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Issues in the Third Circuit

THE CITX DECISION: HAS THE TORT OF "DEEPENING INSOLVENCY" GONE BANKRUPT?

I. Introduction

In times of financial crisis, a corporation’s board of directors often faces the complex question of how to maximize asset value for all stakeholders and must frequently decide whether to prevent seemingly irreversible losses by liquidating assets or whether to try to preserve the corporate entity by incurring more debt.1 Deepening insolvency is a cause of action based on the underlying premise that, at some point, it is more beneficial for a corporation to cease operations, liquidate its assets and distribute the proceeds to creditors rather than continue to operate and incur unnecessary additional debt.2 If a board of directors continues to operate beyond the point when it arguably should have liquidated, some courts, recognizing that such action gives rise to cognizable harm, allow stakeholders to

1. See, e.g., John H. Rapisardi, Third Circuit Revisits “Deepening Insolvency Theory,” N.Y.L.J., July 20, 2006, at 3 (noting one choice that corporate management must make when facing insolvency is whether to liquidate assets or to incur additional debt). Insolvency typically is defined as a "financial condition such that the sum of such entity’s debts is greater than all of such entity’s property, at a fair valuation exclusive of [exempt property].” See 11 U.S.C. § 101(32)(A)(ii) (2001). A generally accepted definition of stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives.” See Benedict Sheehy, Scrooge—the Reluctant Shareholder: Theoretical Problems in the Shareholder-Stakeholder Debate, 14 U. MIAMI BUS. L. REV. 193, 198 (2005) (quoting R. Edward Freeman, Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach 46 (1984)) (defining stakeholder).

2. See Schacht v. Brown, 711 F.2d 1343, 1350 (7th Cir. 1983) (discussing methods by which corporations can maximize value for shareholders). The Third Circuit has defined deepening insolvency as “an injury to the Debtor’s corporate property from the fraudulent expansion of corporate debt and prolongation of corporate life.” See Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors v. R.F. Lafferty & Co., 267 F.3d 340, 350 (3d Cir. 2001) (defining deepening insolvency). For a complete discussion of the court’s holding in Lafferty, see infra notes 28-41 and accompanying text. One commentator has characterized a typical deepening insolvency case as one in which “an insolvent corporation’s trustee, receiver, or creditors’ committee, standing legally in the insolvent corporation’s shoes, sue the corporation’s insiders and its deep-pocket outside professionals alleging that the defendants injured the corporation through wrongdoing that caused the corporation to incur unpayable debt that deepened the corporation’s insolvency.” See J.B. Heaton, Deepening Insolvency, 30 J. CORP. L. 465, 465-66 (2005) (detailing components of deepening insolvency claim).
sue the board and other corporate insiders (e.g., auditors, lawyers, underwriters and even lenders) for the tort of deepening insolvency. As one might imagine, judicial acceptance of this tort has incited vociferous debate over the prudence of circumventing the business judgment rule and placing liability for this insolvency directly on corporate management. Some commentators argue that courts have increased the likelihood that a corporation's board of directors, fearing liability, will choose to liquidate its assets as opposed to making a good faith effort to resuscitate a company approaching financial crisis. Stakeholders assert, however, that the tort of deepening insolvency merely ensures that corporate management makes fiscally responsible business decisions that maximize value.


4. Compare Jay Bender, Deepening Insolvency in Alabama: Is it a Tort, a Damages Theory or Neither of the Above?, 66 ALA. LAW. 190, 194 (2005) (recognizing that corporations are under no duty to liquidate when faced with insolvency, and therefore business judgment rule protects corporate management from liability within zone of insolvency), Douglas Richmond, Rebecca Lambeth & Ambreen Delawalla, Lawyer Liability and the Vortex of Deepening Insolvency, 51 ST. LOUIS U. L.J. 127, 156-57 (2006) (noting that business judgment rule allows corporate management to take risks necessary to maximize profit), and Sabin Willett, The Shallows of Deepening Insolvency, 60 BUS. LAW. 549, 561 (2005) (concluding that business judgment rule should foreclose most actions for deepening insolvency), with Susan Gummow, Director and Officer Liability Insurance: How Bankruptcy Transforms the Rights of the Various Parties, 14 J. BANKR. L. & PRAC. 6, 15 (2005) ("[T]he protections of the business judgment rule may not fully apply once the corporation is in the zone of insolvency."). The business judgment rule effectively immunizes corporate management from liability when it has acted on "an informed basis, in good faith, and in the honest belief that the action taken was in the best interests of the company." See Daniel E. Harrell, Comment, Pandora's Bankruptcy Tort: The Potential for Circumvention of the Business Judgment Rule Through the Tort Theory of Deepening Insolvency, 36 CUMB. L. REV. 151, 168 (2005-06) (citing Aronson v. Lewis, 473 A.2d 802, 812 (Del. 1984)) (providing practical effects of business judgment rule). For a discussion of the effects of the business judgment rule on corporate liability and corporate governance, see infra notes 56, 76, 118-23 and accompanying text.

5. See Harrell, supra note 4, at 152-54 (noting that extending deepening insolvency to claims of negligence "could provide a cause of action distinct from a breach of fiduciary duty claim, [and] officers and directors would be unable to rely on the protection of the business judgment rule," which in turn would make it far more likely that directors would liquidate when confronted with insolvency).

Although coined over twenty years ago, there is a distinct lack of consensus among courts regarding the amorphous tort of deepening insolvency. Questions remain as to whether deepening insolvency is in fact an independent cause of action or a measure of damages and whether negligence alone suffices to establish liability for such claims. The Third Circuit has largely been at the forefront of these issues, and in two recent cases, has both vastly expanded and severely narrowed the tort of deepening insolvency. In *Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors v. R.F. Lafferty & Co.*, the Third Circuit boldly established the tort of deepening insolvency as an independent cause of action. Then, five years later, as a reaction to various misinterpretations of the *Lafferty* holding, the court clarified its

www.arnoldporter.com/pubs/files/Deepening_Insolvency.pdf ("To a cynic (or a defendant) [deepening insolvency] is unfair Monday-morning quarterbacking. To a plaintiff, it is simply a way of requiring that parties who have influence over the debtor make business decisions that are reasonably calculated to maximize value, even if value is maximized through liquidation.")


8. Cf. supra note 7 (providing list of courts that have ruled on deepening insolvency claims and describing their various approaches to them).

9. Compare *Seitz v. Detweiler, Hershey & Assoc., P.C. (In re CitX Corp.*)*, 448 F.3d 672, 676 (3d Cir. 2006) (rejecting deepening insolvency as theory of damages and prohibiting deepening insolvency claims from being asserted solely on negligence), with *Lafferty*, 267 F.3d at 349 (holding that deepening insolvency was independent cause of action), and infra notes 28-41 and accompanying text (discussing court's holding in *Lafferty* and manner by which Third Circuit greatly expanded claims for deepening insolvency). For an analysis of how the court's holding in *CitX* reined in deepening insolvency, see infra notes 78-105 and accompanying text.

10. 267 F.3d 340 (3d Cir. 2001).

11. See id. at 347-50 (establishing deepening insolvency as separate and distinct cause of action). For a discussion of the court's holding in *Lafferty*, see infra notes 28-41 and accompanying text.
ruling in *Seitz v. Detweiler, Hershey and Associates (In re CitX Corp.)* by severely limiting deepening insolvency's broad reach. The *CitX* court held that allegations of negligence alone do not support a claim of deepening insolvency and that deepening insolvency may not be used as a theory of damages. The court also expressly limited *Lafferty*’s precedential value to matters governed by Pennsylvania law.

This Casebrief identifies the current status of deepening insolvency within Third Circuit jurisprudence and serves as a guide to practitioners bringing or defending against a claim of deepening insolvency. Part II provides a review of the economic theories that led to the development of deepening insolvency and examines how various circuit courts have analyzed and interpreted challenges brought under this contemporary theory of liability. Part III details the holding in *CitX* and the way in which the Third Circuit limited deepening insolvency claims. Part IV reviews *CitX*’s widespread effect on deepening insolvency jurisprudence within the Third Circuit as well as the unmistakable and growing trend, within federal jurisprudence, toward significantly restricting claims for deepening insolvency. Finally, Part V concludes that the constraints placed on deepening insolvency by the court in *CitX* will severely limit the number of deepening insolvency claims brought by trustees and creditors against corporations within the Third Circuit.

12. 448 F.3d 672 (3d Cir. 2006).
13. See id. at 677-78, 680 n.11, 681 (limiting claims for deepening insolvency). For a detailed analysis of the way in which *CitX* further restricted *Lafferty*, see infra notes 78-105 and accompanying text.
14. See *CitX*, 448 F.3d at 677-78, 681 (rejecting deepening insolvency as theory of damages and refusing to extend deepening insolvency to negligent acts). For a complete discussion of the court’s holding in *CitX*, see infra notes 78-105 and accompanying text. For an analysis of the various ways lower courts interpreted the *Lafferty* holding, see infra notes 44-77 and accompanying text.
15. See *CitX*, 448 F.3d at 680 n.11 ("[N]othing we said in *Lafferty* compels any extension of the doctrine beyond Pennsylvania."). For a thorough analysis of *CitX*’s refusal to extend *Lafferty* beyond Pennsylvania, see infra notes 103-05 and accompanying text.
16. For a discussion of the status of deepening insolvency within the Third Circuit, see infra notes 78-105 and accompanying text.
17. For further discussion of the historical development of deepening insolvency within the Third Circuit and more generally within federal jurisprudence, see infra notes 42-77 and accompanying text.
18. For a discussion of the Third Circuit’s holding in *CitX*, see infra notes 78-105 and accompanying text.
19. For a complete discussion of *CitX*’s wide-reaching impact on deepening insolvency jurisprudence within the Third Circuit and beyond, see infra notes 106-32 and accompanying text.
20. For support of this author’s prediction that *CitX* will severely limit the number of deepening insolvency claims brought by trustees and creditors in the Third Circuit, see infra notes 111-32 and accompanying text.
II. DEEPENING INSOLVENCY'S CONTEMPORARY ROOTS

A. CHALLENGING HISTORICAL NOTIONS OF LIABILITY FROM INSOLVENCY

Deepening insolvency is a developing theory of liability that evolved from cases concerning corporate officers who fraudulently extended the lives of corporations for personal financial gain. In what is widely considered the first allusion to deepening insolvency in American jurisprudence, a New York district court concluded in Bloor v. Dansker that "[a] corporation is not a biological entity for which it can be presumed that any act which extends its existence is beneficial to it." Three years later, the Seventh Circuit further challenged established notions of who could be deemed liable for a corporation's insolvency. In Schacht v. Brown, the court stated that at some point in a corporation's lifetime—in an effort to maximize asset value for stakeholders—it is more beneficial for a corporation to dissolve than to continue to operate, and that by deepening the company's insolvency, corporate management harms the corporation. The Seventh Circuit's seemingly straightforward decision in Schacht brought the tort of deepening insolvency substantially closer to a viable and separate cause of action.

B. THE THIRD CIRCUIT ESTABLISHES DEEPENING INSOLVENCY AS AN INDEPENDENT CAUSE OF ACTION

The Third Circuit's controversial opinion in Lafferty crystallized the underlying theories that led to the development of deepening insolvency

21. See Bloor v. Dansker (In re Investors Funding Corp. Sec. Litig.), 523 F. Supp. 533, 539 (S.D.N.Y. 1980) (discussing fraudulent actions taken by corporate management that led to incurrence of additional debt); see also Bernstein & Malloy, supra note 6, at 415 ("The early cases that gave rise to the concept of deepening insolvency involved officers and directors who were alleged to have fraudulently prolonged the life of a corporation in order to benefit themselves, and who argued that there was no harm to the corporation . . . .").


23. Id. at 541 (rejecting, in dicta, premise that it is always beneficial for corporate entity to remain solvent). The plaintiffs alleged in their complaint that three brothers manifested the false appearance of financial stability in an effort to conceal their past misconduct, and to raise additional capital to further their transgressions. See id. at 534 (stating factual background). This case represented the first time a court discussed what would later become the tort of deepening insolvency. See Howard Seife, Bankruptcy for Bankers, 122 Banking L.J. 742, 743 (2005) ("The origin of the phrase 'deepening insolvency' has been traced to the case of Bloor v. Dansker.").

24. See Schacht v. Brown, 711 F.2d 1343, 1350 (7th Cir. 1983) (holding that corporate entities can be damaged through deepening insolvency).

25. 711 F.2d 1343 (7th Cir. 1983).

26. See id. at 1350 (rejecting earlier decisions that found extension of corporate existence is always beneficial and holding instead that "[t]his premise collides with common sense, for the corporate body is ineluctably damaged by the deepening of its insolvency, through increased exposure to creditor liability").

27. See Willett, supra note 4, at 550 (concluding that deepening insolvency evolved ever closer to independent action based on dictum in Schacht).
and elevated the tort of deepening insolvency beyond mere dicta. In one fell swoop, the Third Circuit took the bold (and arguably misguided) step of establishing deepening insolvency as a distinct and viable cause of action under Pennsylvania law. Resting its opinion on the reasoning outlined by the Seventh Circuit in Schacht, the Third Circuit held that Pennsylvania law recognized a cause of action for deepening insolvency as "an injury to [a debtor's] corporate property from the fraudulent expansion of corporate debt and prolongation of corporate life."

The seminal issue examined in Lafferty was whether an allegation of deepening insolvency was sufficient to give a debtor standing in federal court. The Third Circuit held that deepening insolvency was a viable cause of action under Pennsylvania law and therefore the plaintiff had the requisite standing to assert the claim. Although the Pennsylvania Supreme Court had not expressly recognized deepening insolvency as a distinct cause of action, the Third Circuit ruled that the theory of deepening insolvency was "essentially sound" because an insolvent corporation retains inherent value in its assets and corporate management seriously damages
the remaining value of the corporation by incurring additional debt. The court identified four ways in which deepening insolvency harms the corporation. The court noted that deepening insolvency harms the corporation by: (1) "inflicting legal and administrative costs" associated with bankruptcy on the corporation; (2) creating "operational limitations" on the corporation that impede its ability to be profitable; (3) undermining customer, supplier and employee relationships; and (4) shaking the confidence of parties dealing with the corporation, causing the devaluation of corporate assets. The court stated that "[t]hese harms can be averted, and the value within an insolvent corporation salvaged, if the corporation is dissolved in a timely manner, rather than kept afloat with spurious debt." In its ruling, the court further noted that the growing acceptance of deepening insolvency in courtrooms across the country, as well as the importance under Pennsylvania law of providing a remedy when there is an injury, effectively cemented deepening insolvency as a valid cause of action under Pennsylvania law. Under these precepts, the Third Circuit

33. See Lafferty, 267 F.3d at 349 (holding that although "[n]either the Pennsylvania Supreme Court nor any intermediate Pennsylvania court has directly addressed this issue," corporation was harmed by deepening insolvency). Whether a jurisdiction recognizes claims for deepening insolvency is an issue whose ultimate conclusion rests with state supreme courts. See id. at 349 (stating that insofar as Pennsylvania Supreme Court had not addressed issue, "we must don the soothsayer's garb and predict how that court would rule if it were presented with the question").

34. For a discussion of the manner by which deepening insolvency harms corporations, see infra notes 35-39 and accompanying text.

35. See Lafferty, 267 F.3d at 349-50 (citing RICHARD A. BREALEY & STEWART C. MYERS, PRINCIPLES OF CORPORATE FINANCE 487 (5th ed. 1996)) (noting heightened legal and administrative costs associated with deepening firm's insolvency).

36. See id. (citing BREALEY & MYERS, supra note 35, at 488-89) (discussing how deepening insolvency can hinder corporation's ability to remain profitable).

37. See id. (illustrating negative effects that deepening insolvency may have on outside parties).

38. See id. (describing harm to corporation's assets that can result from deepening insolvency).

39. See id. at 350 (noting methods by which corporations can limit their insolvency). To support the underpinnings of this controversial theory, the court stated that the "acceptance of a rule which would bar a corporation from recovering damages due to the hiding of information concerning its insolvency would create perverse incentives for wrong-doing officers and directors to conceal the true financial condition of the corporation from the corporate body as long as possible." See id. (ruling that corporations are harmed by deepening insolvency). But see Willett, supra note 4, at 565 (rejecting proposition that debtor is harmed by increasing insolvency).

40. See Lafferty, 267 F.2d at 352 ("In sum, we believe that the soundness of the theory, its growing acceptance among courts, and the remedial theme in Pennsylvania law would persuade the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to recognize deepening insolvency as giving rise to a cognizable injury in the proper circumstances."); accord Paul Rubin, New Liability Under Deepening Insolvency—The Search for Deep Pockets, 23-Apr AM. BANKR. INST. J. 50, 68 (2004) (noting Lafferty's explicit acknowledgment of deepening insolvency as separate cause of action). Nevertheless, the court went on to hold that the plaintiff was barred from bringing a claim on the debtors'
laid the foundation for deepening insolvency as an independent cause of action.\textsuperscript{41}

C. The Unintended Consequences of Deepening Insolvency’s Widening Reach

The \textit{Lafferty} decision immediately sent shockwaves through the business community, which was unsure of the depths deepening insolvency might reach and was weary of the growing acceptance of this newfound legal theory.\textsuperscript{42} The decision also caused significant consternation within federal courts, spawning two distinct lines of cases that expanded the scope of deepening insolvency and interpreted the \textit{Lafferty} holding in dramatically different fashions.\textsuperscript{43} One progeny of cases extended \textit{Lafferty}’s reasoning to hold that deepening insolvency could be utilized as a theory of damages to measure the harm caused by breaching a fiduciary duty or a duty of care.\textsuperscript{44} Another line of cases rejected deepening insolvency as a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Lafferty}, 267 F.3d at 349 (rejecting plaintiff’s argument). The doctrine in \textit{pari delicto} is “the equitable doctrine that a court should not assist a participant in a wrongful act to profit from it. Traditionally . . . [t]he knowledge and conduct of corporate officials acting within the scope of their duties generally is imputed to the corporation.” See Willett, supra note 4, at 557-58 (defining in \textit{pari delicto}). In the instant case, plaintiff’s claim was barred because the officers’ and directors’ misconduct would be imputed to the debtor. See \textit{Lafferty}, 267 F.3d at 350 (rejecting plaintiff’s argument). \textit{But see} Willett, supra note 4, at 560 (“There is little doubt that the doctrine of in \textit{pari delicto} is now in retreat.”).
  \item \textit{Seitz v. Detweiler, Hershey & Assoc., P.C. (In re CitX Corp.)}, 448 F.3d 672, 677-78 (3d Cir. 2006) (ruling that prior holding in \textit{Lafferty} “should not be interpreted to create a novel theory of damages for an independent cause of action like malpractice”); Heaton, supra note 2, at 480 (“Few courts seem to realize that \textit{Lafferty} did not endorse the idea that wrongfully-incurred unpayable debt, per se, measures injury to a corporation.”). For a complete discussion of CitX’s rejec-
\end{itemize}
measure of damages, but widened the spectrum of those conceivably liable for deepening insolvency—concluding that stakeholders could hold both corporate management and lenders liable. What had begun as a rejection of the oft-cited proposition, that any act which extends the life of a corporation must inherently be beneficial to it, was transformed into a powerful tool by which creditors could recoup financial losses resulting from insolvency.

1. Deepening Insolvency as a Theory of Damages

The Lafferty decision sought to curb the fraudulent behavior of corporate insiders who intentionally extended the life of an insolvent corporation for personal financial gain. The first court to build on the analysis set forth in Lafferty, however, considered the more controversial issues of whether to extend deepening insolvency to negligent acts and whether to apply it as a theory of damages. In Tabas v. Greenleaf Ventures, Inc. (In re Flagship Healthcare, Inc.), a Florida bankruptcy court held that the negligent valuation of goodwill acquired by Flagship Healthcare, which contributed in large part to its subsequent insolvency, was sufficient to establish a claim for deepening insolvency as a theory of damages. Relying on a negligently prepared financial analysis, Flagship Healthcare incurred exaction of deepening insolvency as a measure of damages, see infra notes 91-97 and accompanying text.


46. See, e.g., Paul Rubin, Deepening Insolvency is Sinking Fast, The Bankruptcy Strategist, 24 No. 2A, (Dec. 2006-Jan. 2007) (“Five years ago, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals opened the door to extensive litigation by holding, in [Lafferty] that Pennsylvania law would recognize a cause of action for deepening insolvency.”).

47. For a complete discussion of the factual background and holding in Lafferty, see supra notes 28-41 and accompanying text.

48. See Flagship Healthcare, 269 B.R. at 726; Harrell, supra note 4, at 161-64 (stating that “[Flagship Healthcare] involves the expansion of insolvency based on the negligent act of a third-party professional.”). For an analysis of the issues before the court in Flagship Healthcare, see infra notes 49-52 and accompanying text.


50. See id. at 727-28 (affirming Lafferty's analysis that theory of deepening insolvency could be utilized as theory of damages). The court succinctly described the situation in lay terms stating that:
bitant amounts of additional debt to finance the acquisition of another
company and the execution of certain loan transactions. The court
stated that, although not specifically pled as such, the additional debt in-
curred as a result of the defendant’s negligence “may provide a measure of
damages recoverable by the Trustee.”

The Flagship Healthcare ruling is significant in the development of
deepening insolvency jurisprudence for two reasons. First, it began the
imprudent expansion of deepening insolvency to include negligent acts
committed by third parties. The incorporation of negligence into the
doctrine worried many observers that subsequent courts might extend the
lowered standard to decisions effectuated by corporate management.

[T]he Debtor’s situation was not like an individual who sits in the rain all
day and simply cannot get more wet. It is more akin to a boxer with one
black eye who, despite being injured, might still persevere and win the
fight. If that boxer (the debtor) winds up losing the fight and landing in
the hospital (bankruptcy court), a doctor (judge) might find that it was
the additional injuries (deepening insolvency) which put him there.

Id. at 724 n.4 (finding facts sufficient to establish claim for deepening insolvency).

51. See id. at 725 (detailing terms of acquisition, term loan agreement and
revolving credit facility executed in reliance on financial analysis). The plaintiff
alleged that the financial advisor owed a duty of due professional care to the credi-
tor and that it had breached this duty. See id. (claiming negligence in preparation
of financial analysis that endorsed goodwill valuation). The plaintiff further al-
leged “that ‘the Greenleaf valuation was materially unreliable and incorrect’ and
‘materailly overstated the value of Flagship’s goodwill.’” See id. (noting several spe-
cific errors or omissions in valuation process). The court held that the negligent
acts were sufficient to satisfy the requirements of deepening insolvency established
in Lafferty. See id. at 728 (“The financial hardships which possibly resulted from the
increased insolvency were not necessarily forthcoming, and if it can be proven that
they were a result of the increased insolvency, liability may be found.”).

52. Id. (utilizing deepening insolvency as measure of damages as opposed to
cause of action). But see infra notes 92-97 (discussing inherent flaws in holding that
deepening insolvency is applied correctly as theory of damages).

53. For a discussion of Flagship Healthcare’s important role in the development
of deepening insolvency jurisprudence, see infra notes 54-59 and accompanying
text.

54. See Harrell, supra note 4, at 164 (discussing facts of Flagship Healthcare by
noting that case involves deepening insolvency claim based on negligent act of
third-party professional). The Ninth Circuit has improvidently drawn on the rea-
soning set forth in Flagship Healthcare and has extended deepening insolvency to
negligent acts. See Smith v. Arthur Andersen LLP, 421 F.3d 989, 995 (9th Cir.
2005) (recognizing deepening insolvency for unintentionally misrepresenting
firm’s insolvency). For a detailed analysis of Flagship Healthcare’s misguided exten-
sion of deepening insolvency to include negligent acts, see supra notes 48-52 and
accompanying text.

55. See Harrell, supra note 4, at 167-68 (sounding concern that “the deepen-
ing insolvency theory could extend to negligently informed decisions of officers
and directors, thereby negating the business judgment presumption in the realm
of potential insolvency”). One commentator has noted that allowing trustees to
assert deepening insolvency claims based solely on negligence may:
provide a cause of action in tort against officers and directors, sup-
planting a breach of fiduciary duty claim . . . . [A] cause of action in tort
against officers and directors that circumvents the business judgment rule
This distinction is crucial because it would allow shareholders to circumvent the business judgment rule and the penumbra of protection the rule affords corporate executives who act in good faith in accordance with their fiduciary duties. 56

Second, Flagship Healthcare was one of the first decisions to treat deepening insolvency as a measure of damages resulting from wrongfully incurred debt rather than as an independent cause of action. 57 The use of deepening insolvency as a theory of damages is problematic because it does not reflect an accurate measure of harm to the corporation resulting from the defendant's acts and is "inconsistent with the traditional understanding . . . of corporate injury." 58 These two issues, highlighted in the may potentially create a decline in the market for corporate directors, which in turn would have a damaging impact on corporate governance and possibly the economy as a whole. 56. See Harrell, supra note 4, at 151-54 (discussing protection from liability that business judgment rule affords corporation's executives and directors). The business judgment rule allows corporate executives to make tactical business decisions in the best interest of their company without fear that they will be liable if their decisions fail to maximize value, or if in the worst instance, they result in insolvency. See id. at 151-54 (discussing protection from liability that business judgment rule affords corporations' executives). Specifically, the business judgment rule provides:

[I]n making business decisions not involving direct self-interest or self-dealing, corporate directors act on an informed basis, in good faith, and in the honest belief that their actions are in the corporation's best interest. The rule shields directors and officers from liability for unprofitable or harmful corporate transactions if the transaction were made in good faith, with due care, and within the directors' or officers authority. BLACK's LAW DICTIONARY 212 (8th ed. 2004).

57. See Heaton, supra note 2, at 480-81 (arguing Flagship Healthcare mistakenly interpreted Lafferty's holding). One commentator has stated that "[w]ithout saying so directly, the Lafferty court produced an opinion that has been read incorrectly to endorse wrongfully-incurred unpayable debt as a measure of injury to a corporation." See id. (discussing varying misinterpretations of Lafferty ruling).

58. See Bernstein & Malloy, supra note 6, at 415 n.43 (detailing shortcomings of deepening insolvency as theory of damages). One commentator has further noted the inconsistencies within the theory, stating that:

One may legitimately question whether deepening insolvency is a proper measure of damages in these cases. Why not instead measure the damages . . . by actually quantifying the harm suffered as a result of actions taken by the defendant? Moreover, why should the damage calculation differ between (1) a company that is insolvent and then rendered more insolvent by wrongful conduct, and (2) a company that begins solvent but is rendered insolvent by the same conduct? Yet, deepening insolvency seems to imply a different measure of damages in the case when the company begins insolvent and then is rendered more insolvent. Because of these and similar questions, there will continue to be doubt about the validity of deepening insolvency as a measure of damages. Id. (noting flaws in asserting deepening insolvency as theory of damages); see also Heaton, supra note 2, at 500 (concluding that use of deepening insolvency as theory of damages is unsupported in financial economic theory).
Flagship Healthcare decision, have plagued the muddled cloud of deepening insolvency jurisprudence since its inception.59

2. Deepening Insolvency as an Independent Cause of Action

A different progeny of cases, following directly in Lafferty's footsteps, further expanded deepening insolvency as a distinct and separate action to include lenders as defendants.60 In Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors Suisse First Boston (In re Exide Technologies, Inc.),61 a bankruptcy court for the District of Delaware held that when lenders issued additional debt as a means of granting themselves security interests in the debtor's corporation, they caused the corporation to operate at "ever increasing levels of insolvency," thus giving the creditors standing to assert a claim of deepening insolvency against the lenders.62 The bankruptcy court acknowledged


60. See Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors v. Credit Suisse First Boston (In re Exide Techs., Inc.), 299 B.R. 732, 752 (Bankr. D. Del. 2003) (finding actionable claim for deepening insolvency against defendant lenders); see also Willett, supra note 4, at 549 (noting that "a Delaware court moved the theory to its next step, ruling that a plaintiff stated a claim against a lender on the theory that the lender's prepetition loan helped deepen the insolvency of a Chapter Eleven debtor").


62. See id. at 752 (upholding deepening insolvency as independent cause of action). In 1997, Exide borrowed large sums of money from Credit Suisse First Boston. See id. at 736 (stating bank provided $650 million credit facility and loaned another $250 million for acquisition). Three years later Exide borrowed additional money to finance the acquisition of GNP Dunlop; however, in exchange for this extension of credit, Exide granted First Boston additional collateral and guarantees. See id. (same). The effect of the transaction "was to increase significantly the Pre-Petition Banks' control over the Exide Group." See id. (stating facts that led to quasi-transfer of control). The plaintiff-creditors alleged that First Boston effectively forced Exide to purchase GNP Dunlop so that First Boston would be able to obtain control over the entity and thereby force Exide to operate at increasing levels of insolvency. See id. at 751 (stating plaintiff's argument for claim of deepening insolvency). The syndicate argued that insofar as the Delaware Supreme Court had not recognized a claim for deepening insolvency, the bankruptcy court should dismiss the action for failure to state a claim. See id. (asserting that "deepening insolvency action is not recognized under Delaware law"). The bankruptcy court disagreed and recognized the tort of deepening insolvency under Del-
that neither the Delaware Supreme Court nor other intermediate courts had addressed whether litigants could assert a tort claim for deepening insolvency under that state’s laws. Nevertheless, the court utilized the analysis set forth in Lafferty and held that Delaware law would recognize a claim for deepening insolvency if there has been “damage to corporate property.”

Many practitioners and commentators characterized the Exide rule as a judicial escalation of the tort of deepening insolvency because it enabled creditors to sue lenders, as opposed to corporate management, for the issuance of additional debt. This variation and expansion of the Lafferty holding caught the ire of many corporate insiders due to the large concentration of companies incorporated in Delaware and because of the constraints that the decision placed on lenders extending insolvent corporations additional credit.

D. The Push Back: Judicial Backlash Against Deepening Insolvency

The speed with which deepening insolvency had rapidly evolved into both an independent cause of action and a theory of damages brought the bankruptcy tort to the forefront of legal discourse. The legal and economic theories that form its basis, however, began to face increasing skepticism.

See id. at 752 (“The tort of deepening insolvency has been pled sufficiently by the Plaintiffs.”); see also Rubin, supra note 40, at 50 (explaining facts of Exide). Delaware state courts have subsequently diverged from Exide’s conclusions, holding that Delaware law does not recognize the tort of deepening insolvency. See Trenwick Am. Litig. Trust v. Ernst & Young, L.L.P., 906 A.2d 168, 207 (Del. Ch. 2006) (rejecting premise that Delaware recognizes deepening insolvency claims).

63. See Exide, 299 B.R. at 751 (“The Supreme Court of Delaware has not spoken on the tort of deepening insolvency. For this reason, I must predict how the Delaware Supreme Court would rule on the claim if such claim was presented to it.”).

64. See id. at 751-52 (finding for plaintiffs). The court held that “based on the Third Circuit’s decision in Lafferty and the Delaware courts’ policy of providing a remedy for an injury . . . [the] Delaware Supreme Court would recognize a claim for deepening insolvency when there has been damage to corporate property.” Id. at 752. The court reasoned that all of the elements of the Lafferty test had been met and, therefore, it was likely that the Delaware Supreme Court would, if given the opportunity, affirm the tort of deepening insolvency as a separate and distinct cause of action. See id. (ruling that deepening insolvency was actionable under Delaware law).

65. For a discussion on the court’s expansion of deepening insolvency to include lenders as defendants in deepening insolvency causes of action, see supra notes 61-64 and accompanying text.

66. See, e.g., Jonathan M. Landers, Deepening Insolvency Comes of Age, N.Y.L.J., Oct. 5. 2006, at 4 (“Many U.S. corporations are venued in Delaware, and a significant number of cases raising questions of deepening insolvency have involved Delaware corporations.”)

ticism by courts across the country. In *Kittay v. Atlantic Bank of New York (In re Global Service Group, LLC)*, a bankruptcy court for the Southern District of New York refused to recognize deepening insolvency as either an independent cause of action or a theory of damages. The court rejected a trustee’s argument that a lender knew or should have known Global Service Group was insolvent, and that by lending it additional sums of money in light of this knowledge, the lender induced other creditors to follow suit. The court held, however, that absent allegations the lender acted in bad faith or in a fraudulent manner, lending an insolvent corporation may be “bad banking,” but it is not an actionable tort.

The *Global Service Group* decision curbed the expansion of deepening insolvency claims by asserting that the prolongation of a corporate entity through the incurrence of additional debt will not, by itself, give rise to actionable harm. The court held that, in order to state a claim, the plaintiff “must show that the defendant prolonged the company’s life in breach of a separate duty, or committed an actionable tort that contributed to the continued operation of a corporation and its increased debt.” The court also upheld the applicability of the business judgment pre-bankruptcy restructurings”); Richmond et al., supra note 4, at 131 (illustrating that deepening insolvency is increasingly popular cause of action).

68. See, e.g., Bondi v. Citigroup, Inc., No. BER-L-10902-04, 2005 WL 975856, at *21 (N.J. Super. Ct. Law Div. Feb. 28, 2005) (rejecting deepening insolvency as independent cause of action); Coroles v. Sabey, 79 P.3d 974, 983 (Utah Ct. App. 2003) (“Although deepening insolvency might harm a corporation’s shareholders, it does not, without more, harm the corporation itself.”); William Bates III, *Deepening Insolvency: Into the Void*, 24-Mar Am. BANKR. INST. J. 1, 1, 60-62 (discussing limitations and flaws in deepening insolvency); Heaton, supra note 2, at 500 (arguing that deepening insolvency is “unsupported in financial economics and inconsistent with the traditional understanding and economic functions of corporate injury”); Willett, supra note 4, at 574-75 (disputing notion that deepening insolvency can cause harm to corporate entity).


70. See id. at 458 (rejecting deepening insolvency as both independent tort and theory of damages). One commentator has noted that the *Global Service Group* decision “injected much-needed sense into the discussion by ruling that ‘deepening insolvency’ is not a cause of action at all.” See Willett, supra note 4, at 551 (discussing impact of *Global Service Group*’s rejection of deepening insolvency).

71. See *Global Serv. Group*, 316 B.R. at 459 (rejecting argument that lender induced other creditors to loan money to Global Service Group).

72. See id. at 455-56 (alleging lender deepened Global Service Group’s insolvency).

73. See id. at 459 (“A third party is not prohibited from extending credit to an insolvent entity; if it was, most companies in financial distress would be forced to liquidate.”).

74. See id. (rejecting deepening insolvency claims without breach of separate duty).

75. *Id.* at 458 (holding that deepening insolvency claims require breach of independent duty to corporation that results in deepening corporation’s insolvency); see also John Weitnauer, *Will “Deepening Insolvency” Succeed as a New Theory of Corporate Ruin?* (2004) (arguing that deepening insolvency is an “unsupported hypothesis”).
rule within the zone of insolvency, concluding that a director's negligent
decision to continue to operate an insolvent business would not subject
the director to liability. Global Service Group's direct repudiation of Lafferty
and its progeny began a growing trend to limit the widening reach of
depthening insolvency.

III. THE THIRD CIRCUIT REINS IN DEEPENING INSOLVENCY IN CITX

A. Taking Aim at Lafferty

In the five short years following the Lafferty decision, the tort of depthening
insolvency became a judicial juggernaut spreading its tentacles of
liability into the deep pockets of everyone conceivably liable for depthening
a corporation's insolvency. Unhinged from rational judicial con-
straints, stakeholders utilized the tort to sue a corporation's auditors,
lawyers, underwriters and even lenders who provided additional credit to
distressed entities. Largely as a reaction to the various misinterpretations
of Lafferty, the Third Circuit in CITX took aim at depthening insol-
vency and successfully limited its reach in three ways: (1) the court held
that depthening insolvency may not be invoked as a theory of damages to
support a malpractice cause of action; (2) the court ruled that a depthen-
ing insolvency claim cannot be sustained solely on an allegation of negligent conduct; and (3) the court ruled that Lafferty's precedential value
was limited to courts within Pennsylvania.
CitX Corporation, a former Internet company, utilized its prepared financial statements to attract inventors as part of an illegal “Ponzi scheme.” The Florida Attorney General terminated the operations of CitX’s most profitable customer, Professional Resources Systems International (PRSI), because it was operating as a “fraudulent enterprise.” PRSI was CitX’s only significant client, and at the time PRSI ceased operating, it owed CitX $2.4 million. CitX continued to show the account receivable as an asset, which allowed CitX to appear solvent. In reality, had CitX reflected the loss of the receivable, its liabilities would have exceeded its assets. By continuing to show the receivable, CitX was able to sell additional equity securities for more than $1 million. Soon thereafter, CitX filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and the trustee in bankruptcy sued the corporation’s accounting firm, Detweiler, Hershey & Associates, alleging that the negligently prepared financial information enabled CitX to secure $1 million in additional equity, which allowed CitX to continue operating and incurring debt. The trustee stated that this additional equity “dramatically deepened the insolvency of CitX, and wrongfully expanded the debt of CitX and waste of its illegally raised capital.”

C. Third Circuit Rejects Deepening Insolvency as a Theory of Damages

A three judge panel (including one of the judges who issued the Lafferty ruling) held in CitX that deepening insolvency may not be invoked as...
a theory of damages to support an independent cause of action.\textsuperscript{91} In the immediate malpractice suit, the trustee sought to establish the harm done to CitX by asserting deepening insolvency as a theory of damages.\textsuperscript{92} The court utilized its ruling in CitX to further illuminate \textit{Lafferty} and noted that, although it had described deepening insolvency as a "theory of injury," it had not held that deepening insolvency was a valid theory of damages for an independent cause of action.\textsuperscript{93} The court ruled that prior statements in \textit{Lafferty} "were in the context of a deepening-insolvency cause of action" and "should not be interpreted to create a novel theory of damages for an independent cause of action . . . ."\textsuperscript{94}

Additionally, the court in CitX held that summary judgment was appropriate because the trustee did not establish the requisite harm to the corporation.\textsuperscript{95} Even assuming that Detweiler's negligently prepared financial statements enabled CitX to procure an additional $1 million in capital investments, the court ruled that the action did not "deepen CitX's insolvency, but rather, it did the opposite."\textsuperscript{96} Using legal reasoning that seemingly turned deepening insolvency on its head, the court declared that any increase in insolvency resulting from the debt incurred after equity was raised was the result of CitX's management, not the accountants, and therefore Detweiler could not be held liable for deepening the corporation's insolvency.\textsuperscript{97}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{91} See \textit{id.} at 677 (rejecting deepening insolvency as theory of damages); see also \textit{Brighton}, supra note 80, at 24 (noting that same judge presided over \textit{CitX} and \textit{Lafferty} opinions).
\item \textsuperscript{92} See \textit{CitX}, 448 F.3d at 677 (stating that plaintiff's complaint "allege[d] harm to it in the form of 'deepening insolvency'")
\item \textsuperscript{93} See \textit{id.} (clarifying \textit{Lafferty} holding and limiting its scope). The court recognized that its prior holding in \textit{Lafferty} was responsible for some of the confusion regarding whether deepening insolvency is a "type of injury," a "theory of injury" and/or an "independent cause of action." See \textit{id.} (discussing ambiguous language of \textit{Lafferty}).
\item \textsuperscript{94} See \textit{id.} at 677 (rejecting deepening insolvency as theory of damages for malpractice suit). Although the holding rejects deepening insolvency as a theory of damages solely for claims based on negligence, the court stated in dicta that its decision was not meant to imply that deepening insolvency was a theory of damages for other claims either. See \textit{id.} at 677 n.8 ("By this we do not mean to imply that deepening insolvency would be a valid theory of damages for any other cause of action, such as fraud, and \textit{Lafferty} did not so hold.").
\item \textsuperscript{95} See \textit{id.} at 677 ("Seitz did not provide sufficient evidence to allow a reasonable jury to find harm.").
\item \textsuperscript{96} See \textit{id.} at 677 (holding that CitX's insolvency "decreased rather than deepened" because equity investment increased company assets with no corresponding increase in liabilities).
\item \textsuperscript{97} See \textit{id.} at 678 (rejecting plaintiff's argument). Discussing the underlying theories behind deepening insolvency, the court stated "[t]he deepening of a firm's insolvency is not an independent form of corporate damage. Where an independent cause of action gives a firm a remedy for . . . the decrease in fair asset value[,] . . . then the firm may recover, without reference to the impact upon the solvency calculation." See \textit{id.} (citing \textit{Willett}, supra note 4, at 575) (questioning whether deepening insolvency is harmful to corporate entities).
\end{itemize}
D. Third Circuit Rejects Negligence as a Basis for Deepening Insolvency Claims

The Third Circuit proceeded in CitX to further circumscribe the unintended impact of Lafferty by holding that allegations based solely on negligence are insufficient to support a claim of deepening insolvency.98 The trustee’s allegations centered on the claim that Detweiler missed several obvious discrepancies that should have alerted the firm to the errors in the financial statements.99 As a result of Detweiler’s negligently prepared financial statements, the trustee asserted that CitX was able to obtain $1 million in capital investments thus deepening CitX’s insolvency.100 The court rejected this argument, stating that “a claim of negligence cannot sustain a deepening-insolvency cause of action.”101 The court refused to expand Lafferty beyond its exact wording, holding that claims for deepening insolvency may only arise from the “fraudulent expansion of corporate debt and prolongation of corporate life.”102

E. Limiting Lafferty’s Precedential Value

The CitX decision further curtailed the expansion of deepening insolvency by explicitly limiting Lafferty’s value as precedent to matters governed by Pennsylvania law.103 The court cautioned that “[a]lthough some courts in this Circuit have extended Lafferty’s reasoning to other states . . . nothing we said in Lafferty compels any extension of the doctrine beyond Pennsylvania.”104 The Third Circuit went so far as to admonish other courts within the circuit for extending deepening insolvency beyond its proscribed limitations and relying on Lafferty to find an independent cause of action for deepening insolvency under Delaware and New York law.105

IV. CitX’s Effect on Deepening Insolvency Jurisprudence and Corporate Governance

The CitX decision is consistent with the expanding body of law that has begun to limit the much-maligned Lafferty decision and systematically

98. See id. at 680 (rejecting negligence as basis for deepening insolvency claims).
99. See id. (discussing trustees allegations).
100. See id. ("Without fraud, Seitz must fall back on his allegation that Detweiler negligently deepened CitX's insolvency, [and] we must decide whether an allegation of negligence can support a claim of deepening insolvency.").
101. See id. at 681-82 (holding negligence insufficient to establish claim for deepening insolvency).
102. See id. at 680-81 ("We know no reason to extend the scope of deepening insolvency beyond Lafferty's limited holding. To that end, we hold that a claim of negligence cannot sustain a deepening insolvency cause of action.").
103. See id. at 680 (rejecting extension of Lafferty beyond Pennsylvania).
104. See id. at 680 n.11 (limiting Lafferty's holding to Pennsylvania).
105. See id. (describing ruling in Oakwood Homes, which held that deepening insolvency is cognizable cause of action under law of New York, Delaware and North Carolina). For a complete discussion of the facts of Oakwood Homes, see infra notes 114-16 and accompanying text.
dismantle the tort of deepening insolvency.\textsuperscript{106} It is nevertheless significant, in its own right, to the development of deepening insolvency within the Third Circuit and more broadly to federal deepening insolvency jurisprudence in three ways.\textsuperscript{107} First, by holding that deepening insolvency causes of action must be predicated on fraud, the CitX decision creates heightened procedural standards for plaintiffs to overcome when seeking to bring actions based on deepening insolvency.\textsuperscript{108} Additionally, in refusing to recognize negligence as a basis for deepening insolvency, the decision provides assurance to corporate executives that good faith efforts to salvage distressed entities will not result in liability should the corporation reach insolvency.\textsuperscript{109} Lastly, by rejecting deepening insolvency as a theory of damages and expressly limiting the Lafferty holding to matters governed by Pennsylvania law, the CitX decision signals the Third Circuit's growing reservations concerning deepening insolvency to lower courts in Pennsylvania and elsewhere within the Circuit.\textsuperscript{110}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{106} See Bondi v. Bank of Am. Corp. (\textit{In re Parmalat}), 383 F. Supp. 2d 587, 602 (S.D.N.Y. 2005) (rejecting deepening insolvency under North Carolina law as duplicative of remedies for breach of fiduciary duty). The court declined "the invitation to recognize a novel tort duty giving rise to a novel cause of action under North Carolina law. North Carolina already imposes on every person a duty not to aid and abet a breach of fiduciary duty by another." \textit{Id.} (refusing to recognize deepening insolvency); Alberts v. Tuft (\textit{In re Greater Se. Cmty. Hosp. Corp.}), 333 B.R. 506, 517 (Bankr. D.D.C. 2005) ("The District of Columbia courts have not yet recognized a cause of action for deepening insolvency, and this court sees no reason why they should."). The Bankruptcy Court for the District of Columbia also noted the duplicative nature of deepening insolvency: "If officers and directors can be shown to have breached their fiduciary duties by deepening a corporation's insolvency, and the resulting injury to the corporation is cognizable, that injury is compensable on a claim for breach of fiduciary duty." \textit{See id.} (quoting Bondi v. Bank of Am. Corp. (\textit{In re Parmalat}), 383 F. Supp. 2d 587, 602 (S.D.N.Y. 2005)) (holding that breach of fiduciary claims are sufficient to remedy harm done to corporation through deepening insolvency); \textit{accord} Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors of VarTec Telecom, Inc. v. Rural Tel. Fin. Coop. (\textit{In re VarTec Telecom, Inc.}), 335 B.R. 631, 644 (Bankr. N.D. Tex. 2005) ("[T]he Court finds that the Texas Supreme Court would not adopt 'deepening insolvency' as a separate tort, because the injury caused by the deepening of a corporation's insolvency is substantially duplicated by torts already established in Texas."); Kittay v. Atl. Bank of N.Y. (\textit{In re Global Serv. Group, LLC}), 316 B.R. 451, 458-59 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 2004) (rejecting deepening insolvency as independent cause action and theory of damages). For a discussion of the \textit{Global Service Group} ruling, see supra notes 69-77 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{107} For a complete discussion of the significance of CitX on deepening insolvency jurisprudence, see infra notes 108-32 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{108} See CitX, 448 F.3d at 680 (3d Cir. 2006) (rejecting negligence as basis for deepening insolvency claims). For a discussion of the heightened procedural standards that the fraud requirement creates for deepening insolvency, see infra notes 111-17 accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{109} For a complete discussion of CitX's impact on corporate governance, see infra notes 118-23 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{110} See CitX, 448 F.3d at 677 (rejecting deepening insolvency as theory of damages). For a discussion on the expanding body of case law that has seized on CitX's curtailment of deepening insolvency, see infra notes 124-32 and accompanying text.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
A. Fraud: An Additional Barrier in Asserting Deepening Insolvency Claims

The CitX decision held that absent fraud, tort liability should not arise from efforts to extend the life of a corporation, even if those efforts result in the increased indebtedness of the enterprise.111 By predicking deepening insolvency on fraudulent acts rather than mere negligence, CitX makes it much more difficult for a plaintiff to assert a claim for deepening insolvency.112 Under this heightened standard, a plaintiff seemingly must prove the stringent fraud requirements in addition to the requisite damage to corporate property to successfully assert a claim for deepening insolvency.113

Although courts have different requirements for fraud claims, the CitX court approvingly cited the United States Bankruptcy Court's Oakwood Homes interpretation of what constituted fraud within the confines of Lafferty.114 The Oakwood Homes ruling held that in order to prove fraud, a plaintiff must prove "a representation of material fact, falsity, scienter, reliance, and injury."115 Should a plaintiff bring a deepening insolvency suit within a state that recognizes the tort as an independent cause of action, the plaintiff would have to prove all five elements of fraud, and presumably also prove "an injury to the debtor's corporate property from the fraudulent expansion of corporate debt and prolongation of corporate life."116 The extra hurdles CitX added to the pleading process have effect-

111. See CitX, 448 F.3d at 680 (rejecting negligence as basis for deepening insolvency claims in favor of standard that requires intentional action).


113. See id. at 78 ("Even if the hurdle of getting recognition of a state law cause of action for deepening insolvency is cleared, the recent decisions of CitX and Oakwood Homes appear to require allegations of fraud in order to be successful.").

114. See CitX, 448 F.3d at 681 (citing Oakwood Homes as correct interpretation of fraud requirements). In Oakwood Homes, the court found that the plaintiff's allegations—specifically, that the debtor relied on lenders' misrepresentations about the solvency of a loan securitization program—were sufficient to prove fraud and support an action for deepening insolvency. See OHC Liquidation Trust v. Credit Suisse First Boston (In re Oakwood Homes Corp.), 340 B.R. 510, 514 (Bankr. D. Del. 2006) (stating factual background).


116. See id. at 534-35 (discussing appropriateness of application of fraud to deepening insolvency); see also Brighton, supra note 80, at 77-78 (indicating added requirements of deepening insolvency claims). One commentator has questioned the continuing utility of deepening insolvency claims and has stated that "it appears that a plaintiff asserting deepening insolvency as a cause of action must prove (1) fraud (with all five subparts), (2) that the fraud caused the expansion of corporate debt and (3) that the fraud also caused the prolongation of the corporations (pre-bankruptcy) life." Id. at 78 (illustrating challenges of asserting claims for deepening insolvency).
tively made it more difficult to assert a deepening insolvency cause of action than a fraud claim, which will undoubtedly result in the assertion of far fewer deepening insolvency causes of action.117

B. Wide-Reaching Effects in the Board Room

Beyond the additional procedural requirements that CitX places on deepening insolvency claims, the underlying holding in CitX reflects an acute understanding of the perils associated with the expansion of deepening insolvency to negligent acts.118 By declining to extend deepening insolvency to mere negligence, the CitX court has enabled a board of directors to make reasonable business decisions on behalf of corporations with the assurance that decisions made in good faith will be shielded from liability by the business judgment rule.119

117. See Brighton, supra note 80, at 68 (detailing added procedure plaintiffs face when asserting deepening insolvency claims instead of fraud claims). One commentator noted that “[t]he logical conclusion would be that plaintiffs would prefer not to take on these additional hurdles; therefore[,] deepening insolvency may not be included in complaints as an additional allegation with the same frequency in which it had been seen in the past few years.” See id. (noting effects that CitX will likely have on number of deepening insolvency actions); see also Andre Tenzer, Third Circuit Holds That Negligent Conduct Is Not a Basis for a Claim of Deepening Insolvency and Cautions Against a Broad Reading of Precedent Recognizing the Theory, PRATT’S J. OF BANKR. L. 244 (Aug.-Sept. 2006), available at http://www.shearman.com/files/Publication/aa356955-1f77-4fa5-b3aa-3505de0a86e7/Presentation/PublicationAttachment/6f02e3d0-b29d-4a2d-ae0a-3505de0a86e7/BR_082006.pdf (“Perhaps the greatest beneficiaries of CitX will be outside professional advisors to bankrupt companies, against whom it will be more difficult to prove intentional misconduct and complicity in a fraud than presumably negligence or malpractice.”).

118. See Harrell, supra note 4, at 175-76 (noting “slippery slope associated with burdening corporate directors with . . . potential liability”); accord Corporate Aviation Concepts, Inc. v. Multi-Serv. Aviation Corp., No. Civ.A. 03-3020, 2004 WL 1900001, at *4 (E.D. Pa. Aug. 25, 2004) (same); Oakwood Homes, 340 B.R. at 512 (upholding business judgment rule and holding that only fraudulent activities are sufficient to establish deepening insolvency claim). One commentator elaborated that extending deepening insolvency to claims of negligence “could provide a cause of action distinct from a breach of fiduciary duty claim, [and] officers and directors would be unable to rely on the protection of the business judgment rule.” See Harrell, supra note 4, at 155 (detailing problems associated with extending deepening insolvency to negligent acts). But see Smith v. Arthur Andersen LLP, 421 F.3d 989, 995 (9th Cir. 2005) (ruling that deepening insolvency exists “when . . . the defendants ‘misrepresent (not necessarily intentionally) the firm’s financial condition to its outside directors and investors.’”).

119. See Brian E. Greer, Fiduciary Duties When the Corporation is in the Zone of Insolvency, 25-Nov Am. BANKR. INST. J. 26, 57 (2006) (“Application of the business judgment rule will afford directors of troubled corporations the comfort to pursue value-maximizing strategies for the corporate enterprise as a whole, even if such a strategy includes the incurring of additional debt obligations.”); Rapisardi, supra note 1, at 1 (“The Third Circuit’s ruling in CitX should afford directors of insolvent corporations more assurance that they will not be exposed to liability for deepening insolvency as long as they do not intentionally commit fraud or some other wrong.”).
If the court in CitX upheld a negligence standard for deepening insolvency claims, it may have produced a de facto duty to liquidate in the face of insolvency. Providing incentives for directors to immediately liquidate upon reaching insolvency rather than attempt to resuscitate corporations in an effort to maximize “long-term wealth creating capacity” contravenes public policy and lengthy judicial precedent. Additionally, a contrary decision may have discouraged qualified members of the business community from accepting positions as directors out of fear of personal liability. Ultimately, by rejecting negligence as a basis for deepening insolvency, the CitX court upheld the sensible penumbra of protection that the business judgment rule provides to corporate directors who act in good faith, with due care and in compliance with their fiduciary duties.

C. Impact on Lower Courts

The Third Circuit decision in CitX represents one of the only appellate courts that, in the wake of the deepening insolvency hysteria, have begun to add structure to the fractured nature of deepening insolvency jurisprudence. The CitX decision, which openly questioned lower courts’ decisions to extend deepening insolvency beyond Pennsylvania and rejected deepening insolvency as a measure of damages, signified the Third Circuit's growing reluctance to recognize deepening insolvency claims. Against this backdrop, several lower courts have, in rapid suc-

120. See, e.g., Greer, supra note 119, at 58 (concluding that deepening insolvency has “constrained boards of corporations in the zone of insolvency from pursuing value-maximizing strategies for the corporation, which would benefit stockholders as well as creditors”).

121. See Kittay v. Atl. Bank of N.Y. (In re Global Serv. Group, LLC), 316 B.R. 451, 460 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 2004) (ruling that “[t]he fiduciaries of an insolvent business might well conclude that the company should continue to operate in order to maximize” its value). The court held that “there is no absolute duty under American law to shut down and liquidate an insolvent corporation. The fiduciaries may, consistent with the business judgment rule, continue to operate the corporation’s business.” Id. (explaining holding that insolvent corporation, to maximize value to stakeholders, may continue to operate and not simply liquidate).

122. See Harrell, supra note 4, at 152 (“[I]f courts extend the deepening insolvency theory to include negligent decisions in the face of insolvency, thereby ignoring the business judgment presumption, the best and brightest will likely decline these positions due to the increased potential for personal liability.”).

123. See Seitz v. Detweiler, Hershey & Assoc., P.C. (In re CitX Corp.), 448 F.3d 672, 681 (3d Cir. 2006) (holding that “a claim of negligence cannot sustain a deepening-insolvency cause of action”). For a complete discussion of the court’s holding in CitX, see supra notes 78-105 and accompanying text.

124. See CitX, 448 F.3d at 677-78, 680-81 (rejecting deepening insolvency claims based on negligence and limiting Lafferty’s precedential value to courts within Pennsylvania).

125. For a complete discussion of the court’s decision to rein in deepening insolvency, see supra notes 78-105 and accompanying text.
cession, utilized the CitX holding to rule against plaintiffs seeking to assert deepening insolvency causes of action.\footnote{126}

A decision by the highly influential Delaware Court of Chancery in *Trenwick America Litigation Trust v. Ernst & Young* is particularly noteworthy because the court expanded on the trepidations manifested in *CitX* to definitively reject deepening insolvency as an independent cause of action in Delaware.\footnote{127} The court, stressing the protection the business judgment rule provides to directors and other fiduciaries, stated that "the words 'zone of insolvency' should not declare open season on corporate fiduciaries."\footnote{128} The *Trenwick* decision reflects the underlying concerns that many lower courts began to recognize with deepening insolvency claims.\footnote{129}


\footnote{127. See *Trenwick*, 906 A.2d at 174 ("Put simply, under Delaware law, 'deepening insolvency' is no more of a cause of action when a firm is insolvent than a cause of action for 'shallowing profitability' would be when a firm is solvent."). But see *In re Fleming Packaging Corp.*, No. 03-82408, 2006 WL 2587916, at *5 (Bankr. C.D. Ill. Sept. 8, 2006) (holding that it is "open question whether Delaware will recognize a separate cause of action for deepening insolvency" because "[o] nly the Delaware Supreme Court [and not the Chancery Court] may speak definitively on this issue"). Insofar as the Delaware Supreme Court has not yet addressed this issue, federal courts are not bound to apply either decision, but may use intermediate courts to help guide their ruling. See *Paolella v. Browning-Ferris*, Inc., 158 F.3d 183, 189 (3d Cir. 1998) (holding that federal courts "may also consider the decisions of state intermediate appellate courts in order to facilitate [their] prediction"); *Orson, Inc. v. Miramax Film Corp.*, 79 F.3d 1358, 1373 n.15 (3d Cir. 1996) (holding that "[w]hen the state's highest court has not addressed the precise question presented, a federal court must predict how the state's highest court would resolve the issue").}

\footnote{128. See *Trenwick*, 906 A.2d at 174 (upholding applicability of business judgment rule to deepening insolvency claims asserted within Delaware).

\footnote{129. See, e.g., *Bondi v. Bank of Am. Corp.* (In re Parmalat), 383 F. Supp. 2d 587, 591 (S.D.N.Y. 2005) (noting that, under North Carolina law, if corporate officers and directors breach their fiduciary duties by increasing corporation's insolvency, such injury is 'compensable,' but not under theory of deepening insolvency); *Alberts*, 333 B.R. at 517 ("The District of Columbia courts have not yet recognized a cause of action for deepening insolvency. There is no point in recog-
Namely, suits asserted under deepening insolvency are duplicative in nature and other causes of action, such as breach of fiduciary duty and fraud, sufficiently address and provide remedies for fraudulent acts committed by boards of directors of insolvent corporations.\footnote{130. See Trenwick, 906 A.2d at 175 (holding that other causes of action addressed deepening insolvency claims). The court emphatically ruled that "if the board of an insolvent corporation acting with due diligence and good faith, pursues a business strategy that it believes will increase the corporation's value," but nevertheless involves securing additional debt, "it does not become a guarantor of that strategy's success." See id. (upholding reasoning behind business judgment rule). Rather, the board is protected by the business judgment rule. See id. (same). The VarTec court also discussed the duplicative nature of deepening insolvency, holding that established torts in Texas sufficiently address any harm that may have occurred. See VarTec Telecom, 335 B.R. 631, 644 (Bankr. N.D. Tex. 2005) (noting duplicative nature of deepening insolvency).}

In the aftermath of CitX and its progeny, some commentators have begun to question whether the tort of deepening insolvency has any "continuing utility" or whether it has "merely become an 'add on' to fraud counts in complaints."\footnote{131. See Brighton, supra note 112, at 77-78 (questioning whether deepening insolvency has any remaining viable purpose); see also Gordon, supra note 41, at 234 ("[T]here are few, if any, instances where deepening insolvency alone may be applicable to the exclusion of claims for fraud or breach of fiduciary duty. This . . . begs the question of whether there is any need for states to recognize a deepening insolvency cause of action at all."); John J. Rapisardi, Delaware Court Rejects 'Deepening Insolvency' Theory, N.Y.L.J., Sept. 29, 2006, at 3, 5 (2006) (asserting that CitX "may have eliminated the efficacy of deepening insolvency as an independent cause of action by limiting its availability to situations in which it would be redundant to other causes of action, such as fraud").}

The combined force of CitX and the growing number of state courts that have refused to recognize deepening insolvency as an independent cause of action will likely deter future plaintiffs from asserting claims based solely on deepening insolvency.\footnote{132. See Brighton, supra note 80, at 69 (concluding that CitX and lower court's rulings have made deepening insolvency causes of action much more difficult to assert and maintain).}

V. The End of Deepening Insolvency?

Five years ago, trustees' and creditors' committees seemed poised to plunder the deep pockets of corporations' auditors, directors and lenders under an emerging theory of liability known as deepening insolvency.\footnote{133. For a discussion of the early development of deepening insolvency, see supra notes 21-41 and accompanying text.}

In its recent CitX decision, the Third Circuit drastically narrowed the misguided expansion of deepening insolvency by predating deepening insolvency on fraud, emphatically rejecting deepening insolvency as a measure of damages and limiting the precedential scope of Lafferty to

\footnote{130. See Trenwick, 906 A.2d at 175 (holding that other causes of action addressed deepening insolvency claims). The court emphatically ruled that "if the board of an insolvent corporation acting with due diligence and good faith, pursues a business strategy that it believes will increase the corporation's value," but nevertheless involves securing additional debt, "it does not become a guarantor of that strategy's success." See id. (upholding reasoning behind business judgment rule). Rather, the board is protected by the business judgment rule. See id. (same). The VarTec court also discussed the duplicative nature of deepening insolvency, holding that established torts in Texas sufficiently address any harm that may have occurred. See VarTec Telecom, 335 B.R. 631, 644 (Bankr. N.D. Tex. 2005) (noting duplicative nature of deepening insolvency).}

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\footnote{132. See Brighton, supra note 80, at 69 (concluding that CitX and lower court's rulings have made deepening insolvency causes of action much more difficult to assert and maintain).}

\footnote{133. For a discussion of the early development of deepening insolvency, see supra notes 21-41 and accompanying text.}
Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{134} CitX’s rejection of a negligence standard for deepening insolvency has created new heightened procedural obstacles that markedly increase the difficulty with which plaintiffs assert such claims.\textsuperscript{135} Additionally, CitX’s palpable disdain for deepening insolvency has spawned a line of cases that severely curtail the tort by rejecting it as an independent cause of action, finding instead that other causes of action based largely on pre-existing duties are the appropriate means by which to assert a claim.\textsuperscript{136} This growing trend is unlikely to subside in the near future and has made deepening insolvency claims increasingly difficult (and in some cases entirely impossible) to assert as a valid and independent claim.\textsuperscript{137}

The CitX ruling prudently upheld the applicability of the business judgment rule in the zone of insolvency, which will undeniably increase directors’ willingness to salvage distressed entities through the reduced likelihood of personal liability.\textsuperscript{138} Ultimately, the Third Circuit’s decision in CitX is good news for corporate directors, lenders and auditors, who can now breathe a collective sigh of relief that long overdue common sense has been infused into deepening insolvency jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{139}

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\textsuperscript{134} See Seitz v. Detweiler, Hershey & Assoc., P.C. (In re CitX Corp.), 448 F.3d 672, 677, 681-82, 681 n.11 (3d Cir. 2006) (limiting deepening insolvency). For a discussion of the CitX ruling, see supra notes 78-105 and accompanying text. For a complete discussion of the effects of the limitations that CitX placed on deepening insolvency, and the unmistakable trend in lower courts towards rejecting deepening insolvency as an independent cause of action, see supra notes 106-32 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{135} For a discussion of the added procedural barriers for plaintiffs seeking to assert deepening insolvency, see supra notes 111-17 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{136} For a discussion of courts that have rejected deepening insolvency and instead have held that other causes of actions are the appropriate means to assert these claims, see supra notes 124-32 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{137} See Brighton, supra note 112, at 76-79 (concluding that CitX and Trenwick “may have rung the death knell for claims of deepening insolvency”). For a complete discussion of the jurisdictions that have rejected deepening insolvency as an independent cause of action in the wake of CitX, see supra note 126 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{138} For a thorough analysis of the CitX court’s rejection of negligence as a basis for deepening insolvency and its impact on the business judgment rule, see supra notes 118-23 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{139} For a discussion of the wide-reaching positive impact of CitX on lenders, directors and auditors, see supra notes 106-32 and accompanying text.