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"Job Mobility and Career Changes: An Integrated Perspective"

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1. Introduction

Career mobility has become a pivotal argument in understanding professional dynamics across industries, including the highly competitive context of the National Basketball Association (NBA). This thesis aims to explore the factors influencing career mobility across NBA players, with a particular emphasis on how individual performance, measured as percentage variation of Player Efficiency Rating (PER), is influenced by personal and organizational factors. By analyzing data from the NBA, the study wants to offer a deeper insight into how employees design their career trajectories within the complex framework of the work environment.

1.1. Background and Rationale

In today's evolving job market, the ability to adapt and move between is becoming always more important in the determination of career success. This is particularly true in the NBA, where players change teams due to trades, free agency, and strategic decisions made by organizations. The combination of these transitions the huge amount of data collected during every single match played in the NBA from 1973 until today, offers an opportunity to comprehend carer mobility in an environment in which performance is continually measured, and the ability to integrate new joiners into the team is pivotal in determining career success and determination.

The literature on career mobility shows how combining individual traits and organization dynamics is fundamental in the determination of an individual career path. Personality traits like openness to experience, extraversion, and conscientiousness significantly influence the individual's likelihood of seeking new opportunities and adapting to different work environment (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Demographic factors, like age, gender, and education play a crucial role in career mobility, influencing flexibility, risk tolerance, and access to resources (Blau & Kahn, 2007).

Beyond these individual factors, the concept of job embeddedness, introduced by Feldman and Ng (2007), offers a considerable framework for understanding the organizational aspects of career mobility. It includes personal connections, job fit, and sacrifices that influence an employee's decision to leave or stay with an organization. However, job embeddedness not only enhances performance and reduces job turnover, but it may also become a barrier to career mobility; in fact, the portability paradox highlights how highly embedded employees struggle to transfer skills to new contexts (Reitz et al., 2011).

1.2. Theoretical framework

This thesis is based on three main theories related to career mobility: human capital theory, social exchange theory, and organization design theories. Human capital theory states that investments in education and skills development foster workers' productivity and career opportunities (Becker, 1964). Social exchange theory enhances the importance of the role of workplace relationships and networks in defining career paths, highlighting the importance of trust, commitment, and reciprocity in professional development (Blau, 1964). Organizational design theories analyze the structure and strategy of organizations, and how these features influence career mobility, with flexible and adaptive structures that facilitate upward mobility and skill development (Mintzberg, 1979).

1.3. Research Aims and Objectives

This study aims to explore how the previously presented theories influence the context of the NBA, where career mobility is influenced by a combination of factors such as individual performance, team dynamics, and organizational structures. Thanks to the analysis of percentage differences in Player Efficiency Rating (hereafter, PER) across various player transitions, the research tries to discover the key factors that enhance or hinder career mobility in professional sports. The research also examines the roles of firm-specific human capital, job embeddedness, and organizational support in defining career outcomes.

1.4. Contribution to knowledge

The findings of this study contribute to increasing the existing literature providing a comprehensive framework to understand career mobility within the NBA, and offering insights that are applicable to broader discussions on career mobility in other industries. By the integration of theoretical perspectives and empirical analysis, the study shows the complex interplay between individual attributes and organizational contexts in defining career paths.

2. Literature Review

Job mobility and career changes are fundamental aspects of how work experiences are perceived today. In this complex domain of professional dynamics, theories and studies on career transitions form essential structures to understand the interactions among individuals, organizations, and the economy. This analysis discusses career mobility in the context of organizational change, defined as any type of change within an employing firm (Feldman & Ng, 2007). Organizational change may occur without a job transition or as part of a job change. These transitions can involve an intended or actual increase in status, known as external-upward mobility, or occur at the same position level, referred to as external-lateral mobility. Some individuals accept lower status when changing employers, known as external-downward mobility.

An intriguing area in the rationale for organizational change is the motivation that drives employees to pursue job opportunities. Two major categories of motives emerge from the literature: personality traits and demographic factors.

2.1. Personality Traits

Among personality traits, openness to experience is strongly related to career mobility. Costa and McCrae (1992) defined openness to experience as a trait of individuals who are imaginative, curious, creative, intelligent, and open to new experiences. Such individuals are more likely to seek new job opportunities and adjust to different jobs and work environments. Adaptability in career transitions is crucial because it allows individuals to accept changes and adopt new skills relevant to career changes (Ng & Feldman, 2007).

Extraversion, characterized by sociability, talkativeness, confidence, optimism, and vigor, also significantly contributes to career transitions. Extraverted individuals tend to have extensive social networks, which can provide valuable resources and information about job opportunities. Their ability to socialize and instill confidence helps them excel in networking and job searching, increasing their chances of successful career transitions. High extraversion also enables individuals to proactively embrace new challenges and roles, enhancing their work mobility.

Conscientiousness, involving self-discipline, confidence, organization, reliability, and deliberation, is equally relevant to career success. Conscientious individuals are generally careful and reliable — qualities that lead to promotions and permanent employment. They can plan systematically and execute tasks efficiently, which results in high job performance and emergent opportunities for

career development and mobility into higher positions (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Conscientious individuals are well-prepared for career transitions, whether from one company to another or from employment to entrepreneurship, as they can manage new job demands effectively (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999).

2.2. Demographic Factors

Demographic factors significantly influence career mobility. Occupational change is less frequent among older individuals than among younger ones. Younger people are more flexible and willing to experience new things, seeking opportunities for growth and enhancement in the early years of their work life. Additionally, younger workers are likely to have fewer family commitments, making them more mobile and flexible when choosing careers (Blau & Kahn, 2007).

Gender disparities show that men are more likely to change careers than women. This difference is influenced by societal expectations, gender roles, and the availability of jobs. Men often face pressure to relocate for higher positions and salary attainment, while women are more likely to be deterred by poor work-life balance and inadequate career opportunities in their chosen fields. Men also exhibit a stronger propensity for risk in their career choices, leading to more frequent career changes than their female peers.

The likelihood of changing careers is positively associated with formal education. Educated individuals can shift to new jobs by acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills (Carless & Arnup, 2011). Higher education fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and broad cultural knowledge, which assist individuals in various careers. Educated people tend to exude self-efficacy, especially in learning and adaptation, enhancing their probability of seeking new career opportunities. Education significantly influences career mobility, providing individuals with the skills necessary for diverse roles and industries (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995).

2.3. The Role of Job Embeddedness and Economic Contexts

Feldman and Ng introduced the notion of job embeddedness, which they define as forces that bind a person to their current job regarding personal connections, job fit, and the sacrifices incurred in leaving. Higher levels of job embeddedness significantly reduce intentions to quit, as employees are less likely to leave positions where they are deeply embedded. This concept has been expanded upon by later research. Reitz et al. (2011) emphasized the role of job embeddedness in employee

retention, accounting for 24.6% of the variance in retention rates, suggesting the multidimensional nature of job mobility with personal and professional ties shaping career decisions.

Nikiforos (2020) explored the macroeconomic consequences of labor mobility, considering how employment changes affect and are affected by wealth inequality. This research contextualizes career mobility within broader economic structures. Similarly, Lengyel and Eriksson evaluated how coworker networks impact labor mobility and productivity growth, demonstrating that substantial professional networks increase the possibility of mobility and better positions on the career ladder. These findings suggest that mobility is not merely an individual decision but is influenced by social and economic factors.

2.4. The Paradox of Portability

The portability paradox describes the difficulty in transferring skills and knowledge from one job context to another when employees possess high levels of expertise in their current jobs. Ng et al. (2009) highlighted this paradox by focusing on the impact of job embeddedness on job-to-job transitions. They found that while job embeddedness positively relates to job performance and creativity in a current role, it can also bind employees from moving into new roles where such embedded ties do not exist. Trofimov (2022) examined determinants of profit rates in OECD economies and how they influence labor mobility. Workers in high-profit industries face more difficulty being mobile to low-profit sectors, exacerbating the portability paradox.

Freeman et al. (2021) measured the contribution of business dynamics to productivity growth and highlighted the challenges for highly embedded employees looking to move from innovative and dynamic firms to less dynamic settings. High job embeddedness can be advantageous for current job performance but may increase barriers to mobility. Oyvat et al. (2018) discussed wage-led versus profit-led growth and its consequences on labor mobility, indicating that in economic structures where wages are subordinated to profits, workers' mobility is further limited, complicating the portability of acquired skills and knowledge.

The concept of "career capital," which includes the skills, knowledge, and networks of individuals, also ties into the portability paradox. Arthur et al. (1995) proposed the idea of "boundaryless careers," where career capital is mobile across job settings. However, Ng et al. (2009) and Feldman and Ng (2007) argued that higher job embeddedness leads to a "localization effect," making career capital context-specific to the current job setting and less easily transferable.

Institutional and sectoral differences are crucial in the portability paradox. For instance, Sedláček and Pugsley (2021) studied firm growth and employee-firm fit, suggesting that workers in fast-growing environments secure human capital and business contacts aligned with that growth context, making it challenging to transfer skills to different settings. Uemura et al. (2019) discussed how different varieties of capitalism affect skill portability, noting that in coordinated market economies, firms invest significantly in firm-specific skills, making it harder to transfer those skills compared to liberal market economies with a high supply of general skills. This places the portability paradox within broader economic and institutional contexts.

2.5. Beyond Human Capital: Fit Between Employee and Firm

Fit between an individual employee and their firm encompasses more than traditional measures of human capital; it includes values, goals, and organizational culture. Ng et al. (2009) argued that job embeddedness encompasses more than matching an employee's skills with job requirements by measuring the fit between what an individual values and what their organization offers. This results in higher job satisfaction, improved performance, and reduced turnover rates.

Hopson et al. (2018) suggested that occupational satisfaction prevents turnover, as job embeddedness strengthens the fit between employees and their organizations. This view is supported by Lavoie et al. (2004), who examined investment within the post-Keynesian and Marxist tradition, where institutional fit enhances employee performance and retention. Uemura et al. (2019) further explored how varieties of capitalism influence civil society and welfare policies, proposing that different economic systems condition the degree of fit between workers and firms.

Sedláček et al. (2021) contributed to understanding firm growth and its consequences for employee-firm fit, arguing that during rapid growth, firms risk losing a good fit with employees. A dynamic but stable fit between workers and companies is essential for sustaining performance and job satisfaction.

The concept of person-organization (P-O) fit, defined by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) as the degree of compatibility between people and their work environment, is related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and low turnover intentions. This reinforces Ng et al. (2009)'s argument on the role of job embeddedness in enhancing P-O fit.

The dynamic nature of P-O fit is highlighted by Chatman, who suggested that fit develops over time as individuals and organizations change. This notion is essential for explaining long-term

fit amidst rapid organizational changes. Meglino et al. emphasized that value congruence plays a role in P-O fit, indicating that the alignment between individual and organizational values represents overall fit.

P-O fit also supports career development. London and Smither (1999) showed that high P-O fit fosters career success by creating an environment conducive to skill development and career progress. Cable and DeRue (2002) further demonstrated that employees with higher P-O fit are likely to receive developmental opportunities and career advancement.

3. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework analyzes three theories related to career mobility: human capital theory, social exchange theory, and organization design theories. The chapter aims to understand the factors that influence career mobility, integrating these theories we aim at a deeper insight into how individual investments in education and skills, workplace relationships and organization design collectively define career trajectories.

3.1. Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory states that investments in human capabilities, like education or training, increase worker productivity, consequently increasing economic returns (Becker, 1964). These returns are both individual and societal, as the expected returns affect the level of economic success of the employee, as well as the social economic growth. Moreover, Becker posits that individuals who acquire a higher level of education and skills development have a higher probability of having better job opportunities, higher wages, and more career mobility.

The central concept of human capital theory is that education and training are considered as investments. Precisely the way firms and businesses invest in physical capital to derive higher productivity, human beings invest in human capital to uplift their capacity to derive better knowledge and skills. This investment can be formal, through school or university degrees, or informal, through on-the-job training and professional development programs. For instance, in the finance sector, those who pursue advanced certifications and continuous professional development are more likely to receive promotions and salary increases (Tan, 2019). While in the tech industry employees that engage in lifelong learning are more likely to receive upward career mobility. The importance of education in defining the career path of an individual drives the concept that there are differences in employee trajectories related to the accessibility of education. Those who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will more likely face significant barriers to accessing the same educational opportunities, this means that these people will probably face inequalities in career outcomes (Bol and Weeden, 2015).

Another aspect of the theory is human capital accumulation, a dynamic process occurring throughout the duration of a life. It requires continuous learning and skill upgrading according to the changing job requirements. How human capital accumulation can lead to career mobility is explained by several mechanisms:

3.1.1. Education and Initial Job Placement

Education is essential, firstly, in determining the quality of initial job placement. The more educated are more likely to obtain first positions that have higher wages, better fringe benefits, and advancement prospects (Becker, 1964). Job placement determines someone's attraction point in a particular career path. Starting a career path with a vital company is one way to enhance the probability of moving across essential companies during the remaining career (Rosenbaum, 1979).

3.1.2. On-the-Job Training and Skill Development

The most essential components of human capital accumulation are on-the-job training and continuous professional development (Mincer, 1974). Employees who continue to learn when working are better equipped to help with job requirements that change. Employees who keep their skills updated continuously in new technologies are more likely to be considered for further promotion or new postings where such skills find application (Lazear, 2009).

3.1.3. Work Experience and Job Performance

A critical factor for human capital accumulation is work experience itself. With experience associated with work, one can learn the ropes involved with the job and know his or her job function to provide improved performance and a record of achievements (Jovanovic, 1979). Such accumulated experiences make them attractive employees to potential employers and heighten their opportunities for upward mobility. But at the same time, it lowers the possibility of lateral mobility since the employee has gained experience in a sector (Becker, 1964).

3.1.4. Lifelong Learning and Career Resilience

The concept of lifelong learning is very current within the modern labor market. At the center, there is continuous knowledge and skills acquisition throughout a person's life. It is the key to career resilience, the ability to adapt to changes and disturbances within the job market (Candy, 1991). Thus, people become much better conditioned to exercise lifelong learning under transition situations, such as technological changes, changing economic conditions, or when personal aspirations stir one (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Applying this theory to career mobility reveals the importance of individual skills and educational investments. Those firms that invest in the education of their employees can develop the

workforce's capabilities, leading to better performance through career advancement opportunities (Baruch, 2006).

3.2. Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory (SET) affirms that social interactions and networks within the workplace impact career development (Blau 1964), in particular, it is important the nature of the social exchange, which could be related to exchanges of resources, support, or fostering trust and commitment, all aspects essential for career progression.

An important topic according to this theory is mentoring, which increases the possibility of upward mobility due to the guidance, support, and opportunities provided by the mentors (Crapanzano and Mitchell, 2016). At the same time, one more relevant aspect of career mobility is considered to be networking, which gives individuals the possibility to access valuable information and resources enhancing their career opportunities.

SET provides insights into how interpersonal relations, reciprocity, and social networks enhance or obstruct career mobility by highlighting key concepts and their implications for career trajectories (Blau, 1964).

3.2.1. Trust

Trust means the belief in the reliability, integrity, and competence of others. More trust means greater access to resources and opportunities that enhance employees' careers. It gives them more confidence to take risks and embrace new roles facilitating upward mobility (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995)

3.2.2. Commitment

Commitment denotes emotional attachment and loyalty to an organization or individuals, promoting behaviors aligned with organizational goals, including career development initiatives (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

3.2.3. Social Networks

Social networks comprise relationships and connections that facilitate the exchange of information, resources, and assistance. These networks facilitate members to make career transitions

or use relationships effectively for advancement. Mentorship and sponsorship provide career advice, opportunities, and promotion advocacy, characterized by reciprocity, trust, and commitment (Granovetter, 1973).

This theory has been criticized for giving excessive importance to the positive aspects of workplace relationships. It may overlook the potential for exploitation and power imbalances referred to social exchanges (Homans, 2017). Moreover, it may ignore some favoritism and nepotism when career advancements are related more to personal connections than to merit (Ferris et al., 2018). These aspects suggest that when looking the social exchanges to understand career mobility people should consider both positive and negative aspects related.

Connecting this theory to career mobility it highlights the importance of social networks and mentoring relationships as mentioned above. Firms should pay attention to creating positive social exchanges in the workplace providing a collaborative and supportive work environment to facilitate positive type of relations. This approach helps individuals build strong relationships and create a culture of support and development, providing positive outcomes both to individuals and the organization.

3.3. Organization Design Theories

Organization design theories provide a structural lens to examine career mobility, saying that the way in which a firm is designed and structured has a significant role in creating opportunities to enhance upward career mobility. In particular, organizational forms like simple structures, machine bureaucracies, and professional bureaucracies have an impact on job mobility (Mintzberg, 1979). The way in which they influence an individual's trajectory is given by how these organizational forms influence flexibility and responsiveness in dynamic environments (Nadler and Tushman, 1997).

According to recent studies emerged that flat structures with decentralized decision-making tend to facilitate career mobility. For instance, organizations with flatter hierarchies give more opportunities for employee empowerment and skill development, increasing the possibility of career progression (Burton et al., 2015). At the same time, decentralized structures, especially in dynamic industries, facilitate flexible career paths and quicker promotions (Puranam, 2018).

3.3.1. **Contingency Theory**

Contingency theory asserts that organizational structures should align with situational factors like the environment, strategy, and technology (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Flexible and adaptive

structures facilitate career mobility through cross-functional movements and decentralized organizational structures, enabling employees to carve out promotional careers within various units (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

3.3.2. **Mechanistic-Organic Structure Dichotomy**

The mechanistic-organic structure dichotomy suggests that rigid and hierarchical mechanistic structures hinder mobility, while fluid and flat organic structures facilitate it through broader roles and cross-functional opportunities (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Matrix structures, combining functional and divisional characteristics, provide diverse experiences and skill bases for career mobility, though their complexity can pose navigational challenges (Galbraith, 1971).

3.3.3. **Integration-Responsiveness Framework**

The integration-responsiveness framework balances global integration with local responsiveness through a shared culture and standardized work practices, enhancing global career mobility (Prahalad & Doz, 1987). The resource-based view posits that organizations investing in employee development promote career mobility by enhancing skills and career development, seeing mobility as a way to spread valuable knowledge and skills (Barney, 1991).

However, analyzing career changes using a static model may lower the quality of the analysis, ignoring complexities and rapid change in nowadays working environment (Donaldson, 2019). Galbraith (2020) states that this theory has limited applicability to contemporary organizational contexts, suggesting that there is the need of a more adaptive and responsive model to understand career mobility.

Organizational design theories highlight the relevance of organizational structure in defining the career mobility. This approach provided above could help both individuals and organizations foster a dynamic culture of improvement and innovation, facilitating career mobility and increasing employee productivity.

3.4.Conclusion

The integration of all the theories presented above provides a framework to understand career mobility. Human capital theory underscores the importance of individual skills and educational investments, highlighting the importance of continuous learning and skills development for upward mobility. Social exchange theory increases the quality of the framework giving a relational dimension, enhancing the importance of social networks and mentorships in the definition of a career

path. Organization design theories give insights on the structural aspects of organizations, showing how design and hierarchy influence career mobility.

This integrated framework presents how an individual's career trajectory is given by individual capabilities, social relationships, and organizational structures. For instance, an employee with advanced skills, strong professional networks and that works in a flexible company is more likely to experience career mobility in its life.

To conclude, the above theories integrated underscore the necessity of an all-inclusive approach to explaining and increasing career mobility. Organizations which foster positive social interactions, invest in human capital and flexible organizational structures are likely to provide avenues for their employees' career development as well as overall success.

4. Empirical Study

4.1. Research Design

This study aims to investigate how career mobility impacts the performance of an employee. In recent years the concept of the portability paradox has emerged as a significant topic within this field. Indeed, the difficulty that a highly skilled and experienced employees encounter when transferring from one organizational context to another (Groysberg, 2010) is one of the pivotal aspects behind this study. In fact, this paradox challenges the traditional understanding of career mobility, which assumes that skills and experience are applicable across several job contexts, even when completely different from each other.

The study tries to explore the reasons behind the portability paradox and to examine the factors beyond firm-specific human capital that contribute to the challenges that new employees face. Additionally, this research aims to investigate how organizational roles and hierarchical structures influence the integration of new hires and the portability of their performance. Furthermore, the study will analyze the difference between boomerang employees, which are those individuals who come back to a previous organization after a certain period in which they worked in a different company, and new hires in terms of performance.

In order to better investigate these concepts, in the current investigation we will focus on analyzing a real case, namely the case of the National Basketball Association (hereafter, NBA). Considering that the NBA is a highly competitive and globally recognized sports league, its player dynamics offer a rich dataset for examining career mobility (Berri & Schmidt, 2010). The focus will be on players who have changed teams from 1972 to 2023 leveraging longitudinal performance data to gain insights into the factors that design an shape the career path of individuals. The NBA's structure, clear performance metrics, and high visibility make it an ideal case study for understanding career mobility. The research design for this study is based on a quantitative analysis of players' performances using the described database, in order to have statistical evidence that will be helpful in answering the following research questions.

1. *What are the underlying reasons for the portability paradox, and how do factors beyond firm-specific human capital contribute to the challenges faced by newly hired employees?*

This question aims to understand the complexities of skills and experience transferability. It seeks to analyze non-human factors like the level of coordination inside the teams, the possibility of

receiving specific training, or the hierarchical position to understand whether they exert a significant influence of players' performances.

2. *How do organizational roles, routines, and hierarchical structures impact the integration of new hires, and what role do these elements play in the portability of employee performance?*

This question focuses on the structural and procedural aspects of organizations. It aims to understand how specific roles assigned to new hires, established routines individuals must adapt to, and hierarchical structures that operate in the different teams to unveil their possible effect on the ability to integrate performance and, in turn, perform effectively.

3. *What are the performance and integration dynamics of boomerang employees, and how do they compare to new hires?*

By comparing the performances of boomerang employees and the ones of newly hired individuals this question seeks to understand if rehiring people brings advantages to the company instead of choosing new employees.

4. *How does training provided to newly hired employees impact their performance and integration into the organization?*

The aim of the question is to analyze the impact of training programs on performance and integration of new hires. It seeks to understand the role of training in mitigating challenges that newly hired employees may face.

5. *What is the impact of having a larger staff dedicated to the wellness of employees on their performance?*

This question pays attention to the influence of employee wellness programs and support staff on individual performance. The aim is to investigate whether organizations with more initiatives aimed at increasing players' wellness, as well as dedicated staff have better individual performance than organizations with fewer initiatives or staff.

4.2. The case of the National Basketball Association

The National Basketball Association (NBA) is a professional basketball league that composed of 29 teams based in the United States and 1 in Canada. It was founded in New York City in 1946 as the Basketball Association of America (BAA), but in 1049 it changed its name in NBA after merging with the other basketball association that existed in that period known as National Basketball League (NBL). Nowadays it is considered to be the most important basketball championship in the world.

The NBA's mission is to use basketball as a means to inspire and connect people. In fact, this organization not only focuses on sport, but it plays a significant role in media and entertainment worldwide. Its operations extend beyond North America, involving matches which are played in other countries, like Mexico or France, and additional activities especially aimed for children in Africa or Asia. This contributes to its status as a global brand (Huan, 2023).

The organization operates on a franchise system, where each team is separately owned by one person; further, its activities are structured within the league's guidelines. The way in which the NBA is organized allows centralized administration, that manages scheduling, officiating, and disciplinary actions. This provides a standardized approach across all teams. The centralized system also oversees collective bargaining agreements with players in order to have a unified and regulated approach to player contracts and salaries (Chassee, 2019).

4.2.1. The NBA's role in career mobility

The NBA provides a unique context for studying career mobility considering its competitive nature, international reach, and media exposure, making career movements highly scrutinized and analyzed. One aspect of career mobility in the NBA is competitive balance. The organization itself wants to ensure that no single team dominates the league for extended periods of time. This balance is pivotal for the career mobility of players, as it allows the distribution of talents across every team in the organization, providing more opportunities for players to showcase their skills and advance their careers (Jones, Jee, Jordan, Du, 2023).

Superstar players have a significant impact on the team's attendance and success. This makes them important for the determination of career trajectories of the other components of the team, both players and coaches. In fact, teams with superstars tend to attract more media attention, better sponsorship deals, higher game attendance, and more wins during the season, this leads to greater opportunities for those associated with the team (Jones, Jee, Jordan, Du, 2023).

The NBA's internationalization strategies are pivotal for opening career opportunities for players, coaches, and executives across the entire world. The organization itself is working to become global, with the consequence of recruiting players worldwide, even thanks to NBA academies around the world. This international presence increases the talent of the entire organization, while also providing career mobility opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds (Santomier, Dolles, Kunz, 2023).

Nowadays career mobility is strongly influenced by analytics, which has changed the way in which teams evaluate performances, which in turn influences career decisions such as trades, contract renewals, and draft selections. The use of analytics provides a quantitative approach to career mobility, allowing for data-driven decisions that can enhance or hinder a player's progression (Efe, 2023).

4.2.2. Trades, Free Agency, and Market Dynamics

4.2.2.1. Trades

Trades are the most important element in an individual career path in the NBA, in fact they allow players to move from one team to a different one. They involve two or more players, draft picks (the right to choose a player during the NBA Draft), or other assets. There could be several reasons behind a single trade, it could be because a team wants to increase the quality of its roster, or to manage salary space acquiring a player that has a lower wage, or to acquire future draft picks to have more choices in the following NBA Draft. For a player trades may result in new opportunities, or the movement into a team where there is a better fit with the playstyle, or more possibility of winning the championship. However, trades can also be disruptive, requiring players to adapt quickly to new teammates, coaches and cities (Jones, Jee, Jordan, Du**,** 2023).

Trades could happen both during the off-season, so when none of the teams is playing, as well as during the season. In the first case, the player will participate in the training camp of the team, which is a long session of pieces of training where the team learns how to play together, and the players can strengthen their relationships. This results in more possibility to increase the player's performance; conversely, when players are trade in-season, they will have no time to adapt to the new team.

Trades are possible because the salary is paid by the NBA, not by the single team, this allows players to keep their contracts while changing teams.

4.2.2.2. Free agency

Free agency is another critical component of career mobility in the NBA. When a player ends his contract with a team, he can sign with a new team of the organization, depending on which type of free agent he is. There are two different types of free agents: the restricted ones and the unrestricted ones. Both can receive offers from any team of the NBA, however, the difference is that in the first case, the current team can offer the same amount as the highest offer he receives, and in such case, the player will be obliged to accept the offer from the current team, without having the possibility of moving into a new team. In the second case, the individual can sign the contract without any restrictions, and the actual team and no rights towards the player, who can sign with the team he wants. Whether a player belongs to the restricted or unrestricted category is established on the basis of the number of years that he has played for a team; in order to be a restricted free agent an individual must have played at least 3 years with the same team, that must also make an offer for him.

4.2.2.3. NBA Draft

The NBA draft is an annual event where teams select players to join the league. According to a system of probability based on the performance of the team in previous years, each team will have the possibility to select a player on this occasion; this system is designed to give - even to the worst team - the chance to select the best talent among new players that will enter in the NBA, keeping the competitive balance. The draft is composed of 60 picks, divided across teams, and each pick can be traded to other teams to gain players or even more favorable picks. For example, a team that has two lower picks, with the possibility to select worse players, can trade both of them in order to gain a higher one. Being drafted by a team can set the trajectory of a player's career, thus determining their initial opportunities and development path. High draft picks are considered to be better players, so they normally have more playing time and development resources, while lower picks may need to prove themselves over time (Kuehn, Rebessi**,** 2023).

4.2.2.4. Salary Cap

The NBA works under a salary cap system, which limits the total amount teams can spend on player salaries. The aim of this system is to promote competitive balance by preventing wealthier

teams from having the best talents in the organization. Teams must make strategic decisions on which player to sign or trade for, balancing their desire to build the best team of the league with the constraints of salary cap. This system creates a dynamic market wherein player movements are often dictated by financial considerations as well as by sport's performance (Sarlis, Papageorgiou, Tjortjis**,** 2023).

4.3. Data collection

In order to analyze career mobility within the National Basketball Association context a dataset composed of secondary data has been employed. The choice of these data was guided by their ability to provide insights into players' metrics over an extended period, in fact, the dataset provides NBA data from the championship of 1972 until nowadays. Per each year it highlights the best 200 players, who have played at least 60 matches out of 82, for each statistical data point. For each year, x all the players that changed the team have been selected; this led to the construction of a dataset composed of 1883 players, that gave the possibility to study their performance. The aim of the study is to leverage this dataset to understand how changes in teams impact players' career trajectories and performance.

This approach gives the possibility to have a wealth of historical data about NBA players who changed teams, incorporating a diverse range of player experiences and career paths. The secondary data collection method ensures that is possible to analyze players from different eras of the NBA, reducing the probability of misunderstanding the data due to a pattern related to a single period of history.

4.3.1. National Basketball Association (NBA) Data

Career mobility within the context of the NBA describes how organizational dynamics, performance metrics and data analytics influence individual career trajectories. The way in which performance are managed has been completely revolutionized by data analytics, the latter, in fact, offers insights that drive strategic decisions and career advancements. Teams that effectively leverage data analytics improve their win rates enhancing individual career prospects by providing precise feedback and development opportunities (Doe & Smith, 2020).

The role that big data plays in basketball underscores its relevant impact on career mobility. Advanced performance metrics like Player Efficiency Rating (PER) are critical tools for predicting and defining career trajectories. Players with higher PER scores usually gain contracts that provide

higher salaries and enjoy longer careers; this is evidenced by a 25% higher likelihood of max contracts for top-performing players (Johnson & Davis, 2019). However, career trajectories are not only defined by PER and statistical data; this evidence should always be balanced with aspects like leadership and teamwork, that are not easily quantifiable, but that influence in the same way career paths (Lee & Thompson, 2017).

4.3.2. **Player Efficiency Rating (PER)**

Player Efficiency Rating (PER) that is mentioned above is a statistical voice that aims to evaluate the entire performance of the player during a single match, it has been developed by John Hollinger who is a sports analyst. This parameter aims to synthesize into a single number the player's contribution into 100 game actions, both offensively and defensively. It is composed of the following statistical factors:

- Points
- Shots attempted and made
- Three-point shot attempted and made
- Free shots attempted and made
- Rebounds (when the player gets the ball after the failed shot of a teammate or rival)
- Assists (when the player passes the ball to someone who scores)
- Steals (when the player steals the ball from the rival)
- Blocks (when the player blocks the shot of the rival)
- Fouls made
- Turnovers (when the player lose control of the ball)

In order to calculate PER there are several steps:

- Collection of all the statistics of the player during the match.
- Evaluation of data, giving the correct importance to each statistic of the game.
- Normalization of data, data are normalized to consider the different speed of each team while playing, it is made by considering as base value 100 actions.
- The formula:

$$uPER = Minutes1 \times (3P + (32) \times FG + (FT - 0.5 \times FTA) + DRB + (0.7 \times ORB) + AST + STL + (0.7 \times BLK) + -(0.4 \times PF) - TO - (FG - FGM) - (FTA - FTM))$$

- The final value is adjusted considering the mean of the NBA, which is considered to be 15, and multiplied by a constant to obtain a standardized value,

This value tends to underestimate defensive actions and does not give the correct importance to the status of a player in the team, and the context overall. But it can be considered well-descriptive data to understand the performance of a player during a match and, by calculating the mean during the entire season, it becomes a synthesizer parameter of how well an individual played for one year.

4.3.3. **Coaching Style**

Coaching style also plays a pivotal role in career mobility within the NBA. Democratic coaching styles, which prioritize player involvement and coordination among them, foster better team cohesion enhancing individual career progression providing them 20% higher likelihood of career advancement compared to authoritative regimes (Green & Lewis, 2021). Adaptive coaching, which tailors strategies to players' strengths, consequentially giving more freedom to player and less coordination, enhances career development improving individual performance metrics (Clark & Miller, 2020).

In this thesis this parameter has been included by considering 5 coaches famous for imposing more coordination in the playstyle, and 5 others known for giving more freedom to players. The 10 coaches are:

- Coaches famous for providing more coordination:
    - Pat Riley, who trained Los Angeles Lakers from 1981 to 1990 and Miami Heat from 1991 to 1995.
    - Erik Spoelstra who has been training Miami Heat since 2008.
    - Quin Snyder who has been training Utah Jazz since 2014.
    - Steve Kerr who has been training Golden State Warriors since 2014.
    - Larry Brown who trained Denver Nuggets from 1976 to 1979 New Jearsey Nets from 1981 to 1983, San Antonio Spurs from 1988 to 1992 and Philadelphia 76ers from 1997 to 2003.
    - Gregg Popovich who has been training San Antonio Spurs since 1996.
    - Brad Stevens who trained Boston Celtics from 2013 to 2021.

- Coaches famous for providing more freedom:
    - Don Nelson who trained Milwaukee Bucks 1976 to 1987, Golden State Warrios from 1988 to 1995 and from 2006 to 2010, and Dallas Mavericks from 1997 to 2005.
    - George Karl who trained Seattle Supersonics from 1992 to 1998, Milwaukee Bucks from 1998 to 2003, and Denver Nuggets from 2005 to 2013
    - Mike Budenholzer who trained Atlanta Hakws from 2013 to 2018, and Mikwaukee Bucks from 2018 to 2023, and Phoenix suns since 2024
    - Phil Jackson who trained Chicago Bulls from 1989 to 1998, and Los Angeles Lakers from 1999 to 2011
    - Mike D'Antoni who trained Phoenix Suns from 2003 to 2008, New York Knicks from 2008 to 2012, Los Angeles Lakers from 2012 to 2014 and Houston Rockets from 2016 to 2020

4.3.4. Variables and Measures

In this analysis of career mobility within the NBA has been used a comprehensive set of variables in order to capture both quantitative and qualitative aspects of player performance, organizational dynamics, and individual characteristics.

One of the primary variables used in the study is the number of minutes played by the player during the season. This scale variable quantifies the total game time period during the season, providing a description of the player's status inside the team and its involvement, because the more number of minutes an individual stays on the court the more he will be important for the team. Higher playing time often correlates with better performance and a more critical role within the team, whereas limited minutes may be evidence of issues like injuries, poor performance, or strategic decisions by the coach.

Related to minutes played there are games played because it is useful in normalizing the number of minutes spent on the court by an individual, especially if they are considered to understand the status of a player. In fact, considering an important player who due to an injury missed an important number of matches, he may have the same amount of minutes as a less important player who played all the season.

Another crucial scale variable in this study is the Player Efficiency Rating difference between the departure team and the arrival one. The variable captures the impact of the trade on the player's

performance, a positive difference indicates that the trade increased the performance, while a negative one suggests a decline. This measure is pivotal in understanding how team contexts, coaching styles, and strategic roles influence a player's effectiveness.

The timing of the trade within the season is used as a dummy variable, where 1 indicates an in-season trade, so that the player changed team during the season, while 0 indicates an off-season trade, meaning that the change of team happened when the season has not already started. The importance of this variable is understood in light of the fact that in-season trades can disrupt existing chemistry within the team, and they don't comprehend a training session period for the player, who has to understand the playstyle of the team and integrate in the new team during actual matches, rather than during trainings. Off-season trade, on the other hand, provides a period of training with the entire team for the newcomer; this means that the organization can build better chemistry with the new player who has time to understand how to play within the new context.

The number of staff dedicated to player wellness is one more scale variable in this study. This variable represents the number of security staff, psychologists, and all those people that work to facilitate player's life outside the court. A higher number of wellness staff generally indicates a greater focus on individual health, both physical and mental; this consequentially impacts performance and career longevity. This variable is crucial to understand whether and to which extent organizational support structures have an influence on employees' performance and career path.

The age of the player, recorded as a scale variable, is a critical factor in evaluating individual performance. Especially in sports, the older a player becomes, the more his or her performance will decline, because it will lose physical capabilities that are determinant in sport, although their level of on-the-job experience may increase.

Finally, the playstyle of the coach has been considered as a dummy variable where 1 represents all the coaches that require more coordination while playing, while 0 represents the ones that give more freedom to the players. Having a different type of coach is important because entering a team that is required to pass the ball among the teammates may be more difficult for a newcomer, instead of entering a team where players are free to play as they prefer.

4.4. Data analysis techniques

4.4.1. RQ1

In order to understand the complexity of skill and experience transferability by focusing on non-human capital factors, a multiple regression analysis has been conducted with the goal of assessing the impact of these non-human factors on player performance metrics such as Player Efficiency Rating (PER), here used as dependent variable. In this model are included independent variables like the level of team coordination (measured through the style of play given by coaches), and the hierarchical position (analyzed considering minutes played as a proxy for the status).

4.4.2. **RQ2**

To study the influence of organizational roles, and hierarchical structures on employees' performance a linear regression analysis has been used considering the difference of PER between the year before of the change of team and the following year in a different organization, while minutes played, game played, and age are used as independent variables.

4.4.3. **RQ3**

In order to analyze the performance integration and dynamics of boomerang employees a linear regression model has been run considering as dependent variable the difference of PER between the performance in last year with the team and the ones when the player came back to that team, while the age of the player, the number of minutes played and the number of gap year spent in a different team have been included as independent variables.

4.4.4. **RQ4**

To comprehend whether having or not a specific training influences the performance of the employee a linear regression model has been conducted using as independent variable the difference of PER between the performance in the last year with the previous team and the ones with the new team. While the moment of the season in which the change of team happened, whether the change has been made during the off-season or inside the season, the age of the player, the number of minutes and game played were included as independent variables.

4.4.5. **RQ5**

A linear regression has been made to understand the importance of having staff dedicated to employees' wellness, and their impact on performances. In this linear regression model the independent variable was always the difference of performance between two years (i.e., last year in the old team, and first year in the new one), while the dependent ones were the number of members of the staff dedicated to the wellness of players, and as for the other analysis, players' age, minutes, and game played.

By leveraging multiple regression analysis for each question, the study aims to understand various factors that influence career mobility and performance in the NBA. This methodological approach gives the possibility to understand how non-capital factors, organizational roles, training programs, and wellness initiatives impact player performance and career trajectories. The possibility of providing accurate analysis has been given by the large dataset of NBA players from 1972 to 2023.

4.5. Results

4.5.1. Descriptive Statistics

Even though the research questions will be better answered in the econometric analysis chapter to understand properly which elements influence the change of player's performance after a trade, in this paragraph will be statistically described the dataset used in this study. In this way there will be the possibility to get a first overview about how career mobility, that will be deeply explained in the following paragraphs.

The master dataset is composed of 1883 cases of players that changed teams and entered in the top 200 regarding Player Efficiency Rating among the entire league at the end of the season after at least 60 games during the year. Among all these cases, it is possible to highlight an overall reduction of 0.92% in their performance after the trade, with a standard deviation of 16.09%. From this first analysis already emerges an insight into how specific training influences the performance of the player during the year, in fact among all the players that changed teams before the start of the season, so receive specific training with the entire team there is a reduction of 0.19%, that is lower than the one obtained when the player is traded during the season, which is of 2.23%.

Reducing the master dataset by eliminating players that were traded after the first year with the new team, or that did not enter the top 200 ranking in PER obtained a new dataset of 603, which becomes 294 analyzing players 3 years after the trade. These two more datasets give the possibility

to study the change of performance year by year after the trade (Figure 1) highlighting how after 2 years from the trade performances increase by 2.25%, so when the player is well integrated with the team, he increases its performances. After 3 years PER increases of 1.84% in relation to the last year with the previous team.

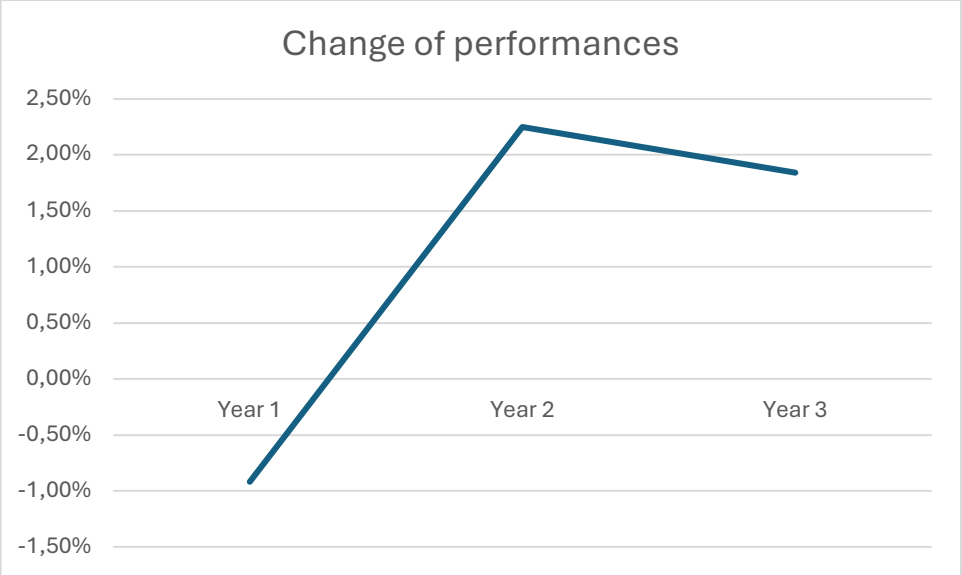

Figure 1. Variations of players' performances across the first, second and third year after entering the new team.

To understand if playstyle influences performance, the master dataset has been divided into a smaller one, considering only the players that were traded towards the team of one of the previously cited coaches. In this way, the sample was reduced to 66 players. Analyzing the difference in their PER it was analyzed how in the first year after the trade there was a reduction of 1.35% in teams with more coordination in the playstyle, while in the ones in which was given more freedom to the players, there was a reduction of 1.95%. This result could be unexpected because it seems easier to adapt to a team where the player needs to coordinate with his teammates. However, in the second year after the trade the reduction in performance becomes higher in teams with higher coordination, in fact, there is a reduction of 4.32%, while in teams with more freedom, there is an increase of performance of 1.49% comparing them to the last year in the previous team (see Figure 2).

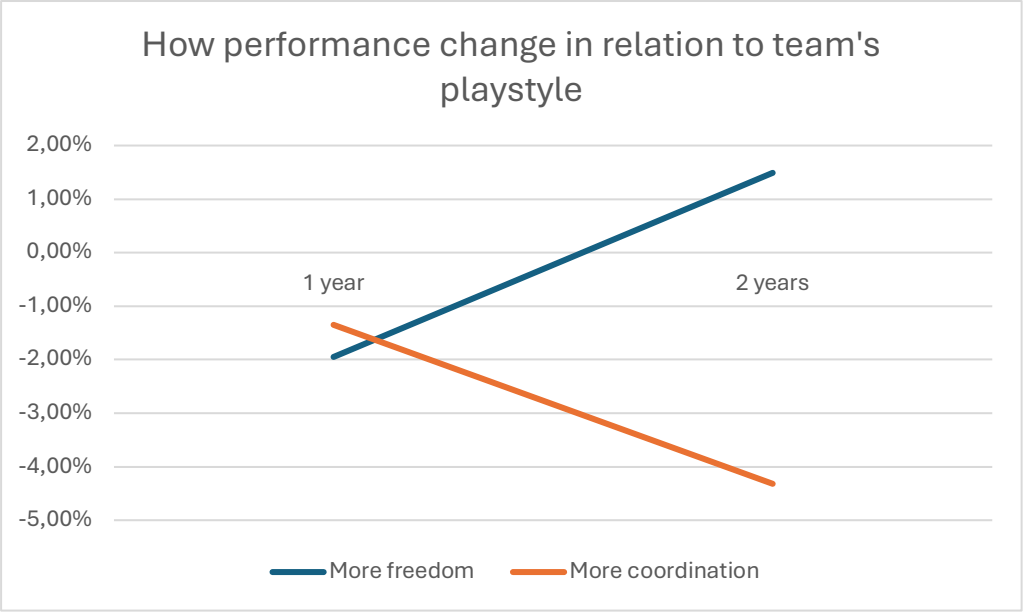

Figure 2.variation of new- joiners player performance according to the level of coordination in the team.

One more descriptive analysis made on the dataset regards boomerang players, so those that come back to the previous team after one or more gap years spent in a different one. To conduct this study has been created a small dataset of 38 cases due to difficulties in finding players that come back to the same team during the years and still was in the top 200 for PER. However, analyzing this dataset emerges that boomerang players tend to have a reduction of 9.70% from the last year they were with the team. There could be several reasons behind this data, probably the organization is the same, but the players of the team changed during those gap years, or may be that the increase of the age impact fitness condition of players, well-developed physical fitness allows for a higher-intensity pacing strategy that can be maintained throughout a tournament, while high-standard/low-fitness players may reduce their playing intensity as the competition progresses due to increased levels of fatigue (Johnston et al., 2015).

4.5.2. **Econometric Analysis**

For the five research questions have been evaluated several econometric parameters. The unstandardized coefficient measures the change in PER for a one-unit change in one predictor variable, holding other variables constant. While the standard error reflects the variability around the coefficient estimate. Moving to standardized coefficients they allow for comparison across different predictors, beta means the effect that they have on the dependent variable, so how the latter is influenced by that variable. The t-test is used to evaluate if there exist a statistically significant

difference between the means of the dependent and independent variable. The p-value indicates the probability that the correlation between the two variables is due to chance.

4.5.3. **RQ1**

This regression analysis evaluates how factors beyond firm-specific human capital contribute to performances, considering the percentage difference of PER as the dependent variable. The constant term in the model is 3.131 with a standard error of 2.993, and it is not statistically significant ($t = 1.046$, $p > .05$). This suggests that the baseline percentage difference of PER is not significantly different from zero when all predictors are zero. The predictor Coach - that it evaluates the level of coordination in the playstyle wanted by the coach -, has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.396, indicating that each unit increase in this variable decreases the dependent variable by 0.396 units, holding other variables constant. However, this result is not statistically significant ($p = 0.436$). The predictor Ranking, namely, the position in the top200 raking for PER of that season, displays an unstandardized coefficient of -0.014 with a significant p-value of 0.002, indicating that each unit increase in such variable decreases the dependent one by 0.014 units. The standardized coefficient for Ranking is -0.387, indicating a strong negative effect. The predictor Games, that stands for the number of games played during the season, has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.051, which is not statistically significant ($p = 0.109$), indicating that the number of games played does not significantly affect the dependent variable. The predictor Age has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.158 with a significant p-value of 0.029. This means that for each additional year of age, the dependent variable decreases by 0.158 units. The standardized coefficient for Age is -0.261, indicating a strong negative effect. The predictor Minutes Played, namely the total minutes played by the player during the season, has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.001, which is not statistically significant ($p = 0.340$), indicating that it does not significantly affect percentage difference of PER (see Table 1 for detailed results).

Table 1. Results of the multiple regression analysis conducted on the dependent variable percentage difference of PER using the variables: coach, ranking, game, age, and minutes played as independent variables.

Model	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B	SE	B		
Coach	-0.396	0.505	-0.095	-0.785	0.436
Ranking	-0.014	0.005	-0.387	-3.206	0.002
Game	0.051	0.031	0.216	1.628	0.109
Age	-0.158	0.070	-0.261	-2.239	0.029
Minutes Played	-0.001	0.001	-0.133	-0.963	0.340

These statistical results show that the level of coordination required by the coach to the players does not impact individual performances, explaining that the results shown in the previous paragraph are probably related to the smaller sample, and not to a real statistical relationship with the change of performances. From this analysis emerges that only the variable age negatively influences the independent variable. Nonetheless, it is also important to note that this analysis has been conducted on a small subsample of players, which may have impacted upon the statistical power of the analysis, and the undermining the statistical significance of the effects.

4.5.4. **RQ2**

This regression analysis aims to determine whether minutes played, used as a proxy for hierarchical status (considering that those players that spend more time on the court during a match are generally more important to the team), significantly impact performance. The constant term in the model is 21-296, with a standard error of 6.588, and it is statistically significant ($t=3.232$, $p<.05$). This indicates that when all predictors are zero, the percentage difference in Player Efficiency Rating (PER) related to the amount of time spent on the court is 21.296, a value significantly different from zero, suggesting a baseline level of performance potential. The predictor Games, representing the number of matches played during a season by a single player, have an unstandardized coefficient of 0.094, suggesting a minor increase in the dependent variable per unit increase in Games, although this result is not statistically significant ($p=0.220$). The predictor age, however, has a unstandardized coefficient of -1.299, with a significant p-value of less than 0.001, meaning that each additional year of age decreases the percentage difference in PER by 1.299. the standardized coefficient for Age is -0.196, this indicates a strong negative effect. The predictor Minutes Played, which measures the total time spent on the court, has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.003 and a significant p-value of 0.006,

this suggests that each additional minute spent on the court increase the dependent variable of 0.003. The standardized coefficient for Minutes Played is 0.073, indicating a relatively weak but positive effect.

Table.2. Results of the multiple regression analysis conducted on the dependent variable percentage difference of PER using the variables: games, age, and minutes played as independent variables.

Model	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B	**SE**	**B**		
Games	0,094	0,077	0,032	1,226	0,22
Age	-1.299	0,149	-0,196	-3,206	<0,001
Minutes Played	0.003	0,001	0,73	2,774	0,006

These results evidence that while age has a consistently negative impact on performance, minutes played positively influence PER, even though in a less consistent way. The analysis reinforces the notion that players with higher hierarchical status, as indicated by more minutes played, tend to perform better. This finding aligns with theories of upward mobility, which suggest that an

4.5.5. **RQ3**

This regression analysis analyzes whether the negative performance realized by boomerang employees (players returning to a former team) are statistically significant or are obtained due to a small dataset. The constant term in this model is 0.916, with a standard error of 0.587, and it is not statistically significant ($t=1.560$, $p>0.05$). This suggests that when all predictors are zero, the percentage difference in PER is expected to be 0.916, a value not significantly different from zero. The predictor Minutes Played has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.099, indicating a minor decrease in the dependent variable per unit increase in Minutes Played, but this result is not statistically significant ($p=0.986$). The predictor Years Away (Anni), representing the length of time a player spent with other teams, has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.061, with a significant p-value of 0.007. meaning that each additional year away decreases the percentage difference in PER by 0.061 units. The standardized coefficient for Years Away is -0.532, indicating a relatively strong negative effect. The predictor Age also shows a negative impact, with an unstandardized coefficient of -0.029

and a significant p-value of 0.010, indicating that each additional year of age lowers the percentage difference of PER by 0.029 units. The standardized coefficient for Age is -0.509, indicating a strong negative effect.

Table 3. Results of the multiple regression analysis conducted on the dependent variable percentage difference of PER using the variables: minutes played, years away, and age as independent variables.

Model	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B	SE	B		
Minutes Played	-0,099	0,005	-0,003	-0,018	0,986
Years Away (Anni)	-0,061	0,021	-0,532	-2,852	0,007
Minutes Played	-0,029	0,011	-0,509	-2,735	0,010

These results highlight that both the length of time spent with other teams and age have a negative influence on the percentage difference of PER, this may be related more to reduction in physical capabilities that issues of team integration.

4.5.6. **RQ4**

This analysis studies the impact of specific training programs realized for new joiners of the team by examining how performance is affected by the timing of trades, during the regular season or the off-season. The constant term in the regression model is 0.186, with a standard error of 0.047, and it is statistically significant ($t=3.917$, $p<0,01$), this indicates that the baseline value is 0.186. The predictor for the timing of the trade (i.e., Trade), where 0 indicates off-season trade and 1 indicates trades during the regular season, has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.023 highlighting how in-season trade decrease the percentage difference of performance by 0.023, holding other factors constant. This result is statistically significant ($p=0.004$). The predictor Age has an unstandardized coefficient of-0.009, with a significant p-value of less than 0.001, meaning that each additional year decreases the dependent variable by 0.009 units. The standardized coefficient for Age is -0.198, indicating a relatively strong negative effect. The predictor Minutes Played has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.0234, with a significant p-value of less than 0.001, suggesting that each additional unit of Minutes Played increases the dependent variable by 0.0234 units.

Table 4. results of the multiple regression analysis conducted on the dependent variable percentage difference of PER using the variables: trade, age, and minutes played as independent variables.

Model	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B	SE	B		
Trade	0,094	0,008	-0,065	-2,888	0,004
Age	-1.299	0,001	-0,198	-8,795	<0,001
Minutes Played	0,0234	0,000	0,087	3,332	<0,001

These results indicate the importance of specific training programs made before the start of the season, in fact, players that join a new team during the off-season and have the possibility to receive these types of training are associated with better performance outcomes. The negative coefficient for in-season trades suggests that players may struggle to integrate and adapt when traded during the season.

4.5.7. **RQ5**

This analysis explores the significance of wellness staff on player performance, considering the current emphasis on employee wellness in organizations. The constant term in this model is 2.488, with a standard error of 0.897, and it is statistically significant (t=2.733, p=0.006), indicating that the baseline value is 2.488 when all predictors are zero. The predictor Number of Staff (NUMERO STAFF), representing the number of wellness staff members, has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.020, holding other variables constant. This result is statistically significant (p=0.040). the predictor Games has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.011, which is not statistically significant (p=0.291), suggesting no significant impact on percentage difference of PER. The predictor AGE has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.156, with a significant p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that each additional year of age decreases the dependent variable by 0.156. The standardized coefficient for Age is -0.224, indicating a strong negative effect. The predictor Minutes Played has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.000, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.041, suggesting a very small positive impact on percentage difference of PER.

Table 5. Results of the multiple regression analysis conducted on the dependent variable percentage difference of PER using the variables: number of staff, games, age, and minutes played as independent variables.

Model	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B	SE	B		
Number of Staff	0,020	0,010	0,059	2,057	0,040
Games	0,011	0,010	0,035	1,057	0,291
Age	-0,156	0,020	-0,224	-7,788	0,000
Minutes Played	0,000	0,000	0,068	2,048	0,041

The positive impact of wellness staff on player performance, as indicated by the positive beta of 0,059, suggests that investing in employee wellness can increase individual performance of employees.

5. Discussions: Reasons behind the portability paradox

5.1. Synthesis of findings

Through the analysis of different linear regression model there has been the possibility to reveals insights into the relationship between firm-specific human capital and individual performances, measured through percentage difference in Player Efficiency Rating (PER).

The first regression model examine examines the baseline value of DiffPer, which stands at 3.131, these results means that the model is not statistically significant indicating that probably there are underlying factors that are more influential but are not captured in the model. As regards for the level of coordination in the team, measured by "Choach", has been highlighted a small decrease in performance when the level of coordination increase, however this result is not statistically significant. Considering the position in the top 200 PER rating and the wage of the player, those are both statistically significant values for the analysis, meaning that the more a player is already good considering performance, the less room for improving there is. At the same time the more a player is old the more performance will decrease.

In a separate model, the regression analysis evaluates the hypothesis that minutes played could serve as a proxy for hierarchical status within the team. While the amounts of game played does not stand a significant factor influencing performance, considering minutes played shows a statistically significant positive effect on performance, suggesting that a player that is important for his team, tend to have slightly better performance metrics.

Analyzing boomerang employees is evidenced how players that spend more time with difference teams will have lower performance when coming back to the original team, and the more the length of time will be long, the more the reduction in performance will be. This result is connected both to the increase of age of the player and to the coordination with the team,

Another critical aspect of this study is the timing of trades, particularly whether they happened during the off-seasons or the regular season. The findings indicate a negative impact on performance when the trade is made during the regular seasons, suggesting that a training period for the new joiners is fundamental to have an increase in their performance.

The last evaluated factor is the role that wellness staff dedicated to player well-being plays in the change of performance. The presence of a larger wellness staff is associated with a positive impact on performance, highlighting the importance of player wellness in order to enhance individual results.

Overall, these findings provide a comprehensive view of the factors influencing player performance, evidencing the importance of age, hierarchical status, and organizational support in the outcome of performance. Moreover, the analysis shows the importance to consider a multifaced approach when evaluating player efficiency.

5.2. Firm-Specific Human Capital Revisited

The concept of firm-specific human capital is revisited through the study of career mobility and NBA player performance, here the dynamic of sports' teams and the important amount of data collected in every single match offer a rich context for understanding how individual and organizational factors interact to shape career trajectories. The firm-specific human capital refers to all those skills, knowledge or capabilities that are strictly related to a single company and cannot be transferred among different organizations.

The regression analysis offers important insights into the relationship between human capital and player performance. Even though the difference in performance is not statistically significant, it makes it possible to understand that the value of firm-specific human capital may extend beyond quantifiable metrics. In fact, elements like player's cultural fit within the team, their ability to internalize and execute complex strategies, or their role in maintaining team morale could be pivotal components of their overall contribution, even if less visible.

Considering the level of coordination inside a team, measured through "coach", the slight percentage decrease in PER associated with increased coordination suggests that teamwork is essential, however putting too much emphasis on coordination may reduce the individual creativity and performance. This result can make coaches reshape their strategies, providing both a structured style of play, and giving even more freedom to players, especially star ones, to make them express their talents.

The position in the top 200 PER ranking gives important insights into firm-specific human capital, considering that the higher a player is in this ranking the more difficult it is for him to increase his performance. As players reach the higher status of the organizations further improvements are increasingly difficult and require exponentially higher effort and resources. This implies that

continuous training programs must be highly targeted and innovative, trying to develop new skills of the employee rather than training the existing ones.

Considering the amount of time spent on the court, and the influence that it has on player performance, this highlights the importance of roles within an organization. In fact, having a specific role tailored on individual's capacity can enhance player performance; on the contrary, playing an important amount of time in a general way does not influence performance at all. Defined the role of a player becomes important the trust placed on him by the coach; in fact, the higher number of minutes the coach invests in keeping the player in the court, the more trust he places on him and, in turn, the better performance the player will display. This concept can be connected to one of the principles of human capital theory which establishes that investing in skills and experience yields higher productivity and returns.

As regards for boomerang employees, or players returning to a former team. The negative impact of the length of time spent away on performance may be connected both to the physical decline of player physique with the increasing age or to changes in team dynamics or coaching strategies. Returning players are required to re-establish their role within the team recalibrating firm-specific human capital to align with the current organization. This process may be facilitated by targeted reintegration programs that can help these players to reacclimate to their old teams.

5.3. Fit Between Employee and Firm

The fit between the employee and the firm is something that goes beyond technical compatibility, referring to the alignment of values, goals, and organizational culture. Considering the NBA, this becomes crucial to understand how players can integrate into teams and compete at a high level. As discussed by Ng et al. (2009) job embeddedness plays a pivotal role in examining this type of fit, in fact, it includes personal connections and cultural alignment. Analyzing the results previously exposed, it is possible to see how personal factors like the level of coordination or the amount of people of the staff that operate for the wellness of players play a significant role in increasing performance. For instance, players who excel in highly coordinated environments are likely to increase their performance under coaches who require more coordination, while individuals who perform better in a low coordinated environment will have better performances under coaches who give more freedom to players.

Job satisfaction, which is a description of the extent to which an individual is content or at ease with his or her job (Ali, 2016), is a key component of job embeddedness and is closely linked to

this type of fit. Players who are highly satisfied by their team will face a lower level of turnovers and will increase their performance, this satisfaction is influenced by organizational culture, wellness programs, mentorship opportunities, or leadership development. The more a player feels the support of the organization the more he will be loyal to it and will play in a better way.

In NBA the fit between employee and firm can be considered as a dynamic one, considering variables like injuries, trade, wins, and losses. However, it is fundamental in the transition period, when a player changes team or when he comes back to a previous one, in this case establishing or maintaining the fit becomes pivotal in order to gain higher performances. This is the reason for which tailored onboarding programs or continuous professional development, can significantly influence the ability of a player to adapt and perform in a team.

5.4. Role of Organizational Structures

Organizational structures are an important aspect the determines the career path of NBA players and their performances, through the influence on development, integration, and contribution to the team. The way in which they are designed can either create opportunities for players or act as barriers to players' development.

According to the theory, there can be several types of organizational structures ranging from the simplest one to more complex and with higher levels of bureaucracies. In NBA teams with a flatter hierarchical structure tend to facilitate the development of players, considering that in those types of teams, there is not a single player who has more importance than the others and consequentially will have better performance, however in these cases each player has his own importance and the possibility to emerge, giving more possibility for upward mobility. On the contrary, in teams with a defined hierarchical structure and centralized decision-making, there is a single player that has more importance than the others, this one has more possibilities to play having the ball in his hands, and consequentially he has more possibility to emerge as a leader, while the other players of the team will have less possibilities to be noted by other team or by the coaching staff, having less possibility of upward mobility and more for lateral mobility, in fact they can be traded to a different team to have the same residual role.

Contingency theory states that there is no best way to manage a team, instead the optimal way to make a decision is contingent on the internal and external situation (Fiedler, 1964). This can be applied to the NBA considering that teams with a higher ability to adapt to internal and external

factors have more possibility to succeed. This adaptability may involve adjusting team roles, revising strategic priorities, or reshaping organizational hierarchy.

5.5. Examining Roles in Employee Integration

The integration of new players into NBA teams, as well as boomerang ones, is a complex process that requires attention to several factors like age, hierarchical status, and level of organizational support. However, this process is fundamental in determining the future performance of the player. New hires bring new perspectives, skills, and energy to the team, but in order to increase the general performance of the organization they must be properly introduced to the organizational culture, dynamics, and structure. As highlighted by one of the linear regression models analyzed above and already discussed in this chapter, training programs as well as the structured onboarding processes play a pivotal role in this aspect. During these occasions, there is the possibility to align new joiners with the team's strategic vision and expectations, at the same time they need the correct support and guidance, that let them integrate into the team's framework.

Boomerang employees bring a blend of familiarity and new experience, when they arrive in the new team, they already know the culture and structure, however, they need to be taught to changes that happened during the gap years, in order to let them integrate to the new framework that is adopted by the team.

The role of hierarchical status in the integration process is also important, in fact player that join a. new team by covering a higher role than the one of the previous team will perform better, highlighting the aspect that giving responsibility to new joiners can enhance their sense of belonging and commitment to the team.

5.6. Comparison of New Hires and Boomerang Employees

New Hires and boomerang employees present different challenges and opportunities for organizations. New hires bring new perspectives and skills that can reinforce the team and foster innovation (Hallenbeck, 2018). They are considered investments in the company's future, and their integration into the organizational culture and workflow is crucial (Allen, 2006). The integration process requires inducing new hires to the company's values, expectations, and operational norms. A successful onboarding process can drive higher job satisfaction, better performance, and reduced turnover rates. New hires usually require more time to reach full productivity, but drive towards

innovation and challenge of the status quo, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability.

Boomerang employees come with familiarity and new experiences obtained during their time away. They often are faster in the learning curve due to their prior knowledge of the company, which can lead to quicker contributions to team productivity (Sonnenberg, 2019). Their previous relationship with the company means they already understand the organizational culture and workflow, reducing the time for acclimatization. However, the success of boomerang employees is not sure due to possible changes in team dynamics, organizational culture, and the individual's own growth during their absence (Hom, et al. 2017). If the organizational environment has evolved, boomerang employees may face unexpected challenges in re-integrating, potentially leading to a mismatch between expectations and reality. Their return may also influence the existing team dynamics, requiring careful management to guarantee their successful reintegration and contribution.

This study indicates that boomerang employees might face more performance challenges than new hires, considering the reduction of 9.60% in PER once the player comes back to the team, even though this analysis is not extremely significant from a statistical perspective. The data collected shows that boomerang employees usually face an important decrease in performance when coming back to a company, potentially due to shifts in team composition or organizational changes that occurred during their absence (Shipp, et al. 2014). These challenges can occur because of changes in leadership, new strategic priorities, or shifts in team structures that modify the environment. On the other hand, new hires are slower in integrating into the team, however, they can benefit from onboarding processes and targeted training, that allow them to adapt to the organization (Bauer, et al. 2007). These programs are designed to equip new employees with the tools and knowledge necessary to succeed. Both groups of employees require support to maximize their contributions, new hires are required comprehensive training and mentorship programs, and boomerang employees are useful initiatives to help them reacclimate to the evolved environment and reconnect with old colleagues. Understanding these dynamics enables organizations to better support their workforce, leveraging the strengths of both new and old employees.

5.6.1. Insights into Performance and Integration

Performance and integration of both new hires and boomerang employees are crucial to maintaining and enhancing the efficiency of the team. For those who enter a new organization onboarding processes are important to understand the company's values, culture, and procedures, giving them the possibility to contribute and align their efforts with organizational goals. The

effectiveness of these programs can significantly impact their performance and career trajectory within the company (Saks & Gruman, 2011). Proper onboarding helps new hires build the necessary skills, understand job expectations, and form connections that are crucial for their integration and future career path. Mentorship can further enhance this process by providing them with ongoing support and guidance, helping in navigating organizational complexities and develop their careers. Besides the onboarding process, it is crucial to provide employees support and wellness during the period in the company, because it is proven to increase the performance of the employee, who will be more committed to the company.

Boomerang employees often require different forms of support to reintegrate successfully. To ensure successful reintegration, companies might provide them updates on new processes, or enhance network activities between colleagues, and provide support to fill gaps in their current knowledge or skills (Stam, et al. 2010). Additionally, the age and the length of time spent away from the organization plays a crucial role in their performance once came back to the company. Older employees, or the ones that stays away for a longer period, require more time to re-adapt to the company. Age-related factors, such as adaptability to new technologies, can impact integration and performance. Organizations that recognize and address these factors can better explore the advantages of both new hires and boomerang employees, enhancing overall performance and cohesion. By adopting a flexible and inclusive integration strategy companies can create a supportive environment for new joiners that enhance the potential of all the employees, even the ones that already are in the company, driving sustained success and innovation.

5.7. Implications for Organizational Design and Talent Management

The findings of this study previously presented have significant implications for organizational design and talent management both in the NBA and in other types of organizations.

One of the key implications for organizational design is related to the need for a company to have a flexible and adaptive structure that can integrate new joiners. Having structured onboarding, training, and mentorship to new hires with the goal of aligning them with the team's culture, values, and strategic goals is fundamental to making them work in the most efficient and efficacious way, increasing their performance.

Teams that adopt flat hierarchies and decentralized decision-making processes give more possibility to every member of the team to emerge and develop his skills and capabilities. This factor can influence the long-term career path of an individual, in fact, this possibility makes employees more committed and increases their sense of ownership, resulting in an increase of job satisfaction that reduces the possibility of job turnover. For the same reason, wellness programs and continuous learning are pivotal elements in the definition of the career trajectories of employees.

This study also underscores the importance of hierarchical status in the definition of player performance, this has been analyzed considering minutes spent on the court, reflecting in important learning, that to better integrate a new joiner is fundamental to give him the most time on the court possible, that reflects to firms in more tasks given to the employee.

5.8. Contributions to Existing Literature

This study makes several contributions to the existing literature on career mobility, organizational design, and talent management. By analyzing the factors that contribute to job changes this study integrates human capital theory, social exchange theory, and organizational design theories creating a comprehensive framework for understanding career mobility. Through the interplay between individual skills, organizational structures, and social networks this study provides a deep understanding of how these factors collectively influence job trajectories and a holistic view of career mobility highlighting the importance of both individual and organizational perspectives to enhance career outcomes.

This study highlights the importance of flexible and adaptive organizational structures in increasing individual performance and defining career mobility, this aspect is aligned with the broader theoretical framework that emphasizes the need for a multifaced approach to career mobility.

This study reinforces the literature on firm-specific human capital by highlighting the importance of job embeddedness and the fit between organizational culture and individual capabilities in order to define player performance and career. The findings presented highlight the need for continuous learning, adaptability, and alignment between individuals and organizational goals to foster firm-specific human capital and achieve long-term success.

5.9. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue to analyze the dynamic of career mobility using data provided by other professional sports leagues. Thanks to this type of study, they may reinforce the analysis conducted on boomerang employees, trying to find a deeper dataset for this specific category, in order to obtain statistically significant data. Moreover, they may analyze the influence of individual characteristics, such as personality traits, motivation, and resilience, in determining career paths and performance. Understanding this influence could provide a deeper view into the factors that drive success at work.

Another area of interest could be the impact that external factors, such as economic conditions, industry trends, and technological advancements, on career mobility, and organizational design. Considering that industries are constantly evolving, it will be important to understand how these factors shape careers and organizational strategies. For example, the increasing use of data analytics and technology in sports management presents new opportunities for enhancing player performance and career mobility but also raises doubts about how these tools can effectively be integrated into existing organizational structures.

Finally, future research may investigate the long-term impact of career mobility and organizational design on the team performance and success. Longitudinal studies that take traces of the relationship between career mobility, team dynamics, and organizational performance over time could provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to continuous success. These studies may also analyze the potential trade-offs between short-term performance gains and long-term career development.

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