Turning Up by Turning Over: The Change of Scenery Effect in Major League Baseball

Abstract

Purpose This study examined a "change of scenery" effect on performance in Major League Baseball (MLB). We also tested this effect for voluntary versus involuntary employee departures, as well as employees returning to a past employer.

Design/Methodology/Approach This study uses publicly-available MLB performance data from 2004-2015. The data comprise of 712 team changes for players following two consecutive years with the same organization. Data were analyzed using MANCOVA to assess the impact of changing teams on player performance.

Findings Results indicate players with declining performance benefited significantly from a change of scenery. Following a team change, these players experienced a significant increase to their performance that remained stable through a subsequent season. The effect was not different for players who changed teams via trade and free agency, and was modest for those returning to a past organization. Analysis also showed that players leaving while their performance was improving suffered a subsequent performance drop-off in the new organization.

Implications As the war for talent escalates and employees change jobs more frequently, extending our understanding of how performance can be influenced by work context may provide new insight into organization staffing policies.

Originality/Value Results extend field theory by highlighting how past performance interacts with new work contexts to influence performance. This is one of the few studies evaluating the job change-performance relationship, and perhaps the first to account for the effects of performance trends prior to exit.

Introduction

As loyalty between employers and employees has waned, the modern workforce has become characterized by shorter employee tenures and frequent job hopping (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Twenge, 2010). Despite the increasingly transitory nature of employment, the effects of job change on employee performance remain relatively unexplored. While past research (Bateman, Karwan, & Kazee, 1983; Dalton & Todor, 1979) suggests some individuals might benefit from changing organizations, the scarce work on this topic has focused more on individual attitudes than performance. For example, work on the "honeymoon-hangover effect" suggests that entering a new organization may bolster individual job satisfaction (Boswell, Boudreau, & Tichy, 2005; Boswell, Shipp, Payne, & Culbertson, 2009), but does not address performance outcomes. Extending this research to the performance domain is important because employee exits rarely mark the end of careers, and the effects of increased worker mobility have yet to be explored. Explaining the ways in which changing work context impacts performance could therefore provide new insight into the transitory nature of 21st century employment.

One setting where the role of changing work context in performance has been debated is professional sports. Sports commentators sometimes suggest that a "change of scenery" may reverse an athlete's declining task performance. While the effect has support from some commentators (e.g., Mannix, 2012; Sheehan, 2011), others remain skeptical (Shandler, 2010; Weinstein, 2013), and the benefits are more assumed than empirically known. Management research, even research drawing on samples from professional sports, has likewise not investigated the change of scenery effect. For example, Bateman et al. (1983) drew on a sample of 97 Major League Baseball (MLB) players in comparing the performance of players traded during the season versus those traded between seasons. Results showed in-season trades spurred

higher performance, while between-season trades had no impact. Although this study provides a useful starting point, it does not address the change of scenery phenomenon because it fails to account for whether player performance was in decline prior to the team change (and thus necessitated the change of scenery), or the role of the team change in *restoring* player performance. Hence, despite debate on the topic, the change of scenery effect remains speculative.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine the proposed change of scenery effect among professional athletes. We define the change of scenery effect as a performance improvement among players whose *declining* task performance precedes leaving one organization and joining another. Viewing the change of scenery through the lens of field theory (Lewin, 1951), we seek to empirically uncover and assess this effect in a sports context. In so doing, our aim was to expose the potential implications for personnel theory and practice in the field of management. We investigate our hypotheses by studying the batting performance of MLB players from the 2004–2015 seasons. Specifically, we used MANCOVA procedures to assess performance differences from seasons prior-to and after team changes among those experiencing declining performance. We further tested the effect's stability by examing performance for players' second seasons with a new team. As "not all turnover is equal" (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008: 234), we also compared the change of scenery effect for voluntary (free agency) and involuntary (trades) job changers. Finally, in order to give additional credibility to our findings, we 1) contrasted our tests against the universe of players from the same time period who were in decline but stayed with their teams, and 2) examined the performance effect for players who changed teams while their performance was stable or improving. In contrast to research highlighting the negative effects (Baruch, 2004; Becker &

Haunschild, 2003), findings shed light on a positive yet unexpected consequence of the frequent job changes prevalent in the modern workforce by showing that exiting an organization and joining another may be a positive development for employees when their performance is in decline. We also uncovered another phenomenon, that those leaving when their performance was stable or ascending experienced a drop-off upon entering a new organization, what we termed a "grass isn't greener effect."

Theory and Hypotheses

Field Theory

Field theory (Lewin, 1951) is predicated on the idea that individual behavior is the product of an interaction between the person and the environment in which the person exists. Lewin (1939) referred to this interaction as the individual's "life space" or "psychological field." Lewin represented this interaction with the symbolic expression, $B = f(P,E)$, where behavior (B) is a function of the person's psychological state (P) and the environment in which they exist (E). What distinguishes field theory from other theories of work environment is it explains the ways in which environmental stimuli create differential, rather than isomorphic, responses among individuals within the same work context (Martin, 2003). For example, field theory suggests an external shock to all members of a field may unmoor some, but leave others unaffected. These divergent outcomes are a result of the ways each person's unique past lived experiences, or "psychological past," influence the ways in which people experience environmental stimuli (Lewin, 1943; Martin, 2003). It is therefore the interaction of the individual and the environment that creates variance in behavior. Put differently, field theory suggests individuals can exist in the same context, experience the same external stimuli, but have different reactions based on their psychological past.

Applied to the employment context, field theory has the potential to provide significant insight into the proposed change of scenery effect. Lewin (1943) suggests one's psychological past influences the way people experience disruptions to their psychological field, such as changing organizations. Those with declining performance are likely to be in a significantly different psychological state than those with stable or improving performance. Thus, leaving one organization and entering another (changing the environment) should constitute a very different experience for those in decline compared to those who are stable or improving. The similar experience of changing organizations should have a differential impact on the behavioral performance of those individuals because of their differing psychological states. It is this differential impact to which we now turn.

Hypotheses

Research on organizational entry has mostly focused on topics such as socialization (Allen, 2006; Finkelstein, Kulas, & Dages, 2003), identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1995), and training (Holton, 2001; Saks, 1994). Common to this research is focus on the effects of post-entry interventions. Research on the "honeymoon effect," which suggests that entry into a new organization may be accompanied by positive perceptions and anticipation (Boswell et al., 2005), addresses entry somewhat differently by suggesting that exit decisions are usually preceded by job dissatisfaction. Although focusing on attitudes rather than performance, this research sheds light on the influence of prior employment even after joining a new organization. The honeymoon effect suggests an individual may perceive a new job as more satisfying because organizational entry engenders positive affect and commitment, and separates them from dissatisfying elements in past employment (Boswell et al., 2009). However, in the context of

performance, field theory suggests the effect of changing organizations should be subject to boundaries based on the individual's interaction with their past, specifically past performance.

From a field theory perspective, individuals with declining performance have a negative psychological past. Changing one's environment by leaving one organization and entering another should disrupt this negative life space and improve performance. Conversely, those with stable or improving performance have a more positive psychological past. Changes to the environment, such as leaving the organization and entering another, may disrupt the favorable interaction of personal states and the work context. Put differently, the effects of a change of scenery should be predicated on whether the person leaving has a negative psychological past in their previous environment (declining performance) or a positive psychological past in their previous environment (stable or improving performance). The change may be beneficial when interrupting a negative life space, or detrimental when interrupting a positive life space (Lewin, 1943). We therefore propose the positive change of scenery effect exists only for those with previously declining performance. In fact, changing organizations when one's performance is stable or improving could yield negative effects because it will separate an employee from an environmental context that is facilitating performance. According to field theory, employees leaving under these conditions may find that the "grass isn't greener" in a new organization. These arguments lead to our first set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: For employees with declining performance prior to changing organizations, performance will be significantly higher the year after joining a new organization.

Hypothesis 2: For employees with stable or improving performance prior to changing organizations, performance will be significantly lower the year after joining a new organization.

Another debate regarding the change of scenery involves the stability of the effect. Research suggests the positive affect and commitment resulting from organizational entry will be followed by a decline, or "hangover" in job satisfaction (Boswell et al., 2005; 2009). This is supported by studies demonstrating similar declines in attitudes as employees move from newcomer to veteran phases (Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Vandenberghe, Panaccio, Bentein, Mignonac, & Roussel, 2011). However, research on performance suggests that employees gain greater ability as they accumulate experience (Ohly, Sonnentag, & Pluntke, 2006; Quinones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995), and that performance behaviors become more stable with repetition (Turner & Fern, 2012). This suggests the hangover effect may be less pronounced or even absent with regard to performance.

Field theory also has potential to shed light on this debate, as Lewin's (1941; 1943; 1951) work addresses behavior stability. As we suggested in Hypothesis 1, leaving an environment where an individual has experienced a negative psychological past should improve performance behavior. Field theory holds that this behavioral trajectory, what Lewin (1951) calls "locomotion," will continue until some force puts a stop to it. Locomotion suggests that individuals prefer to continue moving forward, and will repeatedly draw upon known behaviors, even ineffective ones, in order to stay in motion (Kruglanski, Pierro, Higgins, & Capozza, 2007; Pierro, Giacomantonio, Pica, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2013). Past research demonstrates that employees will continue drawing on their repetitive known behaviors, regardless if the behaviors are effective or ineffective (Turner & Fern, 2012). With regard to the change of scenery effect, field theory suggests that those with declining performance may continue performing poorly as long as their context remains stable. Because a change of scenery restores performance by disrupting an individual's psychological field, performance increases are likely to remain as long

as the context is not disrupted (i.e., the individual stays with the post-change organization). Thus, for those with declining performance prior to changing teams, the change of scenery benefits should remain into a second year following a job change.

Hypothesis 3: For employees with declining performance prior to changing organizations, the improvement proposed in Hypothesis 1 will exhibit stability such that performance will remain significantly higher in the second year after joining a new organization than in the season prior to the joining a new organization.

This logic also applies to those who have stable or improving performance prior to changing organizations. Hypothesis 2 suggests those with stable or improving performance will experience performance declines upon leaving their prior organization and entering another because they are separating from a context where they have a positive psychological state. Individuals remaining in their new environment after this change could continue to struggle as they use performance habits that may be less congruent with their new employer. Although Lewin (1951) suggests forces may eventually interrupt this locomotion, such as when individuals use temporal landmarks to separate from past failures (Dai, Milkman, & Riis, 2014; Peetz & Wilson, 2014), the general pattern of poor performance will likely continue with contextual stability. Thus, the negative effects for those with previously stable or improving performance proposed in Hypothesis 2 should remain into the second year with a new organization.

Hypothesis 4: For employees with stable or improving performance prior to changing organizations, the negative effects proposed in Hypothesis 2 will exhibit stability such that performance will remain significantly lower in the second year after joining a new organization than in the season prior to joining a new organization.

An employee may change jobs either voluntarily (such as an employee quitting or professional athlete leaving through free agency), or involuntary (such as an employee dismissal or professional athlete being traded). Although increasing in frequency, job changes are not easy and are widely recognized as being very stressful. Involuntary separation can place an individual in the unenviable position of accepting a position in a new uncertain environment without the benefit of fully weighing the new organization's pros and cons. By contrast, voluntary leavers may have more choice in job search activities, and be more likely to find better employment contexts (Gottschalk & Maloney, 1985). The differing circumstances under which each of these job seekers changes jobs may have implications for the change of scenery effect.

Field theory suggests that individual behavior is an outcome of interacting personal states and environmental context. For voluntary leavers, professional athletes and otherwise, the environmental disruption is self-imposed and the opportunity to choose one's new organization may place these individuals in a positive psychological state. However, for involuntary leavers, the change of scenery may be dampened by the circumstances in which a job change occurs. Although declining performance may be indicative of a negative life space, research suggests that not all employees, even poor performers, are interested in leaving the organization (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012; Woo & Allen, 2014). An uninitiated disruption, which may be unexpected or unwanted, could be detrimental to one's overall psychological state.

Although our sample of MLB players does not face the same pressures as the average worker, voluntary and involuntary job changes will likely have similar effects. Free agents have the opportunity to seek out the organization they believe will be most conducive to their performance and comfortably transition to the new organization. Even when they are unable to sign with a preferred destination, there are typically other favorable options. While players may

request trades, these job changes can also be as unexpected and unwanted as an involuntary employee dismissal. An involuntary separation may increase the likelihood of a player joining a team under uncertain conditions or in a negative psychological state. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that even players traded unwillingly can benefit from this change of scenery. Hence, while we expect both voluntary and involuntary leavers with prior declining performance to benefit from a change of scenery, these effects should be stronger for those who leave of their own volition.

Hypothesis 5: For individuals with declining performance prior to changing teams, performance will be significantly higher after voluntarily leaving one organization and joining another.

Hypothesis 6: For individuals with declining performance, job performance will be significantly higher after involuntarily leaving one organization and joining another.

Hypothesis 7: The performance effects from a change of scenery will be significantly higher for voluntary job changers than involuntary job changers.

Former employees can be a beneficial source of human capital for organizations (Shipp, Furst-Holloway, Harris, & Rosen, 2014). Research indicates that these "boomerang employees" return to organizations primarily for convenience reasons such as availability, proximity, and security (Loan-Clarke, Arnold, Hartley, & Bosley, 2010). Although boomerang employees' prior experience makes them aware of the negative elements in the work environment, research suggests that individuals are better able to overcome performance barriers when they are cognizant of these constraints (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Furthermore, even though individuals return primarily for convenience reasons (Loan-Clarke et al., 2010), their reentry should be accompanied by a more positive psychological state as a result of their existing knowledge about the organization. This prior experience in the organization should allow them to have more

accurate expectations for the work setting and a better understanding of how to perform in that environment. While some of the hindering environmental elements might be unavoidable and temper the benefits of entering a new context, boomerang employees should still benefit from a change of scenery.

Hypothesis 8: For individuals with declining performance, leaving one organization and returning to an organization where they were previously employed (boomerang employees), performance will be significantly higher upon organizational entry.

Methods

We drew upon the offensive and defensive performance of MLB position players from the 2004-2015 seasons to test our hypotheses. Professional baseball is an ideal setting for studying individual performance for a number of reasons. First, the popularity of professional baseball has made these records accurate, transparent, and widely available. Second, although baseball is considered a team sport, it is highly individualized. In particular, performance is influenced much less by the skill of teammates than in other sports such as football or soccer. Third, in contrast to individual sports (e.g., tennis, golf), professional baseball players are members of a "home" organization from which relocation effects may be evaluated. MLB teams play 162 games, with each team playing almost every other team several times. As a professional league, each team is considered arguably comparable to every other team. Although each at-bat represents one batter's performance against a single pitcher, the large sample and repeated exposure to mutual opponents will result in each batter facing a consistent level of competition over the course of a season. This makes season-to-season comparisons valid. Finally, batting and fielding performance can be measured on an 'at-bat' basis for batting and a 'per chance' basis for

fielding, which allows for valid comparisons between individuals with greater and fewer attempts.

To test our hypotheses regarding the change of scenery effect (Hypotheses 1, 3, and 5-8), we examined all MLB players who had season-over-season declining performance prior to changing teams and had 100 plate appearances in both the season prior-to and after team change. This criterion was chosen for three reasons. First, it was the minimum number of plate appearances necessary to exclude pitchers, those for whom batting performance is not considered a primary task. Second, this criterion reduced the likelihood of random variation influencing the analysis. Finally, 100 batting attempts in a season has been the criterion for inclusion in past studies of MLB performance (Bateman et al., 1983). The time frame was chosen to coincide with the end of the performance-enhancing drug (PED) era in MLB, during which batting statistics were inflated due to the reportedly widespread use of PEDs (Tobin, 2008). MLB implemented a PED testing program between the 2002 and 2003 seasons that aimed to end their use. To allow any residual effects to subside, we analyzed data from 2004 to the most recent 2015 season. The final sample consisted of 422 MLB player team changes that met these criteria.

To test our contrasting hypotheses regarding the negative effects of job change on those with stable or improving performance (Hypotheses 2 and 4), we examined all MLB players with season-over-season stable or improving performance prior to changing teams. Inclusion criteria and the time frame were the same for those with declining performance. The final sample of those with stable or improving performance was 290 MLB players. Thus, the total sample was 712 players who changed teams in the study period.

Measures

Batting performance was captured using three metrics, one traditional measure and two sabremetric. Sabremetrics were developed to assess a player's overall performance rather than a single component of performance (Grabiner, 1994). Each measure considers performance on an at-bat or plate appearance basis, which allows for comparison between players with greater and fewer attempts. Defensive performance was captured using the traditional measure of fielding percentage. Using four measures allowed us to confirm the pattern of our findings across different metrics.

Batting average. Batting average is a traditional measure of performance that represents a player's number of hits divided by his number of times at-bat. Batting average has been used in prior studies on baseball performance (Bateman et al., 1983). We also used batting average to determine whether player performance was in decline.

OPS. On base plus slugging (OPS) is a sabremetric measure of that assesses a player's combined ability to reach base and hit for power. It is the sum of a player's on-base percentage (number of times reaching base divided by number of plate appearances) and slugging average (total bases divided by number of at-bats).

wRC+. Weighted runs created plus (wRC+) is a sabremetric measure of a player's overall offensive contribution relative to other players. wRC+ attempts to place a value on hitting outcomes while accounting for contextual factors, such as league and park. Each individual score is the normalized rate at which a player created offense better or worse than the league average, with the league average normalized and set at 100. A wRC+ score of 110 suggests that player created 10% (110 – 100) more runs than league average for that season. Alternatively, a wRC+ score of 90 (90 – 100) means that player created 10% fewer runs than league average.

Fielding percentage. We included fielding percentage to account for defensive performance. Fielding percentage is a traditional measure of the rate at which a defensive player successfully converts or assists others to convert a batted or thrown ball into an out. It is the sum of the player's putouts and assists divided by total fielding chances (putouts + assists / chances).

Team change. Team change was coded "0" for the pre-team change season and "1" for the season after team change. For hypotheses 3 and 4, the second season after a team change was coded "2" if a player remained with the same team.

Free agency. Players changing teams via free agency were coded "0", players who were traded were coded "1."

Boomerang employees. Employees entering an organization for the first time were coded "0"; boomerang employees were coded "1."

We included four covariates in all analyses: Age, team winning percentage, career batting average and league change.

Age. We included player's age in years to account for the effects of a player's declining ability.

Team winning percentage. We included team winning percentage as a covariate to control for any performance effects associated with the success of the team. Although the advantage of studying performance in a baseball setting is its individual nature, controlling for team effects helps ensure the credibility of the findings.

Career batting average. We included the player's career batting average in order to control for the effects of regression to the mean. Given that our hypothesis is a change of scenery will restore player performance to its "normal" levels, career batting average is likely highly correlated to our study DV, as it is naturally correlated with "normal" performance. However,

team change remaining a significant factor while controlling for career batting average should provide credibility for the effects of team change regardless of regression to the mean.

League change. Because there are slight differences in the American and National Leagues of MLB, with the primary difference being the designated hitter rule, we controlled for a player changing from one league to the other (0 = remained in the same league, 1 = changed leagues).

Analysis

We performed multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) procedures in SPSS 23 to test our study hypotheses.

Results

Means, standard deviations and correlations of study variables are presented in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 proposed that those with declining performance would have significantly improved performance from a change of scenery. Results from MANCOVA analyses support this hypothesis, as performance after a team change was significantly higher (Wilk's $\Lambda = .97$; F (4, 835) = 6.92, $p < .01$). Examining the individual variables, Table 2 demonstrates that performance improved on all measures, and that improvement was significant for all except fielding percentage.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

In order to account for regression to the mean as an explanation for our findings, we tested these effects on the universe of players in performance decline who stayed with their teams (n = 922), and assessed the differences in performance change between the two groups (team changers versus stayers). Although players who stayed also experienced a performance increase, results from repeated measures MANCOVA demonstrate the improvement for team

changers was significantly higher than the improvement for stayers (Wilk's Λ = .99, F (4, 1363) = 2.63, $p < .05$). Univariate tests showed the performance improvement was higher for those who changed teams all variables, and statistically so for all but fielding percentage. Thus, this analysis provides additional credibility for the change of scenery effect.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that changing teams would have a negative effect on players with stable or improving performance. MANCOVA results presented in Table 2 support this hypothesis, as performance after a team change was significantly lower (Wilk's Λ = .93; F (4, 579) = 11.53, $p < .01$). Examining the individual outcomes, Table 2 demonstrates that performance declined on all measures, and that decline was significant for all except fielding percentage. Again, to account for concerns about regression to the mean we compared the performance drop-off for those who changed teams with the universe of batters who were improving and did not change teams (n = 1103). Results demonstrate that players who changed teams experienced a greater performance drop-off (Wilk's Λ = .99, F (4, 1536) = 2.36, $p < .06$). The drop-off was also greater for team changers on all individual measures, but not significantly so for any single measure. Given that the team change was significant even while controlling for multiple covariates, and that we found significant differences in the contrast with players who stayed with their teams, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed the change of scenery effect would remain into the player's second season with a new team. MANCOVA analyses presented in Table 2 support this hypothesis (Wilk's Λ = .92; F (4, 571) = 6.55, $p < .01$). Examining the individual variables, Table 2 demonstrates that the mean difference was higher for all individual performance measures, and significantly so for all but fielding percentage. Thus, the change of scenery effect exhibited stability into a second season after team change. Figure 1 demonstrates the overall

pattern of these results: a reversal of declining performance due to the change of scenery effect, and stability of the effect into the second season with a new team.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Hypothesis 4 proposed that the negative effects proposed in Hypothesis 2 would remain into the second year with the new team. MANCOVA analyses presented in Table 2 support this hypothesis (Wilk's Λ = .87; F (4, 227) = 8.28, p < .01). Examining the individual metrics, Table 2 shows the mean difference was significantly lower for all batting metrics, and lower but not significantly so for fielding percentage. Thus, this effect exhibited stability into a second season after team change. Figure 2 demonstrates the pattern for those with previously-improving performance across multiple seasons.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Hypotheses 5 proposed that the change of scenery effect would be significant for players with declining performance who left through free agency. Results from MANCOVA support this hypothesis (Wilk's Λ = .96; F (4, 389) = 4.12, p < .01). Table 3 shows that players leaving via free agency improved on all individual measures, although only significantly so on batting average. Hypothesis 6 proposed that the change of change of scenery effect would be significant for players with declining performance who left through trades. MANCOVA results support this hypothesis (Wilk's Λ = .97; F (4, 437) = 3.11, p < .05). Table 3 shows that players leaving via trade experienced improvement on all measures, and that the improvement was significant for all but fielding percentage.

Insert Table 3 about here

Hypothesis 7 proposed the performance improvement would be greater for voluntary scenery changers (those who left via free agency) than for involuntary scenery changers (those

who left via trade). A simple examination of the results from Hypotheses 5 and 6 suggest this is not the case, and results in Table 3 from MANCOVA contrasting the improvements for those who left via free agency and those who were traded show that the differences are not significantly different (Wilk's Λ = .99; F (4, 413) = .97, p = NS). Thus, hypothesis 7 is not supported; the change of scenery effect appears to be the same for voluntary and involuntary leavers. Hypothesis 8 proposed that boomerang employees with declining performance would benefit from a change of scenery. Although the sample is quite small, results support this hypothesis (Wilk's Λ = .90; F (4, 105) = 2.83, $p < .05$).

Discussion

We investigated the proposed change of scenery effect among those with previously declining performance. We also examined these job change effects for those with stable or improving performance. Findings provide robust support for the change of scenery effect among those with previously declining performance, and for a negative, grass isn't greener effect among those previously improving performance. Our contrasts with players who had declining and improving performance but stayed with their teams provided additional credibility to our results. Findings also suggest the change of scenery effect does not differ for voluntary versus involuntary departures, and supported the effect for boomerang employees.

Theoretical Contributions

Our findings contribute to theory in several ways. First, we shed light on the highly debated change of scenery effect in professional sports. Although sports commentators have discussed this notion for some time, this study provides empirical support for the idea that changing one's work context can restore declining performance. Results also suggest that changing jobs may harm employees with stable or improving performance. While the main focus

of this paper has been a change of scenery, this finding addresses another common adage and underlying driver of employee turnover: employee belief that "the grass is greener on the other side" (Boswell et al., 2009; Swider, Boswell, & Zimmerman, 2011). Changing jobs resulted in a performance drop-off for individuals who left when performance was improving, suggesting that when one is performing well in one organization, the grass isn't always greener elsewhere. Taken together, these findings provide credence for the idea that one's personal state can interact with context to impact performance.

Findings also build upon existing job context-performance research by considering the interaction of individual performance trends and job change. The change of scenery and grass isn't greener effects extend field theory to the realm of performance by highlighting the importance of one's performance trajectory when moving to a new context (Ouellette & Wood, 1998; Turner & Fern, 2012). Consider the performance trajectories depicted in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 demonstrates that those with declining performance reversed the decline by changing teams, while figure 2 shows how stable or improving performers suffered. Individuals embedded in environments where their performance was on a negative path were impacted quite differently by changing teams than those whose performance was on a prior positive path, supporting Lewin's (1943) notion that psychological past interacts with environmental stimuli to influence behavior. In the current study, it appears the change in work context impacted people differently based on their performance trajectory before changing teams. Both figures also demonstrate the stability of each effect as performance improved even more in year 2 for those benefitting from a change of scenery (Figure 1) and only modestly recovered in year 2 for those suffering the grass isn't greener effect (Figure 2). The stability of the effects support Lewin's (1951) notion of behavioral locomotion in the realm of performance.

Finally, findings regarding form of separation and boomerang employees shed additional light on personnel issues. Results demonstrate that the ability to choose one's new organization is beneficial for players with previously declining performance. While we did not hypothesize differences in free agents and trades for the grass is greener effect (those with improving performance prior to leaving), post-hoc analyses demonstrate both voluntary (Wilk's $\Lambda = .91;$ $F(4, 319) = 8.36$; $p < .01$) and involuntary (Wilk's $\Lambda = .94;$ $F(4, 251) = 4.02$; $p < .01$) leavers have similar decreases in batting average that are not statistically different (Wilk's $\Lambda = .99;$ $F(4, 281) = .70$; p = NS) thus the method of departure may be irrelevant to the grass is greener effect. Thus, our findings suggest that separation form is only relevant for the change of scenery effect, and modestly so. Although our sample of boomerang employees was small, findings suggest these employees experience some performance enhancement via a change of scenery. This work supports the viability of boomerang employees as a potentially rich source of labor (Shipp et al., 2014). The small number of boomerang employees with improving performance did not allow us to test hypotheses concerning the grass is greener effect. Future research might consider this effect for boomerang employees.

Directions for Future Research and Limitations

These findings also point to opportunities to synthesize field theory with the theory of behavioral consistency. Field theory suggests that each employee's unique psychological past can influence how they react to environmental stimuli (Lewin, 1951) and may explain how similar employment experiences can invoke differential responses. While our findings do not directly address the relationship between past behavior and future behavior, they do give rise to the idea that context may play at least some role in the relationship. As the person and environment interact repeatedly, employees may develop favorable work patterns that allow

them to perform more effectively (Ohly et al., 2006). While these patterns are generally effective predictors of future behaviors, prior studies have demonstrated the need to assess behavior consistency across multiple work contexts (Jansen et al., 2013). Our study highlights how changes to the environment may impact this interaction pattern, and thus potentially influence the relationship between past and future behavior. In fact, these results may even contribute to explaining how individuals may demonstrate change in attitudes and behaviors that are normally consistent across time and contexts (Judge, Simon, Hurst, & Kelley, 2014). Although Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2000:53) suggest individual behaviors are "determined by past behavior and not mediated by attitudes, intentions, or other concepts referring to more deliberate or conscious processes," the possibility exists that there may be moderators of the relationship. Given our findings, future research might investigate the possibility that a change to one's context may play a moderating role. Such an inquiry could also explore Mayes's (1978) theory on the ways in which environment activates behavior.

One limitation of this study arises from questions about its potential generalizability to more traditional employment contexts. Clearly MLB is a unique context with employment aspects that are not present in traditional settings. Unlike most settings, many MLB players earn salaries measured in the millions of dollars. Employees likewise are not traded between organizations in most traditional settings. However, because of the transparent data and individualized nature of baseball performance, we believe the findings are trustworthy in this setting and potentially shed light on the role of work context in performance. Future research should examine the effects found here in these more traditional settings to see if they are indeed transferrable.

A second limitation comes from the archival data used in our analysis. The limitations of these data required theoretical, rather than empirical explanation of any intervening mechanisms. For example, we could not assess how players respond to weather differences from their prior city to their new one, or account for routine factors such as the player's placement in the batting order. Although we believe field theory and the literature on work context offered here provides a rich explanation for the ways in which changing teams impacted performance, future research should extend this work by measuring the psychological mechanisms that might play an intervening role in this process. Finally, our measures of performance, while broad-based, were not inclusive of all aspects of a baseball player's value to an organization. For instance, we did not consider extra-role behaviors such as leadership or mentoring. These skills are important for team success, but are not easily measured or readily available to the public. Although these questions are not suited to studies of archival data such as ours, future research might consider how changing work contexts impact such extra-role behaviors.

Finally, because of the nature of our hypotheses, regression to the mean is a concern. For example, the thrust of Hypothesis 1 was players that experience performance declines will return to "normal" performance by changing teams. Thus, a product of returning to "normal" is that performance will trend back toward the mean. We took several steps to alleviate concerns that our effect is explained by regression to the mean. First, we controlled for career batting average in all analyses. The significant change of scenery effect with this covariate in place suggests the effect is not primarily explained by regression to the mean. Second, we compared our analysis of team changers with an analysis on players with declining performance who stayed with their home organization. Results showed that the improvement for team changers was significantly

higher, suggesting regression to the mean was not the primary explanation for our findings. We took the same steps for Hypothesis 2.

Practical Implications

Our study has the practical implications for personnel management. First, findings suggest selection criteria that favor past performance may incorrectly flag adequate job candidates. Managers might consider whether these otherwise strong applicants may benefit from a change of scenery into their workplace. Results suggest organizations can gain utility form this segment of the applicant pool, which may appear undesirable but can actually be a source of advantage in the war for talent (Ployhart, 2006). Professional baseball teams might use "buy-low" strategies to target declining performers in hopes the change of scenery will result in the player outperforming their perceived value. Furthermore, while organizations typically pursue the best performers, these findings suggest this strategy may be counterproductive as they may overpay for these employees.

Study findings also highlight the significant role of context in employee performance. Employee attraction and retention are critical issues for organizations, and a recent field study on the work expectations of the millennial generation suggests that the increasing frequency of employee job-hopping is likely to continue (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). This suggests that in order to effectively manage human capital, organizations might consider adapting their strategies to accommodate the next generation of employees (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Given the value the millennial generation places on work environment (Ng et al., 2010), hiring organizations should be aware not only of how context affected past performance, but also how it may impact these individuals as they enter their new organization.

Our study also has implications for personnel management in MLB. First, our results suggest rewarding one's own players who are performing well with large free agent contracts might be a better investment than luring high-performing players from other organizations. Our results also provide a potential explanation for why players in ascendance suffer performance declines upon signing lucrative free agent contracts, such as the much-publicized case of Bobby Bonilla. Bonilla's batting improved from 1990 (.280 BA/ .840 OPS/ 127 wRC+) to 1991 (.302 BA/ .883 OPS/ 150 wRC+) for the Pittsburgh Pirates. He subsequently signed a 5-year, $29 million contract with the New York Mets to become the highest paid player in baseball, and saw his batting performance (.249 BA/ .780 OPS/ 121 wRC+) decline for the following season. Given our findings, such expensive acquisitions may not be justified if based strictly on expected performance. However, other considerations such as the player's fan appeal or the prospect of keeping that player away from a rival organization may make the investment warranted (especially when that organization is a division rival like the Pirates were for the Mets in 1991). Our findings also highlight the value of a potentially untapped source of talent: those who have performed well in the past but have experienced a decline with their current organization. Given the lack of salary cap in professional baseball, small-market clubs with financial constraints might become more competitive from utilizing this labor pool of discounted players with potential to exceed their value.

Concluding remarks

Beyond baseball, the idea that changing one's location can restore lost performance is manifest in many ways. Individuals often cite the need to "get out of this place" when things become stale, as evidenced by people setting up work stations in libraries and coffee shops. While the notion of a change of scenery as a means to restore performance has previously been

driven by anecdote, our analysis sheds light on its potential benefits for human performance. We hope our study serves as a conduit for translating this idea from the realm of sports to organizational life.

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Table 1 Correlations and descriptive statistics for study variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Batting average	.255	.04	-									
2. wRC+	92.35	26.77	.73**									
3. OPS	.719	.10	.76**	.96**								
4. Fielding percentage	.983	.02	.03	.08**	.06*							
5. Age	30.64	3.63	.04	.03	.04	.13**						
6. Winning percentage	.50	.07	.09**	.12**	.10*	.05	.10**					
7. Career batting average	.264	.02	.52**	.29**	.32**	.03	.27**	.10**				
8. League change	.24	.43	-.01	-.01	-.01	.00	.02	-.01	-.01			
9. Free Agent	.46	.50	-.03	-.02	-.01	-.01	.36**	.07**	.03	-.05		
10. Trade	.54	.50	.03	.02	.01	.01	-.36**	-.07**	-.03	.05	-1.00**	
11. Boomerang employee	.06	.24	-.02	-.02	-.02	.08*	.16**	.04	-.04	.04	.12**	-.12**

Note. N = 712 players; 422 players in performance decline; 290 players in performance ascendance.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table 2 Analysis of performance measures

	Performance Decline				Stable/Improving Performance			
	H1- Change		H3 - Stability		H2 - Change		H4 - Stability	
MANCOVA Analysis	Wilk's Λ	F	Wilk's Λ	F	Wilk's Λ	F	Wilk's Λ	F
Covariates								
Age	.95	11.62**	.98	1.43	.99	1.84	.97	1.56
Team Winning Percentage	.99	2.42*	.99	.49	.98	2.39*	.97	1.64
Career Batting Average	.71	84.50**	.71	30.29**	.66	74.83**	.66	29.55**
League Change	1.00	.27	1.00	.00	.99	1.18	.99	.70
Fixed Factor								
Team Change	.97	6.92**	.92	6.55**	.93	11.53**	.87	8.28**

	Performance Decline				Stable/Improving Performance			
Univariate Analysis	M	SD	*n*	*F*	M	SD	*n*	*F*
Batting Average								
Season Prior to Team Change	.242	.031	422		.276	.026	290	
Season After Team Change	.252	.038	422	18.22**	.259	.037	290	42.18**
Second Season	.257	.034	149	11.41**	.263	.036	118	28.13**
wRC+								
Season Prior to Team Change	83.45	24.17	422		105.51	20.74	290	
Season After Team Change	89.90	27.66	422	9.01**	95.69	28.70	290	12.02**
Second Season	94.37	27.03	149	9.41**	97.80	27.99	118	14.41**
OPS								
Season Prior to Team Change	.689	.093	422		.769	.081	290	
Season After Team Change	.708	.106	422	4.96*	.730	.108	290	15.44**
Second Season	.722	.102	149	4.47*	.738	.107	118	19.02**
Fielding Percentage								
Season Prior to Team Change	.982	.015	422		.983	.014	290	
Season After Team Change	.983	.014	422	.00	.982	.017	290	1.48
Second Season[a]	.983	.015	149	.00	.983	.014	118	2.36

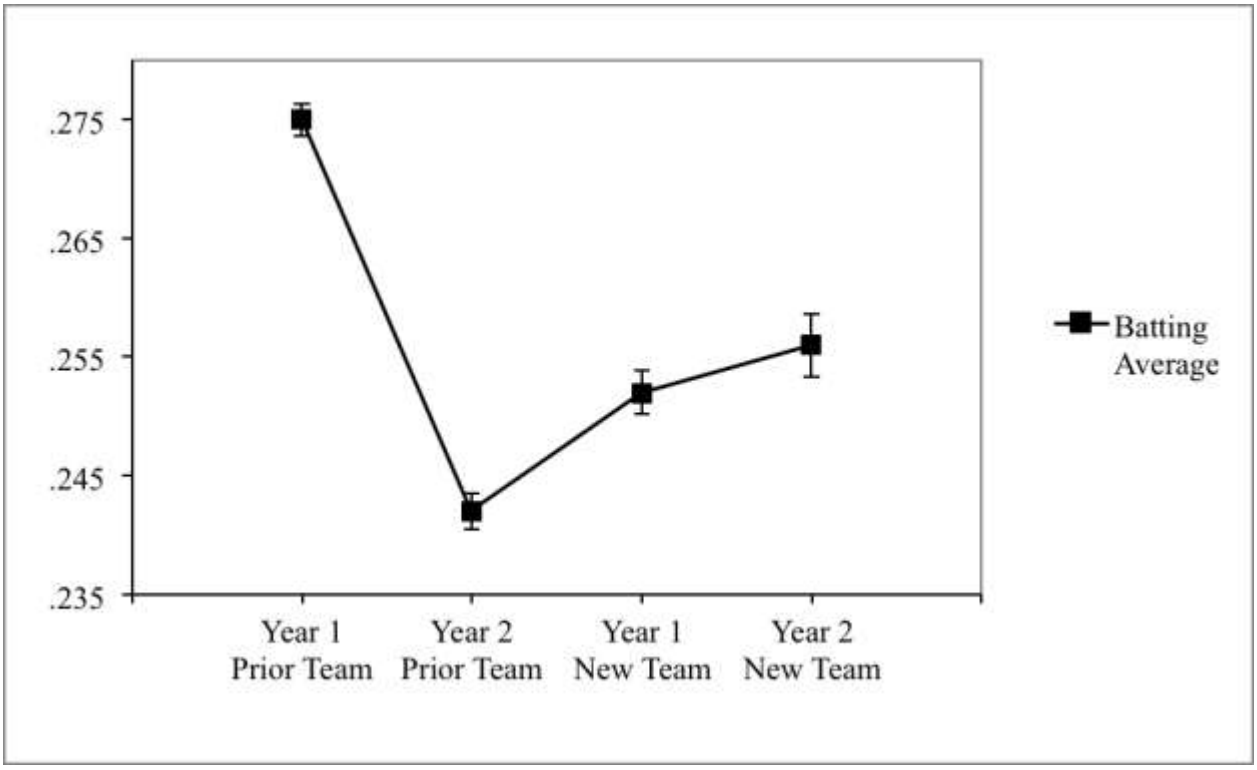
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table 3 Analyses of trades, free agents and boomerang employees

	H5 - Free Agents		H6 –Trades		H7 – Trade vs. Free Agent		H8 - Boomerang	
MANCOVA Analysis	Wilk's Λ	*F*	Wilk's Λ	*F*	Wilk's *Λ*	*F*	Wilk's *Λ*	*F*
Covariates								
Age	.95	4.69**	.94	7.13**	.98	2.30	.95	1.45
Team Winning Percentage	.97	3.31*	1.00	.58	1.00	.27	.97	.95
Career Batting Average	.75	32.99**	.68	50.66**	.99	.58	.92	2.23
League Change	.99	.79	.99	.74	1.00	.41	.97	.90
Fixed Factor								
Team Change	.96	4.12**	.97	3.11*			.90	2.83*
FA/Trade X Team Change					.99	.97		

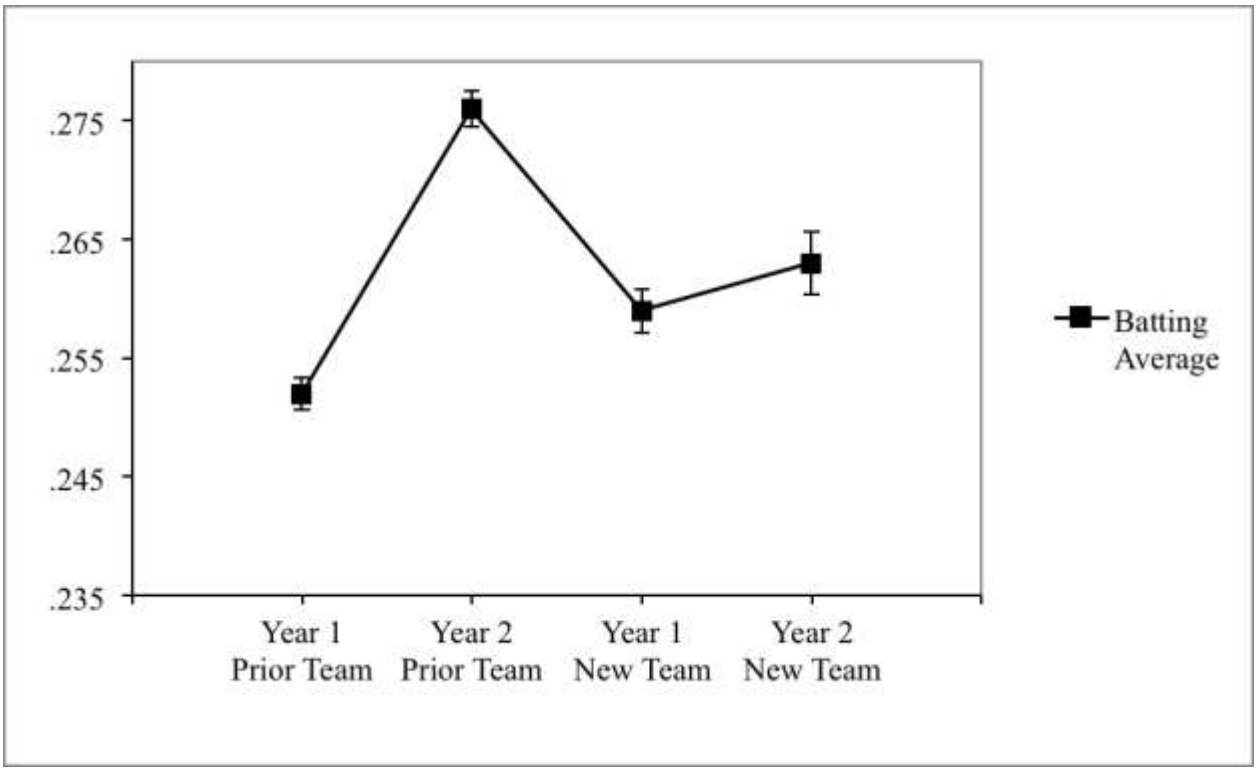
	Free Agents				Trades				Boomerang			
Univariate Analysis	M	SD	*n*	*F*	M	SD	*n*	*F*	M	SD	*n*	*F*
Batting Average												
Season Prior to Team Change	.240	.031	199		.244	.031	223		.236	.028	57	
Season After Team Change	.249	.037	199	6.66**	.258	.038	223	10.38**	.250	.030	57	5.88*
wRC+												
Season Prior to Team Change	82.86	24.08	199		83.97	24.30	223		75.36	24.53	57	
Season After Team Change	87.94	26.58	199	2.93	91.66	28.53	223	6.57*	87.70	24.37	57	7.61**
OPS												
Season Prior to Team Change	.688	.094	199		.688	.092	223		.661	.086	57	
Season After Team Change	.701	.101	199	.84	.714	.111	223	4.85*	.702	.096	57	5.49*
Fielding Percentage												
Season Prior to Team Change	.983	.016	199		.982	.014	223		.981	.017	57	
Season After Team Change	.983	.014	199	.07	.984	.014	223	.06	.986	.012	57	2.30

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
† $p < .10$



Note: Standard error bars are displayed at each data point.

Figure 1 Change of scenery effect among leavers with declining performance



Note: Standard error bars are displayed at each data point.

Figure 2 Grass isn't greener effect among leavers with improving performance