendix N – Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi

### Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Your experience and insights are invaluable to my research, and I am very much excited on learning more about this topic and your background. I would like to ask you some questions about your sports as well as professional career to better understand a possible correlation between the two. With your permission, I would like to record the interview, so I do not miss any of your comments.

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→ agreed on using his name and send thesis as PDF

Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?

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### Background Information

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<b>Interview Partner</b>	Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi
<b>Role</b>	Chairman of the Board of Directors
<b>Company</b>	MPB Executive Search
<b>Industry</b>	Headhunter
<b>Type of Team Sport</b>	-
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	27.04.2023, 11.30
<b>Interview Duration</b>	50min
<b>Interview Language</b>	DE
<b>Format</b>	Online (MS Teams)

May I turn on the recordings? → Press recording (MS Teams or phone)

Interesting insight during the interview: “May I quote you on that by name?”

### Professional Career Path & Success

#### Please describe your career path.

*I started my commercial apprenticeship at an agricultural cooperative. In comparison to my friends, I was very lucky as I was given trust and responsibility which enabled me to work rather than assist. I have then been to Paris for half a year to learn French. After that, I returned for the military service and started at the advertising company of a orell füssli werbe ag afterwards. We were responsible for selling advertisements for newspapers as we had contracts with them. Parallel to the job, I completed my education as a marketing manager. Then, I was contacted by a headhunter if I want to take over the marketing lead for Bindella. This was a miscast as I did not have the required experience for this job. Thus, I only stayed for a short period of time. Afterwards, I applied for a personal consulting ad which I have seen. First, I thought it will be too boring, but I talked to the boss anyways who wanted to open a new branch in Basel for which I would hold the responsibility as CEO. This was 36 years ago and meanwhile this branch has become the independent company MPB Executive Search with locations in Berne and Zurich with over 14 employees. I handed over the management of the company to my young partners last year and am now responsible for our mandates and headhunter activities = Headhunter since 1987.*

#### About the company

*MPB Executive Search stands for **Management, People, and Business**. The recruitment group AG belongs to the most successful executive search companies in Switzerland. MPB is part of the renowned international professional organization AESC Association of Executive Search Consultants. Only about 30 companies in Switzerland are allowed*

to bear the label and it represents a distinction for service at the highest level. The international business is covered by our partner namely "AltoPartner" which is a global alliance of independent executive search and leadership consulting firms with offices across the Americas, Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia-Pacific. If for example a Swiss-based company is looking for a CEO for their Spanish subsidiary in Madrid, AltoPartners Spain will be in charge as they know the regulations very well and already have an existing local network. We are actually search and find specialists with the motto «I search - and find!». We fill Chairman of the Board of Directors, C-level and top management positions by scanning the market for our clients and selecting the best candidates for a perfect match.

**Follow-up Question: What do you like the most about your job?**

The core business involves the recruitment of people which I personally really like. I was called the lucky maker (in German: Der Glücklichmacher) by the magazine "Basler Zeitung". This describes it very well, I try to make people happy, from both sides, the company as well as the hired employee.

Companies come to me and tell me what they are looking for. I then try to find people within the job market who fulfill these requirements set by the company. My main goal is to make both of them happy. If I look back after ten years I can definitely see if I succeeded or not. Following the career path of young people who were at the beginning of their careers at that time, is something I always liked.

➤ **What is your current job position?**

Chairman of the Board of Directors at MPB Executive Search

➤ **How long have you been working for this position?**

Four months as Chairman and before 35 years as CEO

➤ Could you elaborate more about your work and the company?

➤ How long have you lived and worked in Switzerland?

➤ **Have you worked overseas? If so, where have you been and what was your role?**

I have never worked abroad but we have international partners. Our business is based in Switzerland but from time to time we work closely with our partners from abroad. This partner is «AltoPartner» as already mentioned before.

➤ **When and how did you first enter a top management position?**

That was actually from day one when I started my position as CEO at MPB. I was owner and CEO at the same time but of course we were much smaller at that time. There were just the three of us: one secretary, one employee and me. This small business grew to a small and medium-sized company with around 14 employees.

But I have to admit that this is not a top management position. Of course, I have responsibility and we are a successful company but in regards to size and financial KPIs it cannot be declared as top management position.

➤ **What have been challenges and opportunities during your career path?**

Experiencing four recessions during the last 36 years. I hoped that I can retire with three recessions but then Covid-19 came. This is very drastic for self-employed entrepreneurs and a big challenge when sales collapse massively overnight. We are in the service sector, which is always a bit easier. I mean, I can massively reduce costs within 2 months through redundancies if it is required. Short-time work subsidized by the state helps to ensure that no jobs are lost, but many then leave anyway.

➤ **Which characteristics or skills have helped you to overcome these challenges or achieve these opportunities?**

The believe that it works, hard work and high commitment as well as the support of the family (understanding). I mean, sales halved so wages also had to be halved – this is how to survive. Perseverance, high commitment, and willingness to accept losses (adjust standard of living).

➤ **What would you describe as your most important and valuable skills in management?**

You have to differentiate between professional skills and personality. The professional skills (technical knowledge and expertise) must be given. Controller needs a degree in business administration, relevant specialization and training during their studies and must have gained initial experience in order to be able to manage technically. I mean bricklayer must be able to build a straight wall. This is a basic condition that must exist, otherwise you do not even look at the person.

When it comes to the personality, the so-called soft skills, following indicators are important: being a role model, lead by example, modesty, high performance, high commitment, having a vision and be able to share that vision to create a team spirit as well as inspiring and motivating people.

**Follow-up Question: How do you identify these characteristics / traits?**

*You can feel whether a person has charisma or not. It is about the positive charisma, how a person behaves. You perceive and assess this behavior during an interview. It is about the willingness to lead and the soft skills. Of course, there are interview techniques to identify these traits more specifically. This could involve asking the interviewee to talk about a situation where he faced a challenge and what he undertook to solve it.*

➤ **How do you personally define “career success” and which specific skills do you see as key factors?**

*You have to like people. Be a role model. There are good examples of people I have been supporting for many years. It is about how they like people and stand up for them. Walk through fire and motivate employees to do the same. When they see that you work hard and try your best to bring the company a step forward, they will follow and do the same. Thus, it is about behaving in an exemplary manner and be authentic.*

➤ In your experience, what are some key factors that contribute to career success in senior management and what have been the most significant to you?

➤ What are necessary qualities needed for top management positions – for what do you look in particular?

➤ **Key positions such as Chairman of Board of Directors are usually measurable only years after, do you have a success story of a successfully filled position?**

*Of course, there are many in 36 years where I see they have developed excellently. In the end it is all that counts, if one person knows how to win over a team and their people, the team performance will increase. Thus, everyone is part of the company’s success. The CEO or Chairman are defining the mission and strategy, but then they have to win people over to execute the defined strategy. This must be aligned in order to work out. This also requires technical expertise as new products need to be accepted by the market to be successful.*

➤ **How does the recruiting process work (criteria, selection, assessment centres etc.)?**

*You basically start with a briefing together with your customers. This is an intensive discussion what is wanted, hard facts required for the position such as training, experience and personality which is important for the company. If we receive then the order to fill the position, we start the market search. For that we use a geographically fixed space, try to identify suitable candidates, and convince them to have an exchange. Once you have identified interested candidates, you create a short list of the current five candidates which is then sent to the client. Then you carry out the first interview round together with the customer, mostly followed by two to three assessments before the final decision is made.*

**Follow-up Question: Do you carry out the assessment by yourself or do you use external providers?**

*Actually both, we have our own assessments but also work closely with external providers.*

➤ **I assume, that having an excellent network is key to fill these kinds of positions, how important would you rate MPBs network and how do you expand it?**

*Well, having a network is important but not everything It exists of course, and it grows over time automatically. But only working with the network would not be very efficient. Always fishing in the same lake does not work, you have to include new waters. We have a huge database at our disposal which is carefully and regularly maintained. Digital networks such as LinkedIn etc. are also crucial to expand the searching area. Most important is to leave the network, identify people in the market and contact them openly. We currently had to fill a vacancy as police commander. There is an enormous number of people who are eligible for this position. Imagine already having 26 cantons which provides you with a large number of potential candidates. There are maybe 30 to 40 people in Switzerland who would be suitable for this position. Thus, you have to identify them and get in touch. It also has to make sense from a geographic point of view, unless the people are willing to move. So, you check who is already working in this position. But as most people who are already in this position somewhere else do not see a huge benefit in changing the company unless it comes with a main benefit, you have to identify people who have the potential for this position. You only get about 30 seconds to convince them on the phone to agree on a meeting which is very challenging.*

➤ **Did you hire former elite athletes for top management positions during your career? If so, do you consider it as a pro or con if someone participated in professional team sports?**

*It always happens that I see in the CV that were active in a sport. This is something I notice, and which has a meaning. If someone attended the Swiss or even the World Championship means that they had to put a lot of effort and hard work into it. This is a quality which is highly valuable in today’s work environment. They already had to prove themselves and know what it takes to be successful.*

*Hence, I definitely see it as a clear pro! These candidates are usually relatively young as they just finished their athletic careers. So, they are at the beginning of their corporate career.*

**Follow-up Question: Do you differentiate between individual and team sports? If so, where do you see the differences?**

*I think there is a big difference. It is not by accident that I never participated in team sports. I always preferred exercising by myself as I could decide when and what to do. I do not like being tied to fixed date and times. It definitely says something about the person's characteristic.*

**Follow-up Question: What is generally more required for top management positions, characteristics from individual or team sports? Respectively, are you looking more for individual or team sports characteristics when hiring for top management positions? Which do you think is more in demand?**

*Generally speaking, I would say that individual sport characteristics are more demanded for CEO positions. In the end, the CEO is often alone and has to make crucial decisions by himself. I see it more as a marathon runner who is running the 42km by himself. You are quite often alone as entrepreneur or high-level executive, thus the whole responsibility also lies with you.*

*But of course, before entering a CEO position you mostly start with a management position which requires more traits from team sports. Good management works as a sports team: working together toward a common goal. It does not matter who passes the ball, who plays or who scores, it is the outcome that matters.*

*Overall, I think you cannot say something is better or more important than the other. It requires both.*

### Final Question

➤ **What advice would you give to young people at the beginning of their careers?**

*Currently, there is a rising topic in the media about generations. I can already see that there is a tendency to have more fun today than in the past. If you want to be successful, you have to work hard. Of course, this involves liking what you are doing. This makes it much easier. Here I am talking about people in a "league" who have access to education and good chances to get a job they really enjoy. If the motivation is intrinsic, the chances for success increase.*

*Switzerland has today's high standard because we work hard in the past. Choose what you like to do as a profession and then do a good job. You will be automatically seen, discovered, and developed.*

*Not everyone can become managers, it is not necessary at all. If people are happy that is wonderful. Not everyone can become head of something in top companies and this is totally fine.*

*As a military commander once said: "It is suspicious if a soldier arrives happily but once they are here, they should have fun."*

*I also notice a tendency when it comes to wages. Young people are very self-confident when they enter the job market. But you have to perform first before you get rewarded. That is how it works. You cannot work part-time but expect a full-time salary. That is what you learn in economics. And this does not support the current shortage of skilled workers either.*

Ask for a moment to review the agenda guide to ensure all key questions are answered.

"Do you mind if I quickly go through my interview guide to ensure all questions are covered?"

If time is running out: omit optional remaining questions and focus on critical ones or ask to extend the time a bit. If not feasible, request a short follow-up meeting at a later date.

### Conclusion

Do you have any final thoughts or comments on the topic discussed today?

If not: Thank you for taking the time, I highly appreciate your effort and dedication. Your insights were highly interesting and valuable to better understand the relationship of soft skills development between team sports and business. If you should have any further questions or feedback, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

### List of Abbreviations used

## Appendix O – MAXQDA Coding

List of Codes		Frequency
<b>Code System</b>	Motivation for Becoming a Sportsperson	7
	Identify Strengths of Others	5
	Own Core Strength	7
	Leadership Role in Sports	6
	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	13
	Transition into Professional World	6
	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	7
	First Top Mgmt Position	7
	Career Challenges	8
	Career Challenges Skills	7
	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	13
	How Team Sports Helped in Career	10
	Team Sports Skills Helped to Achieve Top Mgmt Position	3
	Team Sports Skills: Negative Impact	7
	Unique Skill Set: Better prepared for Top Mgmt?	4
	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	8
	Individual vs. Team Sports	2
	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	7
	Intentionally Recruiting Athletes	6
	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	8
	Advice to Young Athletes Aspiring to Top Mgmt Positions	7
	Correlation to Business	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>22 Codes</b>	<b>155</b>

## Appendix P – Categorization of Interview Data

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Mario Gyr	Motivation of Becoming a Sportsperson	It has always been a childhood dream of mine to win Olympic gold. I mean, what could be nicer than rowing on the Rotsee on a beautiful may morning? It is literally the most beautiful thing on earth. You experience such strong emotions that you will never experience again later in this depth. Of course, also the downsides but the emotions are truly unique.	1.50
Interview Mario Gyr	Own Core Strength	My strengths were my good rhythm and my technique. I was a racer! As soon as the light switched from red to green, my gladiator mode started. It needed everyone in the team, we contributed equally to the team performance, and we all needed to have the same rhythm. Of course, the stroke was important, but it takes everyone at the same time.	1.43
Interview Mario Gyr	Identify Strengths of Others	Yes definitely. But you not only get to know the strengths but also the weaknesses of your teammates. Competitive sport is brutal. In business, the boundaries are fluid. Sport is non-negotiable. There are no excuses. This self-reflection is what sport brings with it, which is missing in large companies. I mean, the companies' big brains have never faced headwind.	1.53
Interview Mario Gyr	Leadership Role in Sports	I was the stroke, who set the rhythm but everyone had their task so I would not say that I was a leader in particular.	0.50
Interview Mario Gyr	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Consistency is super important. In sports it is crucial whether you have a good day or not, which is less the case in business. For us, it was more important to be consistently good than to be extremely good on one day and then bad again the next day. But this consistency was needed 365 days a year. Also, direct communication was essential. I always compare it to a hospital: there you have a very strict hierarchy but as soon as you are in the surgery room, this is forgotten. The only thing that counts is the result and for that you need immediate feedback. We had the same principle on the boat. There is a certain aggressivity towards each other during the race because everyone is under pressure to perform. This requires also to address unpleasant situations. Nobody likes conflict but you still have to face it.	3.45
Interview Mario Gyr	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Former top athletes develop a completely different kind of ambition which is mainly intrinsic. They are mostly not after money & status symbols. They are fundamentally not motivated by money but by success. Usually, the very successful athletes are down to earth. Most of the time it is the top 5 to 10 that are the bigger assholes. They have to prove themselves all the time. But once they achieve a big title, that behavior might change as they are seen now. Modesty: hard work pays off! Use your time in the office - be efficiency & have a good time management, be able to deal with difficult characters, and the most important: consistency! I am the first to stand up after a defeat which is one of the greatest learnings from sport. Dealing with defeats learn you to not overestimate victories as well as defeats.	3.45
Interview Mario Gyr	Transition into Professional World	I studied Law in Lucerne next to my athletic career. Law is actually a grateful study for athletes. You receive a bunch of books knowing that you must know everything in half a year. In the end all that counts is the exam. Next to it, I was working 20% in a law firm. This is something I recommend all athletes as they are often caught in the sports bubble only. They reduce themselves to sports only which is also why their happiness is purely dependent on their athletic success. If they are injured, everything tends to be bad but if you just broke a new record, everything seems to be perfect. It is highly volatile and by establishing a second mainstay, you might be much more balanced. But of course, if you do too many things at the same time, you cannot fully focus on your sport so the probability to become successful declines. It is all about finding the perfect balance of your focus.	3.77
Interview Mario Gyr	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	Consistency! Have a consistent good performance, you might have a bad day but at least try to make it up to an average day. Also, I learnt to be efficiency and have a good time management. Additionally, being able to deal with difficult characters is highly crucial. You have to understand how they think and deal with them in a respectful manner.	1.46

Interview Mario Gyr	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Of course, my sporty gene helps me in negotiations. I always try to find an agreement instead of winning all the points.	0.50
Interview Mario Gyr	First Top Mgmt Position	I would say my current position is the highest so far. I am a warrior, and I am project based responsible for legal. Of course, I am not alone, there are four others responsible for the project. I am not sure if I really strive to achieve a top management position for now. Again, I relate to the question if you are an entrepreneur kid or a corporate kid.	1.50
Interview Mario Gyr	Career Challenges	It bothered me at the beginning that i was on the same level as 5 years younger employees. As I entered the professional world at a later stage, it was difficult to get used to be surrounded with younger people with the same rank.	0.97
Interview Mario Gyr	Career Challenges Skills	This is relatively easy to answer in sports: performance counts! I had to put away my ego which required mental strength. Knowing that there will always be better and smarter people than you helped. I mean, there are brilliant people working for Partners Group. It is not always working perfectly, and everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. Sport takes everyone the same way – everyone is treated equally. You have to get a feeling for people and if you are good at what you are doing, you will always move forward. The question is: what is your motivation? It requires a different approach if you want to achieve a CEO position than if you want to negotiate the interesting transactions. The latter for me is like sitting in a driver seat – you move something. Thus, it is important to choose your seat!	3.41
Interview Mario Gyr	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	Consistency! Deliver a consistent good performance every day. Even if you have a bad day, try to achieve an average performance. The athlete who is frustrated after training and goes home pissed will not get better. The one accepting the bad training in the morning but still goes on the spinning bike for a short period of time will automatically improve. In addition, also learn to read people (and being aware of international differences). My team consisted of one guy from Ticino, one from Basel and one from Geneva. The French speaking teammate always thought that the German-speaking is making fun of him. So, I said okay let's talk in French from now on and the problem was solved.	2.90
Interview Mario Gyr	How Team Sports helped in Career	It helped me get in, stay in and especially helped showing that hard work always pays off. Are you the one who takes on a fuck-off project even if someone else already screwed it up? Do you push off the blame or take responsibility? I am the guy who tries to find a solution together and DO IT! And I really mean it. There are many people saying yes, I will do it but you actually have to do it. My advice: build the foundation first and then build on it. It may take several years to build it but do not start with the roof because then you can be sure everything will collapse at a certain point.	2.52
Interview Mario Gyr	Team Sport Skills: Negative Impact	Age! You cannot have the same work experience as your peers. This is a fact you cannot deny. Also, there are certain prejudices that are interpreted negatively. Might be related to jealousy or that they think you get everything much easier. This is especially the case in Switzerland. If you tell a Swiss guy that you did competitive sports, they usually answer with "ah pretty chill – you had a good life". But, if you tell that an American, he has the greatest respect for you. This is the downside of Switzerland. Swiss people tend to be extremely critical and have a certain scepticism. I feel, you have to prove yourself much more then. Something I also learnt from sports is the importance of direct communication and confrontation.	3.11

Interview Mario Gyr	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	I think yes, certainly internally, externally I do not know. You have more experience with difficult situations. Thus, you learnt to never give up. Life is not a sprint is a marathon, you have to be able to deal with defeats.	0.95
Interview Mario Gyr	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	One thing is for sure that you know your worth.	0.20
Interview Mario Gyr	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	This athlete attitude provides an advantage because you always want to be the best which means you have to belong to the top performers.	0.57
Interview Mario Gyr	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	No, I am not biased, but you can feel a difference in general. After having a negative experience, you evaluate it differently. If you had a bad experience with an individual athlete, you focus much more on the negative traits of individual sportsmen. This just happens automatically.	1.19
Interview Mario Gyr	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	Of course, a pro. Even participating in team sport during childhood helps. When I asked these questions during an interview, HR told me that this is discriminating (which is not the case according to Swiss law). But I still continued to ask the question if they have ever participated in team sports. I have to find out more about their attitude. If they already learnt how to lose and subordinate their own ego in favor of the team – this is something you notice relatively quickly. Of course, team sports offers an opportunity for social lounging where you hide behind the team. This is something I cannot find out during the first job interview. But if you want to play in the champions league, you have to be intrinsically motivated. If they hide, they will work on less interesting projects – it is up to them.	3.43
Interview Mario Gyr	Advice to Young Athletes aspiring to Top Mgmt Positions	Find your purpose - what motivates you - what do you want? There might be many hard years where you have to go through which have certainly become more difficult in recent years.	0.75

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Beni Huggel	Motivation of Becoming a Sportsperson	I first played at the amateur level with around 16 to 17 years. I always stood out of the crowd and once my coach said I belong in the Swiss Super League and should rather play at FC Basel. I was laughing at that time because I never imagined playing with the big ones. So, he then organized some trial trainings and that was how I got into FC Basel. It was not because I wanted but more that I landed there due to my coaches' effort.	4.26
Interview Beni Huggel	Own Core Strength	My main strength was my mentality. The mental strength of never giving up and always stay positive no matter how bad the situation got. I was definitely well known as the "fighter".	1.78
Interview Beni Huggel	Identify Strengths of Others	I am 100% sure that I got the skill "identify the strength of others" from team sports. I always thought about how to integrate other team members to be successful. Strikers in football are usually highly sensitive and freethinker. So, I permanently tried to recognize their emotions and to intervene early enough if needed. During the game I tried to integrate them and reconcile disputes between team members. I also gave some inputs to the coach when I saw that someone was doing particularly good and tried to convince him to give it a chance. But yes, recognize strength in others comes definitely from sports.	6.03

Interview Beni Huggel	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Yes, definitely a lot. One of the most valuable skills I have learnt is to deal with all kind of people. I have played with soccer players from all around the world. South Africa, South Korea, Latin America, Europe etc. – thus, to fit into a group under the team's conditions and to find a basis relatively quick in order to succeed was crucial. Also, not looking for excuses and blaming others but rather identifying things I could have done better and take responsibility for your actions. That is what it needs in a team to work together. Everyone has his role and, in a team, you need everyone to win. For example, strikers get more compliments and fame than defenders, but they are equally important so sometimes you need to ensure to praise the ones who do not get compliments that often.	7.79
Interview Beni Huggel	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	People skills and teamwork	0.26
Interview Beni Huggel	Career Challenges	That was definitely the transition into the business world. It was my passion and not playing soccer anymore at a relatively young age was a big challenge. The corporate world functions so differently and I first had to understand and accept the way it works. In sports, you use a much more direct language and receive immediate feedback. I acquired mental toughness in sports, but business has different rules which created a major challenge. Additionally, I had to learn that there are people and functions which are not really efficient and productive. That is something that you do not have in sports. If the training is not effective, you have to change the approach. You cannot train for several weeks without seeing progress. Each practice has a goal and impact. Thus, I learned that there are also other motives to do something and not everyone wants to perform in the same way.	8.70
Interview Beni Huggel	Career Challenges Skills	I am a highly positive and optimistic person. I have a certain confidence in myself and that there is always a solution to a problem. There is no "I cannot do it". You need resilience and to find ways to solve an issue. And staying positive during these challenges is definitely not easy but you have to be confident to succeed. That was also something I have learnt from injuries.	3.74
Interview Beni Huggel	How Team Sports helped in Career	Yes, definitely. It helped me by gaining life skills and also as soccer is a sport that touches people emotionally, I was very warm welcomed in certain places. This is also an advantage in business. People like to talk to you which provides you with a certain degree of fame and makes it easier to get in touch with new people. I also learned, to deal with setbacks, being highly disciplined, and to sacrifice. The last point is something people often forget. There were many things I could not do during my free time which other people could. I do not want to complain but sacrificing is definitely part of being a professional athlete.	6.25
Interview Beni Huggel	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	Well, since I am not that long in this position it is hard to say. But I would say that the most important for my position is to be reliable for your environment. Employees and clients need to know what they can expect so that there are no undesirable surprises. This stands for quality.	2.82
Interview Beni Huggel	Team Sport Skills: Negative Impact	At the beginning, the obstructive mindset may manifest as demanding, impatient, and occasionally harsh. Those accustomed to achieving rapid progress must learn to cultivate patience first. In the competitive world of sports, inefficiency is unacceptable, and ineffective training is immediately adjusted. Conversely, professional life presents numerous scenarios where efficiency is not always optimal, a challenge that must be addressed initially.	4.40

Interview Beni Huggel	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	No, I do not think so. People without sports background can gain exactly the same skills – just maybe in a different area of life. Of course, sport is like a "life school", especially team sports. But you can also acquire these skills on a lower level or during a shorter amount of time. That can already have an impact. Therefore, not necessarily but I am convinced that it helps.	3.74
Interview Beni Huggel	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	Absolutely. Of course, I am in the sport industry, but I check if they do sports and what kind of sports. I also ask how many times they practice and if I can identify the glow in their eyes when talking about it. It is about passion and when I see that they are passionate and that it is important for them, it creates a certain trust.	3.30
Interview Beni Huggel	Intentionally Recruiting Athletes	Yes	0.03
Interview Beni Huggel	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	Definitely a pro! It means learning group dynamics. In sports you have to subordinate yourself and adapt to the team. You have to prove yourself every day. With age, your role might change. It is a constant interplay between egoism and teamwork. You are basically an individual sportmen and a teampayer. Your teammates are your competition and your friends at the same time, and it only works together. This creates an incredible basis for life.	4.38
Interview Beni Huggel	Advice to Young Athletes aspiring to Top Mgmt Positions	Especially when applying to sports: never lose the joy in what you are doing. Joy needs to be in the foreground. Enjoy it as long as possible because as long as you have joy in what you are doing, performance will follow automatically. It is exactly the same in sports. The outcome and progress comes by itself as long as you love what you are doing. Passion and joy are the basis for success.	3.86

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Heinz Karrer	Motivation of Becoming a Sportsperson	It was this competitive thinking which I had since I was a kid. I always wanted to win and I was above-average talented which motivates you to become even better. I was thinking about individual sport, but it was the sense of belonging and working towards a common goal which led me to team sports. Also, the integration of all team members was something I really liked.	1.27
Interview Heinz Karrer	Own Core Strength	I always exactly knew how the others think and what they need.	0.21
Interview Heinz Karrer	Identify Strengths of Others	I always exactly knew how the others think and what they need. I can name you the strengths and weaknesses of all my team players. The one who played unfair had to be reminded, the one who got aggressive had to be calm down. I could identify the talents and was able to promote them as a leader. Sometimes it was just a "throw the ball, you can!" needed and I used that intuitively. I cannot say if it is a developed skill or a natural intuition.	1.53
Interview Heinz Karrer	Leadership Role in Sports	I was captain and had team responsibility. At Otmar St.Gallen, I was captain until the end of my athletic career.	0.39
Interview Heinz Karrer	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Definitely. Highly valuable for me was the skill of having goals. The objective was to think about what can I do that makes the possibility to achieve the goal as high as possible. A great example therefore is the Champions League Final in 1982 where we defeated several teams which were supposed to be better than us. We aimed to reach the Champions League Final but for that we had to think about how to prepare even before the season started. We had to prepare and perform even better than before. So, questions arose about how to train, which athletic program to use, on what to focus on and especially how to measure our progress in terms of performance test. In the end, we achieved the goal and ended in the final round where we lost by many goals, but it was about reaching the goal. This can be applied 1:1 to business. Setting goals and then defining what is needed to achieve this goal. What kind of skills do I need? Which people do I need who bring the required passion, effort and knowledge? Which special skills do I need to motivate my team? This includes all business aspects: handling people and having an understanding for their situation, strategic processes as well as compliance. Every mistake make will set you back by 10 steps. Therefore, it is in the interest of the whole company to avoid as many mistakes as possible and do things right from the beginning. Also, reputation is crucial. If you have a bad reputation that creates a significant problem. Moreover, it is about how to create a culture that everyone can identify with. The main goal is to target a goal and to think through the process.	5.56

Interview Heinz Karrer	Transition into Professional World	My transition to the business world was super abrupt. I stopped playing handball when I was 27 and immediately took over a management position for which I had to terminate my study after 2 years. I did work next to handball since I did not want to earn any money except covering my expenses. I had some odd jobs such as taxi driving where I was flexible with the shift schedule. But since I always had fun in what I was doing it was never difficult to adjust to the new situation. I always do what I like most and find pleasure in the new role. I had to make various difficult decisions where I was confronted with a totally new situation the next day but the dedication of giving 150% remains the same.	2.41
Interview Heinz Karrer	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	I think that would be the handball technical and psychological mechanisms to be successful. This working towards a common goal as a team can be applied 1:1 to the world of business. It has been always difficult to watch my kids games from the side line where I could not make an impact. I really had to pull myself together since I could not understand how such mistakes can be made on the field (either made by a player or by a coach). I have the urge to make an impact and bring a team forward. Additionally, the preparation and mental state for a game confronted me o have critical discussions with myself and build healthy self-confidence at the same time.	2.26
Interview Heinz Karrer	Correlation to Business	Important correlation to business to me is the aspect of recovery. You also need recovery in business. Never relaxing is neither desirable nor reasonable or logical. Recovery is part of performance.	0.68
Interview Heinz Karrer	First Top Mgmt Position	That was actually at the age of 27, directly after my handball career where I was asked from our sponsor Adidas to take over the role of the director of the Sporting Goods Suppliers Association. Only 2.5 years later I ended up taking over the director position of Intersport Schweiz AG.	0.98
Interview Heinz Karrer	Career Challenges	Let us divide it per job: <u>Intersport</u> After 3 years of being the director of the subsidiary, I was asked to take over the lead for the holding company which was close to insolvency at that time. We had significant liquidity shortages and with the young age of 30 I had to undergo a rehabilitation procedure and come up with a restructuring plan. I decided to play with open card and requested a meeting with the bank (today UBS) and the revision auditor (today EY). I openly explained the current situation and showed a plan how we intend to fix it. Interestingly, until today I have a strong relationship to both colleagues and together we succeeded by a hair's breadth. Additionally, we had many storages we had to close down due to liquidity shortages. One of them was in Winterthur Grütze, only few meters away from where I grew up. At the age of 30, I had to stand in the front of 110 employees and tell them at 8am that they are going to lose their jobs. I knew many of them privately since they were the parents from former school friends of mine. But I promised that we are going to find them new jobs and I always keep my word. In the end, we managed to find new jobs for 103 of them and 7 retired early. <u>Ringier</u> I was in a tricky situation at Ringier where I had to convince the CEO to move in the right direction. This meant to get rid of 2-3 people who were just taking advantage of the system. I told him that I cannot tolerate that but the decision is on him.  If he cannot, it is fine but then it will be without me. And that was how it ended. He could not fire them since he had a close relationship to them but that meant for me to leave the company. <u>Swisscom</u> I joined Swisscom at a difficult time where we were facing 8,000 job cuts, the liberalization where all clients wanted to leave and launching the IPO in ZH and NY at the same time. I had investor meetings for 3 weeks straight and still had to lead the business parallel to it. <u>AXPO</u> In March 2011 there was the Fukushima accident. You can imagine what chaos we experienced in the energy industry, having several nuclear power plants. My phone was vibrating the whole meeting and I already thought it is broken. After the meeting, I saw all the messages and news articles. So, on Friday we observed the situation and on Saturday we created a crisis unit and activated the crisis modus. At the beginning we met twice a day, then daily and in July on a weekly basis. The main question was if nuclear power plants are still safe. We were swamped with media inquiries. We did a lot of information screening and talked about technical updates and possible learnings. We had to verify our equipment to find out if we used the same materials and products as Fukushima. From a political perspective, we had to get directly in touch with the federal council. Communication during crisis is key and we had to ensure that people trust us. This meant providing immediate information even though we did not know much at that time.	18.04

		<p>We immediately organized meetings in large sports halls for the general public to talk about nuclear power plants and their safety. We openly communicated what we know and what we do not know at that time and responded to all questions raised. I was only sleeping 3 hours a night at that time and at the beginning I thought I am totally fine but after 3 weeks I realized what it was doing with my body. So, I had to consciously sleep 3-8 hours a night. The interesting part was that you get to know the people very well during time of crisis. Everyone deals with crisis differently and we had to ensure that people trust us and always trust your own people. We had many highly skilled people and I never doubted that we cannot make it – I always believed in the system and our personnel. The main goal was of course to avoid the shutdown of the nuclear power plants which would have been caused by the panic reaction. In the end, we managed to create a relationship of trust with Doris Leuthard and the political parties. There is a saying «target first, shoot afterwards» but politics usually shoots before targeting. To me it is important to decide at rest. Think about it and take your time to come up with a reasonable decision. Before I decide, I want to understand everything.</p>	
		<p><u>Economiesuisse</u>  The difficult part at economiesuisse was that you are measured immediately. It is all about winning the vote. I think there is nothing more measurable than economiesuisse. We won 17 out of 20 votes and we had to win all relevant votes in the parliament all 3 month. Important: people do not need to like you, but they need to trust you. There was also a high media presence. I was in the focus 24/7 which put a lot of pressure on me. I was constantly watched and criticized. The media really drag my name through the mire, clearly below the belt. It is important how you personally deal with death threats and fake news. For 1.5 years we even had to redirect our mail to the police who scanned all letters. You have to be willing and able to handle such burdens in top management positions. This is the downside of highly exposed top management positions.</p>	
Interview Heinz Karrer	Career Challenges Skills	<p>Definitely my sportsman genetics which means running at the performance limit for an above-average amount and for an extremely long time. This need for drive almost makes you addicted. You have to be comfortable in high pressure situations and need to do it with pleasure.</p> <p>Additionally, I am a people person. I like people and I like it even more to motivate, support and empower them. To find the most suitable people and being able to keep them is a real skill. It is also important to never avoid conflict. Always address a problem immediately, factual but fair.</p>	1.93
Interview Heinz Karrer	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	<p>Having a great sense of responsibility and a great willingness to perform. Also, high authenticity, above-average communication skills are needed as well as having the will to act as a role model and leading by example.</p>	0.75
Interview Heinz Karrer	How Team Sports helped in Career	<p>Sportsmen definitely enjoy sympathy. It brings advantages which you should take advantage of. The media presence comes as a plus and people generally like to get in touch with you. I am not sure if I would have taken the first job opportunity in management if I would not have had a sports background. It gave me a certain degree of confidence that I can do it.</p> <p>There is a funny story of a family company where I have the chairman mandate. They had an applicant who played handball. So, the boss went to see a game and decided to hire him because of his way of playing.</p>	1.95
Interview Heinz Karrer	Team Sport Skills helped to achieve Top Mgmt Position	<p>Power of concentration at a specific time and the organizational skills to juggle all balls at the same time.</p>	0.37
Interview Heinz Karrer	Team Sport Skills: Negative Impact	<p>You will face moments where your sport career triggers negative reactions in certain people. It might be due to a certain amount of fame you gained from sports or the desire to make it not too easy for you.</p> <p>Also, ambition can be difficult sometimes. But it is a question about proportionality, handling and using a filter in certain situations but yes it can definitely over roll somebody.</p> <p>Yes, I am ambitious – sorry for that?</p>	1.46
Interview Heinz Karrer	Unique Skill Set: Better prepared for Top Mgmt?	<p>Yes, indeed (already mentioned above).</p>	0.13

Interview Heinz Karrer	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	There are in fact many handball players in top management positions. It is much more pronounced in handball compared to other team sports such as soccer or ice hockey. Is this a coincidence? I do not know. It might be that handball does not enjoy as much fame as other sports which requires more effort for their professional career. But competitive sports definitely develop skills which are needed in top management positions. Especially when looking at team sports where you need other people in order to succeed.	1.77
Interview Heinz Karrer	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	Not in general, most important are the requirements for the job. But if they meet the requirements then it does create an additional positive impression. Basically, it does not lead to more confidence in general, but the personality traits will be acknowledged. Their experience and background are still the most important factor.	1.13
Interview Heinz Karrer	Intentionally Recruiting Athletes	No	0.01
Interview Heinz Karrer	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	Definitely a big con!	0.07
Interview Heinz Karrer	Advice to Young Athletes aspiring to Top Mgmt Positions	Education, education and education – and continuing education! I am a bad example for that but it is required nowadays and highly important to succeed in the labor market. You have to have that in mind before, during and after your sports career. «Gump einfach n0ime ine» – have the courage to try If you are not certain about something, create a = cost-benefit analysis for each decision to go through the criteria in a systematic manner (location, foreign countries, status, money etc.)	1.67

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Florence Schelling	Motivation of Becoming a Sportsperson	I did not choose it actively, it just came with time. It was a step by step process. I early realized that I am talented. Not only in ice hockey, but generally in sports. I did swimming, soccer and even athletics and all kept telling me how talented I am. But ice hockey was just most fun, I loves team sports and that you go through high and lows together. The needed speed, the agility, dynamics as well as the precision made it highly attractive to me. I always invested more time and effort. With reaching higher levels, I had to train more frequently so it just happened automatically. It is basically embedded in the system, the better you get, the more you train.	3.42
Interview Florence Schelling	Own Core Strength	I would say I got two main strengths: First, I knew (or still know) how to deal with pressure to perform. Secondly, it is said that the goalkeeper makes 50% of the team. Thus, my team knew that they can rely on me as I was solid as a rock. They knew, I will give 100% and support them as good as I possibly can. It is difficult to perform then when it is needed and be ready at game time.	1.98
Interview Florence Schelling	Leadership Role in Sports	I was never captain but in the captain's team. In ice hockey you cannot be captain as a goalkeeper because you are not allowed to cross the red line. This makes it impossible to go and talk to the referees on the other side. This is internationally not allowed, just the US has an exception where it is possible. But I definitely had a team leadership role and always supported the team with my experience. What I always did was standing up for my teammates.	2.34

Interview Florence Schelling	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Yes, a lot. How to put a team together, to assign the roles within a team in order to function. It is difficult to assign different roles so that they get accepted by everyone. For that, transparency and communication are key. You have to get to know all players and know how to deal with them. Thus, communication is highly crucial as I learned as a player as well as a coach. Additionally, as a goalkeeper I learnt how to stay focused. Preparation, resilience, performance pressure as well as the reflection of games, trainings and situations are other key competencies. I have to admit that it was extremely difficult to me to name these skills at the first place because for us athletes, it is just normal. With time, I realized that what was normal to me, was very special to others.	4.03
Interview Florence Schelling	Transition into Professional World	I always worked 100% or studied next to it. So, it was not that much of a change.	0.41
Interview Florence Schelling	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	Focus: deliver performance when it is required and of course being able to perform 100%	0.44
Interview Florence Schelling	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	I realized that I have actually something to offer. I was thinking about how to transfer my knowledge and how this can help others in achieving their goals	0.79
Interview Florence Schelling	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	What I really love about my job is that I work with so many different personalities, that with each client I learn something else. It is like a symbiotic relationship; we can both learn from each other. As a coach, I realized that.	1.18
Interview Florence Schelling	First Top Mgmt Position	That was when I started my role as head of sports at the Swiss ice hockey club SCB in Berne. Even though I was the first female in history leading a male professional sports team, I did not regard it as something special. For me it was just a job. Unfortunately, it ended in some sort of chaos as it was during Covid-19 and the media did not have anything to talk about. My dismissal created therefore the perfect headline opportunity which was a bit unfortunate.	2.36
Interview Florence Schelling	Career Challenges	The whole communication creates a huge challenge. You provide the knowledge and vision and with that you have to put together a team. It is very difficult to communicate in a way everyone is happy. You cannot say something is based on your gut feeling or that you think that might be the best way to go. Everything has to be underlined by facts and you have to formulate your arguments carefully and fact-based.	2.10
Interview Florence Schelling	Career Challenges Skills	My willingness to learn and my eager to always improve myself definitely helped me to overcome the obstacles. Continuous development was crucial. Also, I always regarded it as a challenge with the knowledge that it will not be easy, and nothing will be given for free. But this resilience and being able to perform under pressure definitely helped to master the situation.	1.90
Interview Florence Schelling	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	Oh, difficult. To be honest, that is something I still have to figure out. I do have joy in working individually with clients. This enables me to fully commit to someone. I think this is highly related to the focus topic – focus only on one person.	1.27
Interview Florence Schelling	How Team Sports helped in Career	No, a role model itself but I had a clear definition for myself how I want to be. I had different coaches and bosses and tried to take the best from all of them. Thus, no idol but I loved to analyze other goal keepers and take the best things from each of them and tried to apply it. That is what I personally identified as "best".	1.69
Interview Florence Schelling	How Team Sports helped in Career	Definitely. As an athlete I was not unknown, but I made myself a name which helped me in business. Sponsor events and networking were not really interesting as an athlete but gets very important afterwards. I was not fully aware of that during my sports career but with time I realized the benefits and opportunities they create. It is like branding. My name stands for something. Of course, this is even stronger as individual athlete since in team sports you are mainly defined as a team rather than an individual. But that is exactly what you have to use.	2.85

Interview Florence Schelling	Team Sport Skills: Negative Impact	In sport, results were always black or white. In contrast, in the professional world a lot of things are "grey". I was missing this clear cut between "good and bad" and that I got not immediate and direct feedback or results. This made it really hard to measure my work. I did not know where I stand within this grey zone. It is not like a game where you have to perform within these important but limited 60 minutes. It is rather a period of time, starting every day, morning to evening, 5 times a week.	2.57
Interview Florence Schelling	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	No, not in general. Before attending the secondary school, I would have said yes but after I joined the culture and sport school, I realized that other hobbies develop similar skills. We had musicians in the class and since I worked with them, it became clear to me that also other hobbies develop similar skills. In music, you have solo artist or orchestras, similar to individual and team sports. I would say, sport is definitely a competitive advantage but rather over people who are not participating in something specific.	2.69
Interview Florence Schelling	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	Funny example here is that I had a client from the organization committee from the fan club of FC Zurich called "Südcurve". I have to admit that I never thought about how much organization is needed for that. They regularly meet to create the banners and have to synchronize the songs etc. which needs a whole choreography to support the sportsmen. They also have their leaders and rankings which is similar to business.	2.14
Interview Florence Schelling	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	No, I would say that I rather get to know the person itself. This is something you cannot generalize; it is about the person and not just their background.	0.79
Interview Florence Schelling	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	Both, but generally I would say as a pro. If you are a professional athlete "only", you definitely miss out on the professional experience. You have to understand the topics but you cannot learn these in each position. I had a dual-career and I would not want to miss that.	1.39
Interview Florence Schelling	Advice to Young Athletes aspiring to Top Mgmt Positions	Start early especially regarding the communication with players and coaches (mit Hand und Füess)	0.49

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Roger Schnegg	Motivation of Becoming a Sportsperson	Fun! Also, the unique atmosphere. Imagine having 1000 spectators who cheer you. As well as friendship, my friends from that time are still my best friends today.	0.92
Interview Roger Schnegg	Identify Strengths of Others	Yes, I totally agree, you also have to step down as the team is in the foreground. My position was also important as I was the team control center and playmaker. Every second ball comes to me, so I needed to have a good overview. Also, as coach player I had to coach the team and was still part of the team on the field. Today, I try to lead my team as I did as coach player. I am still responsible and have to make decisions, but I try to do it together with my team. I still have to pull strings, but I do it after talking to my team. And, I do not take myself too seriously.	3.29
Interview Roger Schnegg	Own Core Strength	My strength is that I know that I have no strength. I understand a bit of everything, but I am not a professional at something. Therefore, I need the best people for each topic/division around me and give them a platform. I would see myself more as a coordinator.	1.50
Interview Roger Schnegg	Leadership Role in Sports	Coach player and club president at the same time for several years.	0.38
Interview Roger Schnegg	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Basically yes. Switzerland lives the Olympic values of excellence, respect, and friendship - exactly the values that I learned from sports. Sport and business have many parallels. The second and third best are just as important for society. They learn to perform at a high level from an early age, to live a structured life, but also to develop resilience, sacrifice, setback handling, respect opponents, and work within a team, which are important skills. The number one desire for the course at that time was: universities teach us to avoid all risks, but we wanted to teach the opposite - to take reasonable risks.  Top athletes who didn't quite make it to the top are also very important. They carry the backpack of competitive sports with them and then realize after their education that it is not enough. They then start their professional career or studies with these skills and often shape society (Schäppi from Swisscom or Hildebrand and former SNB chief, who was a swimmer).	5.61

Interview Roger Schnegg	Transition into Professional World	I was never a real professional. I completed a commercial apprenticeship and then served in the military. Back then, elite sports were not as advanced and fast-paced as they are today.	1.05
Interview Roger Schnegg	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	Teamwork as a team sport athlete and handling pressure	0.31
Interview Roger Schnegg	First Top Mgmt Position	Leadership reference: Train a high-level volleyball team at the age of 27-28 while also serving as the president of a club with over members. I then completed my diploma thesis on tourism at HWV and was employed by the company I worked with during my thesis to implement it internally. Then, I worked four days at the welcome counter for a holiday exhibition in Bern and was approached by a job placement firm which was in search for a new manager. My boss who was sitting next to me then said take him, he works good and that was how I entered the next position. It is ironic, I went straight from the "Inföhüsl" of a holiday fair to a managing position for all trade shows in Berne with 20 employees under me. It was a challenging 3-year period, but I still maintain contact with my former colleagues.	4.59
Interview Roger Schnegg	Career Challenges	As mentioned above, it was difficult because I did not have a lot of specialized knowledge and it was hard for me to deal with my boss as we did not share the same values and leadership style. I often took it very personal when he was talking to me disrespectfully. Additionally, my start at Swiss Volley was also hard. I had a lot of time pressure and much work to do. For 1.5 years I had one free Sunday only. That was crazy as I had to reorganize the whole union. From 16 people we had to reduce to 6 and we ended up firing 14 of them and hire 4 new employees since we could not continue working with the old work force. That was particularly difficult as I knew most of them privately. Also, Covid-19 made it very difficult to adapt to all restrictions given by the state and the money we have received. We got over CHF 300m to distribute fairly to all clubs. And of course, the overall situation also plays a crucial role. I always say everyone has an energy level of 100%. You can put more than 100% for a while but not in the long run. But sometimes you only put 70% in something which is also not fun because then it is getting boring. Long-term you should try to stay at around 100%.	6.80
Interview Roger Schnegg	Career Challenges Skills	There is an incredible variety of topics to manage in my role, and accordingly, I have to prioritize them. Someone once said, "Better to be roughly right than precisely wrong," which is kind of my motto as a CEO in a management position. You have to distinguish between what is important and what is not worth putting much energy into. While you definitely have to identify unimportant things, usually a problem is always important to someone, so you have to convince them that overall, it is not that much of a burden, so that they understand. Motto: «lieber grob richtig als im Detail falsch»	3.38
Interview Roger Schnegg	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	Find the right balance between tension and relaxation = find your mix Prioritizing and setting boundaries.	0.60

Interview Roger Schnegg	How Team Sports helped in Career	People person: I can handle people very well - I like all people and they mostly like me too Good listener & the importance of networking Be authentic & credible!	0.93
Interview Roger Schnegg	How Team Sports helped in Career	Team concept – together! -> performance as well as social I feel better being part of a group and I am certain that a group will always outperform the individual. It is also very exciting to bring together many different people with the same interest but different personalities.	1.67
Interview Roger Schnegg	Team Sport Skills: Negative Impact	I always thought it would be nice to play an instrument, but I never learnt to do so. I sometimes regret it as I think it would be nice to play guitar at home or in some situations. I even went travelling for a year for this reason I did not even miss out on that. I never had to give up anything for sport. Also, I was never very open for other sport disciplines as I was committed to volleyball. I think I should have been more open to other sports and make use of these synergies.	2.75
Interview Roger Schnegg	Unique Skill Set: Better prepared for Top Mgmt?	Yes, team concept and teamwork.	0.18
Interview Roger Schnegg	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	Generally, yes. Unless someone is strongly committed to another area such as "culture, association, music, etc." It doesn't have to be high-performance sports, it can also be an engagement in a club that offers a great opportunity for young people to take responsibility, which is extremely helpful as a life school. We recently launched "Club Management": it includes 8-10 online modules for sports managers. In the end, there are 2 days of in-person training, and after 2 years of engagement in a club, you will receive an official diploma, which we want to have recognized by economiesuisse.	3.38
Interview Roger Schnegg	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	No not really, single or team sport does not really matter to me. But if they engaged in a club parallel to their studies/work, I do prefer them over someone who "just" studied.	1.01
Interview Roger Schnegg	Intentionally Recruiting Athletes	No, not specifically. I want people with the same values but different skill set. Having different knowledge and basis is needed to progress. Shared values are important, especially when it comes to social interaction. People who think different than me are challenging my view which is super interesting. Because then I learn something new. In the end, I can still decide but at least I got some different ideas and approaches.	2.44
Interview Roger Schnegg	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	Yes, but I would not differ from individual sports because both need to perform = School of Life	0.54

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Josh Simpson	Motivation of Becoming a Sportsperson	That was when I watched the World Cup in 1994 and I knew that I never want anything else than to be a professional football player. Canada was not in the World Cup, so my biggest dream was to attend the World Cup with the National Team. Canada only attended in 1986 and 2022 but just qualified for the Cup in 2026. So, they are definitely making progress, but I am just a big investor now.	2.09
Interview Josh Simpson	Own Core Strength	Within the Team (change room): positive energy and confidence On the Pitch: power, speed, and the drive to score	0.61
Interview Josh Simpson	Leadership Role in Sports	Of course, not at the beginning, since I was only 22 years old. So, I was more the follower. But by the time I got 25-26 years old I was more experienced and had a different role. In the end of my career, I was captain of the national team and in my club.	1.37
Interview Josh Simpson	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Yes, definitely! Resilience, drive, and mental toughness. That is actually a good one, mental toughness is really crucial. But also, social competence and being able to read other people. Funny story actually, I had a teammate who just started his first job after retiring from soccer. So, he worked as kind of a travel agent for the VIPs at the World Cup in Qatar. I was literally surrounded by the highest top-level people and his behavior and coolness was just incredible. I was truly fascinated, also about the way he talked to them. He was so confident and could just read them. I mean, it is not easy to tell somebody at that level that they just have to be patient and need to wait for the plane to arrive, but he did it with such a coolness that I was highly impressed. That demonstrated to me the importance about reading people and treat them respectively.	4.66
Interview Josh Simpson	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	Resilience, drive, and mental toughness	0.21

Interview Josh Simpson	Transition into Professional World	Full time student and parallel in the men's soccer team. My transition was not easy. I was playing in Beme, so I looked for a job there. That is when I started working for UBS at the lowest banking level. My boss was actually surprised that I was willing to do this job, but I just said as long as I do not need to be at the counter and can-do client meetings, I am fine with it. That was actually a pretty hard time. I remember when I had to buy several suits since I could not imagine going to work like that. First, I thought it was a joke. But it really helped me to get a structure and working during fixed hours.	3.33
Interview Josh Simpson	Correlation to Business	Well, I started in banking at UBS Berne and was then promoted as Client Relationship Manager at UBS in Zurich. That was when I realized that I can do much more and much better if I build a company of my own. So, I am currently in a senior management position and I just got a 300m deal as a broker. Have I ever done it? No Can I do it? Hell yes!  And that is what I mean with the confidence I gained from sports. I know that I got something they want so I just need to bring them together.	2.63
Interview Josh Simpson	Correlation to Business	I am working in different continents, so I have no fixed working hours. This needs a work-live integration because you have to work then when it is needed. I do not know if I got this from football or not but there my private and professional life melted together. You have to train, to do it over and over again and just keep going. Everything is aligned with the sports, your recovery, your diet, your lifestyle etc.	2.25
Interview Josh Simpson	First Top Mgmt Position	That was five years ago at the age of 35. I founded the Pacific Football Club and hired 55 people within 6 months. That was an incredible growth phase and very challenging.	0.93
Interview Josh Simpson	Career Challenges	People relation skills, for sure. I do not like it to say it but I often have more problems with women than men (being direct). It is difficult if you have a conflict in the office, to resolve it in a way that everyone is happy. Even today, I cannot tell you how to deal with that. Not only in Canada, but also in Switzerland. Something, I have learnt is managing people and that you need to have good managers in place. They are like someone's parents. That was a big learning, that we need levels of management. I think that it is said that "each person can only properly manage eight people right", not 100% sure about the number but this demonstrates the importance of having good managers.	3.74
Interview Josh Simpson	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	People skills = soft skills If you manage people, you have to deal with different personalities and their incentives vary a lot. You have to feel what they need. I nice example is the Managing director I hired at the Pacific Football Club – Paul. Since I could not be around that often, I had to hire someone to be in charge. Sometimes he comes to the office and brings donuts for everyone. With that, he just made everyone having a better day. It is simple but can achieve so much.	2.60
Interview Josh Simpson	How Team Sports helped in Career	Yes. Work ethics and drive helped me the most. I started football with nobody and nothing, working 18 hours a day. I had to sit on every board in the area, give speeches and that every evening. It was very hard and needed a lot of mental toughness. If you do not sleep a lot six days in a row, you realize how tired you get.	1.74
Interview Josh Simpson	Team Sport Skills helped to achieve Top Mgmt Position	You know, start-ups are tough. You have to believe in yourself and work hard. IF you hire people and want to have their confidence you have to show them that you believe in what you are doing so that they trust you. People only follow if you believe in yourself, and they will only bring new people if you are confident to succeed.	1.78

Interview Josh Simpson	Correlation to Business	Transferrable skills to business: Grid, determination, ability to adapt, and drive function.	0.50
Interview Josh Simpson	Team Sport Skills: Negative Impact	<p>Not going to the office from morning to evening. I learned it at age of 35. Putting on a suit and get up in the morning was hard. Definitely not similar to my former sportsmen lifestyle.</p> <p>Also, sports taught me to be very direct. When it comes to my kids, I tell my son wtf was that? And then my wife looks at me and says how can you say that. I do not know if it is because she does not have a professional sports background, but I am used to be direct. In sports you can hit each other on the pitch and shout and afterwards you shower together. Or you have the worst fights on the pitch and when you score, you hug and sometimes even kiss. Sport is very emotional, in both ways.</p> <p>Also, it took time until people took me seriously for something else than being an athlete. If you succeed, they kind of have a mindset "how did he achieve this?" or "It must have been vitamin B". You have to proof yourself again but that time from a different perspective.</p>	5.14
Interview Josh Simpson	Correlation to Business	I can confidently say "yes". Being in a football team is like being in a company. Finding your way through that company. I try to be respectful and caring. I mean I own the company so nobody can fire me, right? Thus, I treat people with the best incentives.	1.38
Interview Josh Simpson	Unique Skill Set: Better prepared for Top Mgmt?	<p>I can confidently say "yes". Being in a football team is like being in a company. Finding your way through that company. I try to be respectful and caring. I mean I own the company so nobody can fire me, right? Thus, I treat people with the best incentives.</p> <p>At the bank, I have learned what it is like to be in that world – not my world. Everything is too structured and inefficient, and I felt that I could do the work of a whole day within two hours if I wanted to. But there is always somebody asking you things, or you have these meetings to attend. That was when I realized, that with my skill set, I can already do what I want to do, take better care of my clients by having more flexible offers and make a better job and salary.</p>	3.96
Interview Josh Simpson	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	I think it does, of course I have a sports background but there are so many things that I have learnt from that time that non-athletes could not have experienced.	0.87
Interview Josh Simpson	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	Absolutely, I already know how to treat them. They do know not to take everything too seriously and I can really grab the guy.	0.68
Interview Josh Simpson	Intentionally Recruiting Athletes	No, I do not have the luxury of line ups of people as a start-up. Our salaries are at the lower end spectrum in the industry but therefore, it only attracts people who really love the job and work with passion.	1.13
Interview Josh Simpson	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	<p>Pro without question, a massive pro! It is hard and I know what it needs to succeed.</p> <p>It is totally correct what your thesis is about – I gave speeches about it to all the managing directors at UBS about this topic, I basically said the same thing, and they loved it!</p> <p>You have to go out to win or be passive and lose.</p>	1.71
Interview Josh Simpson	Advice to Young Athletes aspiring to Top Mgmt Positions	<p>Never stop learning! I met ten soccer players from YB yesterday. They are my clients, so we went for lunch at 12am, ate until 2pm and then went for a coffee and walked around until 4pm. So, when I asked them what plans they have for the day, they had literally none. One had to go and get a document for the taxes, and another had to grab take-away food for him and his girlfriend.</p> <p>They do not do anything the whole day! Except training of course, but it does not hurt to take some interest and learn something. Especially if you have so much time available. My advantage was that I studied before I started being a professional football player.</p> <p>I bough my first real estate when I was 20 years old so, learned quickly how that hobby can make me money.</p> <p>And it goes without saying that you have to work hard.</p>	4.35

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Peter Spuhler	How Team Sports helped in Career	Regarding my experience in top management (as an entrepreneur), two significant factors have greatly influenced me. Firstly, my involvement in sports, specifically ice hockey and handball. Secondly, my military service as a grenadier in the mountain company which was highly performance-oriented in the 80s.	1.08
Interview Peter Spuhler	Correlation to Business	In sports, one learns the art of teamwork, discovering their role, taking on responsibility, and finding a balance between individual and team interests. Success in sports is the result of a collective effort, which also calls for discipline, understanding one's role, and embracing setbacks as opportunities for growth. Ice hockey, in particular, demands high levels of intellect. It is a fast-paced sport played in four blocks of five players each, along with a goalie. Each block has a specific strategic order and can stay on the field for a maximum of one minute. All moves are pre-planned and must be executed seamlessly under pressure and mental stress. These skills are transferable to the workplace, making ice hockey a valuable training ground for life.	2.69
Interview Peter Spuhler	Motivation of Becoming a Sportsperson	Well, I have never become a full-time professional player, even though that was the goal. I was good but never talented enough to be a professional ice hockey player. Playing ice hockey in Zurich while studying in St. Gallen made it difficult to fully concentrate on either pursuit. Thus, I could not focus properly on one thing. Ultimately, I made the decision to retire from ice hockey at the end of my studies.	1.45
Interview Peter Spuhler	Own Core Strength	Throughout my athletic career, I have held the position of captain in nearly every team I played for. At the youngster level, I have always been the captain. I think my characteristic traits of my strong sense of discipline, and having a certain claim to leadership were two of my main strengths. While I was physically strong, my technical skills were somewhat limited.	1.30
Interview Peter Spuhler	Identify Strengths of Others	I think yes. Especially during my early years. I was not a great student, but sports helped me develop confidence and a sense of purpose. Sports have the power to keep young people off the streets and provide them with direction and meaningful leisure activity. We were Swiss champion back in our junior years and I spent a lot of time with my friends to whom I still have contact nowadays. I think it develops a really strong bond of friendship.	1.57
Interview Peter Spuhler	Leadership Role in Sports	Almost throughout my whole career, I have been captain at Grasshopper Club Zurich.	0.29
Interview Peter Spuhler	Valuable Skills through Team Sports	Absolutely! Discipline and punctuality were definitely two key factors for success, including being prepared for training with sharpened skates and sticks ready. On the ice, discipline meant following tactical guidelines and putting aside personal ego to fully integrate into the team. It has always been a delicate balance between personal ambition and teamwork. Emotions also play a significant role in ice hockey as they can greatly influence the outcome of the game. Thus, the power of emotions is highly valuable to turn a game around.	1.90
Interview Peter Spuhler	Transition into Professional World	I was never 'just' an ice hockey player, I also studied in parallel and started my career in the Swiss army.	0.38
Interview Peter Spuhler	Biggest Learning through Team Sports	Integration, discipline, and fighting together for a common goal. Of course, having fun is also important in the end.	0.41
Interview Peter Spuhler	First Top Mgmt Position	Well, I led Stadler Rail the moment I entered and then became the owner in 1989 with the loan granted by the Thurgauer Kantonalbank. However, with my entry into operational management in 1987, I was already in a leadership position.	0.82
Interview Peter Spuhler	Career Challenges	Oh, there were challenges during my 37 years. At the beginning, it was certainly paying off the interest and amortizing the loan regularly. In the mid-90s, our goal was to develop our own vehicles. At that time, everyone laughed at us, but that is the best thing that can actually happen to you: being underestimated. That was then, but of course, does not happen anymore today (laughs). The decision to become a rail vehicle manufacturer was definitely a big challenge when looking back.	1.72

Interview Peter Spuhler	Career Challenges Skills	I would say that I am very resilient as well as courageous but still in a thoughtful manner. We have doubled our number of employees and revenue several times. You have to carefully consider what possibly can go wrong. But at the right moment, you need to have the courage to implement it if you have a good gut feeling. Do you know Helmut Maucher? He was the man who made Nestle great. He once said that three characteristics are necessary for an entrepreneur: courage, strength of nerves, and composure. I fully support this. However, I would say that there is still a very essential fourth characteristic needed: passion! This makes the difference between an absolute top manager and an entrepreneur. In German, the word 'Leidenschaft' includes the word 'Leid', which means that you have to persevere and show a certain bite.	2.91
Interview Peter Spuhler	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	I can assemble a team, motivate them to work together and move forward as a team. Compensating for weaknesses and leveraging strengths, utilizing the expertise of exceptional engineers and leaders to form the best possible team. And then integrating them as team players into the whole. Motivation means moving forward, which I learned strongly in the military. Also, lifting together under physical and mental pressure.	1.48
Interview Peter Spuhler	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	I do believe that setting a goal and sticking to it is important. There is a saying, 'When we lost sight of the goal, we doubled the effort.' Defining a goal with the team and working towards it is crucial. And, above all, not letting daily events distract you from achieving the goal. We operate in a long-term industry. The question then becomes, what do we want in terms of technology, what resources do we have available, and then consistently sticking to it.	1.63
Interview Peter Spuhler	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	Courage, strength of nerves, composure, and passion! Defining a clear strategy and consequently sticking to it with the whole team.	0.46
Interview Peter Spuhler	How Team Sports helped in Career	Yes, certainly with learning to fit in a team, working towards a common goal as well as discipline and fun.	0.38
Interview Peter Spuhler	Team Sport Skills helped to achieve Top Mgmt Position	I definitely believe so, but it also takes a certain amount of luck, or more accurately the chance, to get and see the opportunities. Being in the right moment at the right place and then having the courage to make the right decisions.	0.82
Interview Peter Spuhler	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	I have to differentiate between a manager and an entrepreneur. Someone who invests their own capital and is fully involved means more than just being a top manager of a large company. Their entire wealth is then tied up in the company and they cannot run away that easily. Personally, I think that nowadays people focus too much on side issues (such as compliance, sustainability checks, gender quotas which are all topics prescribed by the legislator) and no longer have the focus on the essentials. The essential goal of a company is to be able to survive in tough international competition. Do you have the technology? Are you well positioned? What does the competition in the market look like? (minute 27 of the recording) What you have to submit in reports today, is insane. Personally speaking, it would be a big advantage to take a step back regarding the regulations. This would significantly improve the survivability of companies and, above all, guarantee it. In addition, an entrepreneur must have an "out of the box" mindset. Not always standing against the current but also not always going along with the crowd. It is about finding your own profile, constantly questioning, and reviewing everything you do. What can you do differently? Going along with the crowd has rarely made anyone successful.	4.61
Interview Peter Spuhler	Team Sport Skills: Negative Impact	Well, with rising age you do feel the negative effects of sports (laughs). I have osteoarthritis in both knees. The physical wear and tear is certainly a disadvantage of sports.	0.62
Interview Peter Spuhler	Unique Skill Set: Better prepared for Top Mgmt?	Yes, I would say so. Referring to the above-mentioned skills learned through sports.	0.30
Interview Peter Spuhler	Sport vs. Non-Sport: Better equipped?	I do believe that team sports teach you many things such as teamwork, integration, putting your own ego aside and more. I think that a team athlete can adapt to new team situations and fit in better and faster.	0.74

Interview Peter Spuhler	More Confidence in Former Athletes?	I do believe that if someone has participated in sports, they bring certain prerequisites with them. Of course, education and experience are necessary to overcome difficult moments. They also need to bring passion to their work. These qualities can be excellently applied in the professional environment.	1.07
Interview Peter Spuhler	Correlation to Business	They also need to bring passion to their work. These qualities can be excellently applied in the professional environment.	0.43
Interview Peter Spuhler	Intentionally Recruiting Athletes	Yes, this is definitely a factor to consider. Of course, it is not the main factor, but maybe about four to five on the list of important factors, alongside with education and experience.	0.66
Interview Peter Spuhler	Intentionally Recruiting Athletes	Yes, we currently have an assistant who played in the first German handball league. There are several former professional athletes among us.	0.49
Interview Peter Spuhler	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	Yes, that is a pro. Of course, one has to consider the compatibility of the sport with the work schedule if the person is still active, but we also have reduced hours. Thus, we can always find a solution.	0.72
Interview Peter Spuhler	Advice to Young Athletes aspiring to Top Mgmt Positions	<p>Education is becoming increasingly important. That is why it is important to complete an education alongside being a professional athlete. I see a lot of examples in ice hockey, where I am very close to, where players do nothing during their professional career. Then there is the risk that they will fall into a hole after their career. I also see many positive examples where players study alongside their professional career. Of course, it takes longer, maybe six to seven years instead of four, but at the end of their career, they have a good education. At ZSC Lions, there are maybe four or five players who are doing distance learning.</p> <p>Also, it is important to consider what to do afterwards and to work towards it. There are only few Swiss team sports players who earn so much that they do not have to work for their whole life. But those who live in Switzerland still have to work afterwards. Thus, it is important to foster these characteristics learned from sports that are fundamental prerequisites for business.</p>	3.61

Document Name	Code	Segment	Coverage Ratio %
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	First Top Mgmt Position	That was actually from day one when I started my position as CEO at MPB. I was owner and CEO at the same time but of course we were much smaller at that time. There were just the three of us: one secretary, one employee and me. This small business grew to a small and medium-sized company with around 14 employees. But I have to admit that this is not a top management position. Of course, I have responsibility and we are a successful company but in regards to size and financial KPIs it cannot be declared as top management position.	2.83
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Career Challenges	Experiencing four recessions during the last 36 years. I hoped that I can retire with three recessions but then Covid-19 came. This is very drastic for self-employed entrepreneurs and a big challenge when sales collapse massively overnight. We are in the service sector, which is always a bit easier. I mean, I can massively reduce costs within 2 months through redundancies if it is required. Short-time work subsidized by the state helps to ensure that no jobs are lost, but many then leave anyway.	2.64
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Career Challenges Skills	The believe that it works, hard work and high commitment as well as the support of the family (understanding). I mean, sales halved so wages also had to be halved – this is how to survive. Perseverance, high commitment, and willingness to accept losses (adjust standard of living).	1.49

Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	<p>You have to differentiate between professional skills and personality. The professional skills (technical knowledge and expertise) must be given. Controller needs a degree in business administration, relevant specialization and training during their studies and must have gained initial experience in order to be able to manage technically. I mean bricklayer must be able to build a straight wall. This is a basic condition that must exist, otherwise you do not even look at the person.</p> <p>When it comes to the personality, the so-called soft skills, following indicators are important: being a role model, lead by example, modesty, high performance, high commitment, having a vision and be able to share that vision to create a team spirit as well as inspiring and motivating people.</p>	4.13
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	<p>You have to like people. Be a role model. There are good examples of people I have been supporting for many years. It is about how they like people and stand up for them. Walk through fire and motivate employees to do the same. When they see that you work hard and try your best to bring the company a step forward, they will follow and do the same. Thus, it is about behaving in an exemplary manner and be authentic.</p>	2.20
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Most Valuable Skills in Top Mgmt	<p>In the end it is all that counts, if one person knows how to win over a team and their people, the team performance will increase. Thus, everyone is part of the company's success. The CEO or Chairman are defining the mission and strategy but then they have to win people over to execute the defined strategy. This must be aligned in order to work out. This requires technical expertise as new products need to be accepted by the market to be successful.</p>	2.39
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Team Sports: Pro or Con?	<p>It always happens that I see in the CV that were active in a sport. This is something I notice, and which has a meaning. If someone attended the Swiss or even the World Championship means that they had to put a lot of effort and hard work into it. This is a quality which is highly valuable in today's work environment. They already had to prove themselves and know what it takes to be successful.</p> <p>Hence, I definitely see it as a clear pro! These candidates are usually relatively young as they just finished their athletic careers. So, they are at the beginning of their corporate career.</p>	3.12
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Individual vs. Team Sports	<p><u>Follow-up Question:</u> Do you differentiate between individual and team sports? If so, where do you see the differences?</p> <p>I think there is a big difference. It is not by accident that I never participated in team sports. I always preferred exercising by myself as I could decide when and what to do. I do not like being tied to fixed date and times. It definitely says something about the person's characteristic.</p>	2.17
Interview Helmut Zimmerli-Menzi	Individual vs. Team Sports	<p><u>Follow-up Question:</u> What is generally more required for top management positions, characteristics from individual or team sports? Respectively, are you looking more for individual or team sports characteristics when hiring for top management positions? Which do you think is more in demand?</p> <p>Generally speaking, I would say that individual sport characteristics are more demanded for CEO positions. In the end, the CEO is often alone and has to make crucial decisions by himself. I see it more as a marathon runner who is running the 42km by himself. You are quite often alone as entrepreneur or high-level executive, thus the whole responsibility also lies with you.</p> <p>But of course, before entering a CEO position you mostly start with a management position which requires more traits from team sports. Good management works as a sports team: working together towards a common goal. It does not matter who passes the ball, who plays or who scores, it is the outcome that matters.</p> <p>Overall, I think you cannot say something is better or more important than the other. It requires both.</p>	5.72

Interview Helmut  
Zimmerli

Advice to Young Athletes aspiring to  
Top Mgmt Positions

Currently, there is a rising topic in the media about generations. I can already see that there is a tendency to have more fun today than in the past. If you want to be successful, you have to work hard. Of course, this involves liking what you are doing. This makes it much easier. Here I am talking about people in a "league" who have access to education and good chances to get a job they really enjoy. If the motivation is intrinsic, the chances for success increase.

Switzerland has today's high standard because we work hard in the past. Choose what you like to do as a profession and then do a good job. You will be automatically seen, discovered, and developed.

Not everyone can become managers, it is not necessary at all. If people are happy that is wonderful. Not everyone can become head of something in top companies and this is totally fine.

As a military commander once said: "It is suspicious if a soldier arrives happily but once they are here, they should have fun."

I also notice a tendency when it comes to wages. Young people are very self-confident when they enter the job market. But you have to perform first before you get rewarded. That is how it works. You cannot work part-time but expect a full-time salary. That is what you learn in economics. And this does not support the current shortage of skilled workers either.

7.13

## Appendix Q – The Creation of the Conceptual Framework

### Key Skills in Top Management

According to Primary Research	According to Secondary Research (Robles, 2023)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Balance Between Tension and Relaxation</li> <li>• Communication Skill</li> <li>• Composure</li> <li>• Consistency</li> <li>• Courage</li> <li>• Great Sense of Responsibility</li> <li>• High Commitment</li> <li>• Leading by Example</li> <li>• Motivating People</li> <li>• Passion</li> <li>• People Skills</li> <li>• Prioritizing</li> <li>• Reliability</li> <li>• Setting Boundaries</li> <li>• Setting Goals and Sticking to Them</li> <li>• Strength of Nerves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication: <i>Oral, Speaking, Written, Presenting, Listening</i></li> <li>• Courtesy: <i>Manners, Respectful, Etiquette</i></li> <li>• Flexibility: <i>Adaptability, Adjustability, Willing to Change</i></li> <li>• Integrity: <i>Honesty, Ethics, High Morals, Personal Values</i></li> <li>• Interpersonal Skills: <i>Friendly, Social Skills, Self-Control, Patience</i></li> <li>• Positive Attitude: <i>Optimistic, Encouraging, Confident</i></li> <li>• Professionalism: <i>Appearance, Businesslike</i></li> <li>• Responsibility: <i>Reliable, Self-Disciplined, Accountable</i></li> <li>• Teamwork: <i>Cooperative, Supportive, Helpful, Collaborative</i></li> <li>• Work Ethics: <i>Hard Working, Initiative, Attendance</i></li> </ul>

### Contingency Table: Top Management

Key Skills in Top Management	Primary Research	Secondary Research
Balance Between Tension and Relaxation	x	
<b>Communication</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Composure	x	
Consistency	x	
Courage	x	
Courtesy		x
Flexibility		x
<b>Integrity</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Interpersonal / People Skills</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Motivating People</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Passion	x	
Positive Attitude		x
Prioritizing	x	
Professionalism		x
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Setting Boundaries	x	
Setting Goals and Sticking to Them	x	
Strength of Nerves	x	
Teamwork		x
<b>Work Ethics</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>

### Confirmed by Both:

- Communication
- Integrity (including Authenticity and Leading by Example)
- Interpersonal Skills / People Skills
- Motivating
- Reliability
- Responsibility
- Work Ethics (including High Commitment)

## Key Skills in Team Sports

According to Primary Research	According to Secondary Research (Burns et al., 2022)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to Read Others</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Consistency</li> <li>• Dealing with All Types of People</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Drive</li> <li>• Focus</li> <li>• Goal Setting</li> <li>• Mental Toughness</li> <li>• Preparation</li> <li>• Punctuality</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Social Competence</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Values of Excellence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to Adapt to Change</li> <li>• Ability to Create a Supportive Network</li> <li>• Ability to Manage Emotions During Competition</li> <li>• Ability to Manage Performance Nerves</li> <li>• Ability to Recover After Injury</li> <li>• Being a Knowledge Seeker</li> <li>• Being Self-Aware</li> <li>• Coping Skills</li> <li>• Goal Setting and Planning</li> <li>• Mental Toughness</li> <li>• Preparation (including Breathing Techniques, Rituals, and Routines)</li> <li>• Problem-Solving</li> <li>• Reflection</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Self-Discipline</li> <li>• Strategic Thinking</li> </ul>

### Contingency Table: Team Sports

Key Skills in Team Sports	Primary Research	Secondary Research
Ability to Adapt to Change		x
Ability to Read Others	x	
Ability to Create a Supportive Network		x
Ability to Read Others	x	
Ability to Recover After Injury		x
Being a Knowledge Seeker		x
Being Self-Aware		x
Communication	x	
Consistency	x	
<b>Coping Skills</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Dealing with All Types of People	x	
<b>Discipline</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Drive	x	
<b>Focus</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Goal Setting and Planning</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Mental Toughness</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Preparation</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Problem-Solving		x
Punctuality	x	
Reflection		x
<b>Resilience</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>
Respect	x	
Social Competence	x	x
Strategic Thinking		x
Transparency	x	
Values of Excellence	x	

### Confirmed by Both:

- Coping Skills (including Dealing with all Types of People and Social Competence)
- Discipline
- Focus (including Ability to Manage Emotions During Competition and Performance Nerves)
- Goal Setting
- Mental Toughness
- Preparation
- Resilience

### Identified Key Skills in Both Domains

Key Skills in Top Management	Key Skills in Team Sports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Communication</li><li>▪ Integrity (including Authenticity, and Leading by Example)</li><li>▪ Interpersonal Skills / People Skills</li><li>▪ Motivating</li><li>▪ Reliability</li><li>▪ Responsibility</li><li>▪ Work Ethics (including High Commitment)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Coping Skills (including Dealing with all Types of People and Social Competence)</li><li>▪ Discipline</li><li>▪ Focus</li><li>▪ Goal Setting</li><li>▪ Mental Toughness</li><li>▪ Resilience</li><li>▪ Preparation</li></ul>