



HR Practices in the Soccer Industry: Promising Research Arena

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ABSTRACT

Human resources (HR) practices have been extensively researched in the management arena, mostly in firms' context. Yet, there are many other contexts that have enormous potential for more investigation with regard to selection, pay, and turnover intention. One of these contexts is soccer teams, a game that has enormously grown in the last 50 years, and it continues to grow at even larger scales, exceeding all national, religious, and ethnic considerations. This paper considers the possibility of varying ways that HR-related practices may differ in soccer teams depending on factors such as race and tenure. The growing numbers of non-European players in European teams represent a phenomenon that deserves some attention, especially as to how teams in Europe select their players, what factors influence their decisions, how pay is allocated, and what are the mechanisms through which career mobility for soccer professionals occur. In this paper, I present a framework for soccer teams' HR practices and the theoretical arguments underlying their acts to improve our understanding of these practices in soccer context. My hope is to start a discussion that would continue to develop overtime so we can reach a mature and well-developed framework for the recruitment practices and their outcomes in the soccer context.

Keywords: Human Resources Practices, Sport Teams, Hiring, Career Mobility, Soccer Teams Human Resources Strategies

JEL Classifications: M52, M55, O15

1. INTRODUCTION

Sport teams have long been a major topic in the business arena. Scholars in management arena have studied baseball teams and used different theoretical lenses to derive relative hypotheses that are related to strategy, human resources (HR) practices, and performance.

The selection topic has been extensively explored in the business compass, mostly for firms and organizations. Yet, there are many contexts and industries such as soccer industry has not been looked at by management scholars. It is noteworthy that HR systems and practices should be diverse based upon the organizational processes and domains to which they are being applied (Medcof and Song, 2013). Most often scholars have used Baseball teams to conclude some theoretical and practical implications for practitioners and scholars (Crocker and Eckardt, 2014; Timmerman, 2000). However, soccer teams as profitable organizations that do business seem to have drawn little attention in the management field, more specifically in the HR arena

although, this sport has been enormously expanding in the U.S, not to mention the that soccer industry accounts for Billions of dollars (Unlucan, 2015).

Highly talented employees are sought after by companies due to the potential value added and their contribution into a desired sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Barney and Wright, 1998). In the same sense, highly skilled and talented players are sought after by soccer teams' technical managers. Yet, there's little known as how the selection decisions of professional soccer players are made, what criterion are used, what are the contingencies upon which the success of selection depend in terms of selected players' added value, and what factors are emphasized, and what factors are under-emphasized, and finally what makes players want to stay or leave.

High pay, team standing, reputation of the management, coach influence and reputation, and also country specific factors such as: Spectators' attitude, weather, and culture and language fit, as well as similarities of the play styles could all play a role. In fact,

there is also little literature with respect to these issues in the HR arena. Despite the fact that soccer game is considered among the most rich industries in the world (Forbes, 2015), and despite the fact that its core pillar is the human individuals' capital (Bloomfield et al., 2005; Gil et al., 2007; Perciballi, 2011), I am surprised by the fact that very little attention has been given to this topic in the strategic HRM, as well as personnel management in general.

Few studies have recently started utilizing the soccer teams' context to test new theoretical perspectives in the management and business arenas. Zepp et al. (2015) studied the relationships between symmetry and complementarity and the performance and well-being as the outcome variables in soccer teams. Barros et al. (2014) studied French soccer teams from macro perspectives where they used the operational technologies used by French clubs in earning points and maximizing revenues. Fillis and Mackay (2014) studied the effect of social integration on fans loyalty; the emphasis was on marketing behavior of teams to increase consumers' fanaticism. Whitehead et al. (2014) studied the most recently played world cup and how the home field advantage can be reduced by the participating teams. Bachan et al. (2014) studied the effect of the racial composition of the national teams as well as the race of technical manager of the team on team performance, and found that racial diversity was not significantly related to the outcomes, however, they did find a significant support for coach nationality for England team, but the opposite was found significant for France team.

However, these may not be the only factors that influence the HR practices and the teams' outcomes. Moreover, the country to which a professional player belongs seems to play a role as well. For example, players from Africa with high qualification and admirable skills may not have the luxury to choose because of the situation in their countries, which make them vulnerable to team's opportunism and their agents' opportunism as well. As pointed out by the diversity literature and social science literature, some races and ethnicities are being mistreated. In selection however it's no exception; black people is have long suffered the mistreatment at workplace, in selection, and in lay-offs decisions. In this paper, I focus on three HR-related processes: Selection, pay, and turnover. This paper aims at starting a more integrated debate among management and HR scholars regarding the various ways that HR related practices in soccer teams may differ from those being implemented by firms and other organizations. We focus on the selection of the players, transference, pay, and some team-specific factors that may influence the decisions of players, as well as those of the team officials. We show that there are noteworthy considerations that may have been overlooked in other contexts such as the organizational contexts. The hope is to initiate broader debate that can enhance our understanding of the ways that soccer teams may actually be different from the typical firms, in which most research has theorized.

2. BRIEF DESCRIPTION ABOUT SOCCER

The utilization of sport teams is quite popular by management scholars. In a search I did in the journal of management, the utilization of sport teams yielded 80 articles, 6 times in the academy

of management journal, 2 times in the strategic management journal. However, to be more accurate, the utilization of baseball teams is much more popular approach due to the availability of data, with even higher number of appearances in the management recognized journals.

A soccer team comprises of players which is equivalent to employees. Players are divided into two categories: The 11 main players who start the game, and other 11-13 players on the bench as substitutes. Substitutes are meant to take role when a main player is injured, tired, or is not performing well. Technical manager is the person in charge and who selects the formation, plan, and put strategies for the season. Also, he selects which players he wants to bring in to the squad, and which ones he wants to sell based upon many considerations. The managerial head is the one who coordinates between the board members including the president and the team including the tech coach, managerial head, and the players.

The game has been dominant in most parts of the world; it has been drawing the attention of sportsmen in the United States, and recently has started gaining some momentum with regard to its popularity.

Performance of soccer teams is measured in wins and losses, trophies, and financially in terms of how much money the club as a whole has made. Typically, there are three types of teams: Superior teams, average teams, and low-rated teams in each league in the European countries.

Superior teams are teams that have decent number of titles and trophies, decent fans' base, and strong financial capacity. Moderate teams are teams that have somewhat good number of trophies and good financial position. And finally, low-rated teams that are financially weak, and often struggle to stay in the first national league.

From an HR standpoint, the employees are the most important pillar for a soccer team. There are several factors that influence selection and contracts. Some of these factors depend on the reputation of the player, his experience, and his previous stats with his team or with previous teams. Some teams follow a home-grown strategy, others use a buy from the market strategy, and other teams use a mix of both strategies.

Soccer players who are well-known, highly skilled, and have excellent stats will have the opportunity to select from different options. This depends on the extent to which they themselves do not have preferences regarding language spoken in the host country of the buying team, cultural similarity with their home country, having friends and countrymen, and also the set of players with whom the player is going to play, as well as the technical manager-player fit, plan of the team familiarity, and also the pay would play important role in many cases.

It is my goal to shed light on the relationship between the cultural backgrounds of the soccer professionals when they are employed outside their countries, which have been phenomena, especially

in Europe. Since players come from different backgrounds, there is a reason to believe that the newcomers will have less stability, low performance, and less ability to contribute into the team performance which will increase their turnover intentions. This relationship is expected to be stronger for players who come from different background in terms cultural norms and different language. The host country fans of the team will also play a significant role in whether the newcomer will have the potential to feel welcomed, get socially integrated into the new environment, and improve their performance. For instance, some players who come from Latin American countries have performed poor in England and Italy, but have significantly improved their performance in Spain. There is very little work that has been done in that regard. Most of the sport literature has focused on other factors such as high pay. Yet, some players might disregard the pay difference in order to feel integrated and comfortable in the country that their team is located.

It's been argued that soccer professionals from different ethnicities will experience impulsive degrees of cultural assimilation when they are employed in a foreign team as professionals (Konter, 2009; Perciballi, 2011). However, structural integration of soccer professionals seems to be a promising avenue for more exploration, and thus the potential interactions that would affect the player performance and contribution to the team. We know as a fact that professional soccer players come from different countries, including African countries, Asian countries, Latin American countries, and other countries in addition to the within-Europe transfers of players.

I feel it would be very interesting to see how the differences between these countries would determine several processes, including how technical managers select their targeted players and make their recommendations to make contracts with them and bring them in. what are the determinants of such selection process? And why it is important to improve the selection mechanisms? It is well- known that soccer contracts have been enormously increasing for professional players, and teams that would invest in such players need to make sure they reduce the turnover, unless, they will even earn profits by selling players to other teams. For instance, a team may buy a player with little experience if they see a potential of adding value to the team, filling a position that needs be filled, or if the managers feel it's worthy to bring such player, give him some time playing, improve his performance in short time, and then sell in the market again to make some profits. However, this process, although, intensively used by soccer teams as a way of making money, very little in the literature has focused on the factors and the processes underlying these transactions.

The extant literature on the way that soccer players are selected is, to large extent, under-researched. (Bloomfield et al., 2005) studied four major leagues in Europe, which is the context of this study, including Italy, England, Spain, and Germany. This study aimed at identifying which league (English Premier League, Spanish La Liga Division, Italian Series A and German Bundesliga) have the highest quality players and whether differences in age, stature, body mass and other physical traits would exist between

different positions in different leagues. The results found that there are huge differences, and that these differences are due to many factors including playing styles in each league, physical demands of the different leagues, different physical conditioning methods or, alternatively, that there are desirable characteristics of players with teams in all 4 leagues seeking such players. Bloomfield and colleagues findings suggest that each league has some distinguished features.

These features would influence the selection of particular players by the technical managers, and by the board members. Super-stars policy has been somewhat controversial. It has not been showing strong effects on the team overall performance in terms of trophies and titles won. Take for instance, the two famous teams in Europe Manchester City and PSG which were bought by gulf princes, the two clubs have been buying super stars and yet the results did not show that they have contributed largely to the wining of major titles such as their national league, Europe champion's league, and Europe cup. Hence, there is a motive to argue that it is very important to look at it from a different lenses, using the standards used in such selection, and whether this policy has brought in the actually needed players to perform specific tasks in the team. Furthermore, the characteristics of those available players, as well as those who make decisions of selection, and finally the duties expected from such players, their previous experiences including which league they have been playing in, what team strategy they have been used to, in what level of competition the players have been put, and more importantly the communication methods available.

3. THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT IN HR THEORIES USING SPORT TEAMS AND EXTENDED ARGUMENTS FOR SOCCER TEAMS

Numerous perspectives and theoretical lenses have repeatedly been presented, developed, and tested based upon baseball teams' data. The reason as I said earlier is the availability of data for the most part, and to some extent relativity of constructs applicable in business firms and sport teams. In a recent study, Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2015) studied the effect of organizational identity on both team cooperative behavior and team performance. The study found that the relationship is positive and significant between these constructs. The study built upon the extant literature and hypothesized that both team identity and organization identity would have significant impact on the performance.

In the same sense, soccer team needs to have a positive atmosphere, needs cooperative tactic, and needs also cohesiveness since the nature of the task is highly interdependent and success requires all members' efforts together. It's a collective game not an individual game. Thus, one might argue that when the team as an organization has a unique identity, very good reputation, decent titles and trophies, this would reflect on its members as they would most likely have developed strong loyalty and pride to be members, and they would be working hard in a cooperative approach to keep their team competitive.

In relevance to selection, team decision makers would also make sure to select the appropriate players that would fit well with the existing players, be cooperative, and have similar traits in terms of personality, and also have previous experiences that are similar in both quality of play and level of competition in previous teams.

In baseball teams for instance, Taylor and Giannantonio (1993) argued that baseball teams need highly distinguished players, who have shown great potential to contribute to the team's performance, thus baseball teams focus on external recruitment. Tyler and Giannantonio stressed that because baseball teams require continued high performance, players tend to turnover at higher rates.

The concepts presented by Taylor and Giannantonio emphasized that firms differ from sport teams in the sense that they depend on internal labor promotion, and that external recruitment is central in baseball teams because of the need for ready players. In soccer teams, it has been the case that most teams-especially superior teams- prefer to hire highly talented players, depending on their financial positions, specific needs, and also the team standing (superior, average, and low-rated).

The superior teams are much more interested in highly skilled players, who have potential to contribute to the sustainability of the team superior performance. However, these teams sometimes select skilled players, but do not succeed later on in improving or sustaining performance, resulting in turnover or selling the player.

The adaptation plays central role after the player has been selected and joined the team. The adaptation in a soccer team is similar to the organizational adaptation which is defined as "the process through which an individual comes to understand the values, abilities, expected behaviors and social knowledge that are essential for assuming an organizational role and for participating as a member" (Taylor and Giannantonio, 1993. p. 474). Individuals' ability will depend on their personality and social skills, thus they are likely to adapt well when they have already gathered information about the team, team members, have developed connections inside the team, and also have some experiences in different teams that improved their adaptability. This is to say, that when the team decision makers want to select player, they prefer players with higher adaptability skills, and also with the specific skills they need for the vacancy available in the team.

Diversity scholars suggest that diverse teams perform better because of the informational richness resulted from different skills and talents in problem solving and cognitive resources (Bell, 2011; Cox and Blake, 1991).

In soccer context, statistics have shown that it is teams that have diverse compositions that have been dominating in winning titles and trophies (Marcos et al., 2010; Perciballi, 2011). Thus, soccer teams in Europe have been the largest market for soccer professionals from all over the world (Forbes). That said, decision makers in soccer teams take into consideration that it would be better for them to select players from different backgrounds and different countries, perhaps sometimes even more economical

when buying players from Africa and Latin America. However, this may not hold true in all events. In some cases, and especially when the team has specific character and need specific traits in the potential player, they might be limited to the availability of the required players, and the decision may not be taken in accordance with the optimal requirements. Additionally, superior teams prefer ready player with European experience to avoid any unexpected drop in performance due to the time needed for new players to adapt, especially those from different continent.

Though one view suggests that diverse teams don't essentially have the same level of productivity as their homogenous counterparts (Byrne, 1971), because of the similarity attraction, and therefore homogenous teams perform better than diverse teams (Wiersema and Bantel, 1992).

One can argue that a more integrated approach is more appropriate in understanding the underlying factors that would determine the optimal level of diversity, particularly in soccer teams. Put simply, an approach that can incorporate both diverse teams' advocates and opponents.

It's been shown that diverse teams do better jobs in soccer context, but also these diverse teams are somewhat homogenous in many regards, including cultural factors, race, ethnicity, play-style, and other relative features.

Without team fit and cohesiveness, a soccer team cannot do well (Carron et al., 2002; Hogg, 1992; Marcos et al., 2010). This requires the decision makers to sense the existing group of players before making selection decisions for new needed players for the team. For example, Barcelona (The most dominating team in the last 10 years in Spain and Europe) follow a strategy that takes into account the opinions of the existing players, or at least the influential ones, and that was the case when they brought in three players based upon the recommendation of their super star Lionel Messi, those players were very close friends, two of which are his countrymen (Messi is the best player in the world for 4 times in a row in the last 5 years). It should be noted though, that in some countries, research has shown that fans dislike cultural diversity which is for instance the case in England (Amenta et al., 2012).

Two of the most debated factors that are said to have varying effects on team performance are age and race (Bell and Harrison, 1996; Bell, 2007; Hoch et al., 2010; Morales and Marquina, 2009; Streufert et al., 1990; Timmerman, 2000). Timmerman (2000) found that age was not related to performance when the task required little to no interdependence, the author used baseball teams as one sample of study.

However, the age diversity was negatively related to performance when the task required more interdependence (the second sample: Basketball). Furthermore, the author found that race diversity was negatively related to performance when the task required high interdependence of its members and unrelated to performance when task required little interdependence. This is to say, soccer teams do require high coordination, cooperation, and mutual understanding inside and outside the pitch, and the soccer team task requires high

interdependence. Though, race diversity may not negatively affect performance in soccer teams for many reasons: 1. some races may differ but they still have the same culture and the same language such as Portugal, Spain, and many Latin American countries, as well as France and many African countries 2. Many players may have developed friendships with other players in different teams. 3. The nature of soccer game is more dependent on technical and operational strategies emphasized by the technical managers. Hence, if all players understand it well, the impact of race diversity may decrease 4. The existence of many migrants from the same countries that most professional soccer players come from help creating a community for such players. 5. The availability of information about the teams and players, their life styles, play styles, personalities all make it easier for new players to come prepared and expect what is required and what is undesired when coming into new teams.

Age and race have been addressed by some social science scholars in the European context. For instance, Ashworth and Heyndels (2007) analyzed how age grouping in soccer education programs affects the wage distribution at the professional level in the German soccer league. The author found that younger players earn more than those who are older.

In Belgium for example, the presence of foreign professional players have decreased the chances of young players to appear in official games. The soccer federation in Belgium had to modify some regulations for the 2nd and 3^d national divisions, in which teams were mandated to include at least 2 national players of age 21 or younger (Vaeyens and Philippaerts, 2004). Romann and Fuchslocher (2013) found that bias exists in selecting younger players for soccer teams in Switzerland. Age was found influential in the selection decision, especially for positions such as defenders, where preferred age is older and for goalkeepers too. By selection here, the author does not address selection from HR standpoint; instead he addresses selection of the main 11 players who play the game from beginning. Franck and Nüesch, (2010) found that talent disparity turns out to be beneficial for the team at the seasonal level, not single match's level. The author also finds that teams developed homogeneity over time, and thus performance improved due to the increased interaction. An important study done by Pearton and Maguire (2000) pointed out that due to socio-economic and political factors, most soccer professionals have selected Europe as their preferred destination, namely England, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Tavana et al. (2013) were among first and very few scholars to study the process of selection in soccer teams and how the team formation is a key factor in determining the success of the team. The coaches collect information about the best available choices; they analyze such information in accordance with the existing players' positions and styles, as well as the potential fit and harmony for the incoming players with the existing team. The evaluation of the alternatives is also influenced by the available players in the market, whether the team has a home-grown players who can fill the vacant position, and also whether the player has played similar style, same or different league, and whether his numbers are strong or not. These standards however vary based upon the available budget. Some teams have the financial capability to buy highly

skilled players; some teams have only limited financial capability. This affects the selection process and outcomes.

The number of trophies that the previous team of a player has achieved will positively influence the decision, increase competition upon the player, and thus increase his offered package. The fierce competition between teams in the La Liga for example has increased the offer for the Brazilian Neymar from Barcelona, so the main opponent of Barcelona which is Real Madrid doesn't get the player. So, it is obvious that the level of competition between competitors in same league can lead to higher offers for highly skilled players. However, only when a team is in need for such player they can offer them high pay, assuming the team has the financial resources at hand.

The self-esteem and self-achieved would also play important role in determining the extent to which a player would prefer to stay or leave. Some players might be receiving decent salaries, especially in teams that are financially strong and owned and managed by rich investors. However, this may not be a motive to stay, if the player does not participate in enough minutes on the pitch as a player soccer career is all about number of minutes played and how much value during these played minutes he adds to the team by scoring, assisting, or making unique input.

In sum, I expect that players' previous experiences, age, and overall personality which entails adaptability and social skills, all will be positively related to the selection chances by soccer teams. However, based upon the financial strength of the team, the team standing and performance, the selection preferences will vary. Superior teams will likely be more interested in ready players, super stars, and players with European experiences. Low-rated and average teams will be more likely interested in second-class players, younger players, and players from different contexts other than the European market because their financial capacity is limited.

- Proposition 1: The financial position of the team will be positively related with preference for players with European experiences.
- Proposition 2: The players' skills, experiences, number of trophies, and overall personality will be positively related to the amount of pay a team will offer.
- Proposition 3a: Age of player will be positively related to experience, and thus b. to selection by superior teams, c. the relationship between age and selection is stronger for players who have European experiences.
- Proposition 4: The European experience will positively moderate the relationship between players' skills and his pay offer.

4. SOCCER PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS AS HUMAN CAPITAL: DIFFERENT SELECTION, PAY AND TURNOVER IMPLICATIONS

In a soccer team, cooperation, coordination, and complementation between players are the key to succeed. In support of this argument, (Crocker and Eckardt, 2014) show that the relationship between individual human capital and individual performance is impacted

by complementary functional and managerial unit-level human capital resources.

A team can bring in young player at low price, let him train with the team players, learn, and develop more mature skills. Then will be given the opportunity to participate in games where he will make sure to do well so he can maintain his place in the main list and not the substitute, in such case, the player price will go up, and the team will have more options such as selling these young players in the market if the team has a wide pool of available and equivalent players. In order to do so, the team needs a mixed strategy that uses different approaches in acquiring and accumulating human capital (players) depending on their agenda and objectives, as well as their competitiveness level in the league.

Stumpf (2014) studied the interrelationships between career success, embeddedness, and mobility of early career professional, and how these factors might affect future career success, embeddedness, and future career mobility between and within organizations and occupations. The author does so by studying these relationships over time, a point that is rarely done in the literature. Feldman and Ng (2007) stated that today's careers have become boundary-less in the sense that people can switch easily, as long as there is a demand for their skills. In their meta-analysis, they found that negative relationship between past promotions, job embeddedness, and subjective career success on mobility 1 year later as people began to "settle in". However, if a person fits in an organization, succeeds, and get advanced and promoted as well as pay increase, why not staying. That said, over time; the player will spend more time in team, getting older, making reputation that is attached to the team, he begins worrying about the ability to reach the same level of success he has reached with the current team, thus he is more likely to stay until retirement with his current team.

In soccer context, a player might fit in well, play well, succeed, and get pay increase and more time playing; all these factors shape their career success, their embeddedness, and their decisions for their future. Depending on many factors, including their age, they might decide to either stay, leave, or retire even. Some teams for example grant their players the right to benefit from their personal commercial ads (using players in commercial ads), they fulfill their personal demands, treat them nicely, and thus players might not always consider a pay boost a sole criterion for future decisions.

Moreover, when a player becomes highly recognized by the team and the fans; develop outstanding performance with his teammates; it may be a motivation not to leave if their age has advanced because the player might fear transferring to another team would require adaptability, adjustments, and a whole new system that could end his outstanding reputation result in a failure. Players in soccer teams often retire in the teams in which they achieved the most success because they want to be remembered for that.

Bell (2007) posited that team tenure in organization helps members increase their mutual understanding, reduces the amount of communication required, increases homogeneity, and thus increases performance.

In soccer teams, it is the case that players who have been playing together for considerable number of years develop more cooperative behavior, they also develop mutual respect, caring, and understanding, and they feel that they have become a family. This leads to improved overall performance in terms of titles and trophies won by the team. As for age, it is well known in soccer that new players who are younger are the less experienced ones. Less experienced means they are not yet fully integrated in the team, which means they as individuals won't be able to perform well or best per se. However, over time, and with more support from their mates and more playing time, such players will start developing and improving their performance depending on their adaptability, their communication skills, and their ability to fit well with the existing group of players. It is expected that at younger age, a person may not be able to fit with those who are older, however, if the team has group of outstanding and reputable players, the effect of age may be mitigated in many ways. For instance, if the young player sees a star playing with him in the same team, this creates a motive for him, encourages him to put more efforts, and increase his performance after all.

5. FACTORS INFLUENCING HR PRACTICES AND OUTCOMES IN SOCCER TEAMS: PROPOSED MODEL

Factors influencing HR practices and outcomes in a soccer context are presented in Table 1.

Career system theory proposes that organizational staffing and selection processes are driven by the nature of the business strategy that the organization is pursuing (Taylor and Giannantonio, 1993).

Miles and Snow (1978) and Taylor and Giannantonio (1993) build upon the CST and posited that there are three categories of organizations: Prospectors which are firms that have innovation strategy, defenders who stick to narrow domains and require loyal customers and employees, and finally reactors who have no control over resources and fail to react to competitors' moves.

If I were to extend a parallel arguments to soccer context, it is to say that there are teams that have strong history of achievements, strong fan base worldwide, strong financial position, excellent reputation, and outstanding administrators who maintain such strengths. These teams could be the prospectors. Some other teams do have somewhat good history, good fans' base, good financial position, and good administrators which could be the defenders. The rest are just reactors who have very poor history and just maintaining existence and have survival strategy. Based upon this, the outstanding teams will have more attractiveness in the selection process because of their history, current level of competitiveness, titles and trophies, and not to mention the financial capacity of buying highly talented players. However, the number of these teams is limited and not too many exist in each European league. On the other hand, a player who has no history yet, or perhaps came from Africa or Latin America and still young, and had to go to a B or C class team just to get started, will have limited options at the beginning of their careers as due to the aforementioned reasons. Once he has proven talented, then his

Table 1: Factors influencing HR practices and outcomes in a soccer context

Interactionist	Stages 1a and b	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Player	a.Evaluation of choices b.Selection decisions	Adaptation, integration, socialization and overall play style fit	Performance of player	Turnover intention
Team	a.Evaluation b.Selection	Adaptation and integration (teammates)	Performance of the team	Sell out decisions
Individual and organizational variables	(Previous team country level of competition, previous team competitiveness, cultural fit, race, age, experience, personality, social interaction ability, and play style fit)	(Previous team country level of competition, previous team competitiveness, cultural fit, race, age, experience, personality, social interaction ability, and play style fit)	(Previous team country level of competition, previous team competitiveness, cultural fit, race, age, experience, personality, social interaction ability, and play style fit)	Age, adaptability, pay level, performance, Team members support, technical manager support

star may begin lightening and teams will start looking to hire such players. However, this takes quiet sometime and small proportion of the many players who come at younger age succeed in ending up in an A team. The argument here is that the selection at both sides of the equation (teams and players) is dependent on many factors that influence the decisions.

Barreto (2010) for instance argued that there are contingencies upon which decisions that firms make are dependent. The author posited that there are two contingencies (a) environmental conditions and (b) types of firms. The authors argued that acquiring and accumulating resources strategies are dependent on such contingencies. Several scholars suggested that dynamic capabilities are useful in all sorts of contexts, including dynamic and stable environment (Zahra et al., 2006). However, Barreto's argument is that even though research has shown this is, to large extent, true but still the suggested contingencies may be of crucial effect on both decisions and outcomes for organizations. In a soccer context, decision makers are obliged to make these decisions - assuming rational thinking-, based upon the specific needs of the team. These needs are technically decided by the technical manager, the technical managers often need to consult with the existing players to make sure the new potential players will be accepted by their teammates and thus team will not be negatively affected. Discussion between the technical managers and the administrators include several other factors such as the price, availability of substitutes from within the team, availability of substitutes from other markets in different geographical locations, analysis of the contributions and traits of potential players, and other factors such as possible language and communication hinders, as well as the team objective meaning high aims with high expectations, which is also always influenced by the fans.

The human capital has been researched extensively in the HR and strategy literature. Yet, a recent review on the strategic human capital done by Wright et al. (2014) pointed out that the literature in this arena has developed without adequate "interdisciplinary conversation" (P353). Wright and his colleagues identified six issues that could be of great interest among the strategy and the HR scholars. Among the topics they indicated as important: When does HR strategy takes place outside the HR department; what policies are important to sustain the competitive advantage; how can the human capital be combined with other resources such as social capital and organizational capital.

The human capital is conceptualized in two dimensions in Wright et al. (2014). They propose that the two dimensions are associated with two concerns: One with the level of analysis, and the other one with the characteristics as follows:

Ability	Personality	Skills knowledge	Affect	Behavior
Intra-individual				
Individual	Highly important	Important	Important	Highly important

The authors argued that studies for instance have focused on investors, baseball players, and similar constituents as human capital. They debate that there is a decent literature that has developed on "stars" that are defined as individuals who contribute enormously to the firm. However, the authors also point out that being start may not necessarily mean that you are exceptional in all characteristics, rather it may mean that this particular individual may be the best at one character (soccer player who scores easily without putting too much efforts, meaning that it is a natural talent), or may mean they are not the best at any characteristic or trait but they are doing good overall on all characteristics.

Some stars may not possess all the necessary characteristics. They, perhaps, have some natural talents and skills that appear to be influential in the team performance. However, it is not a surprise that many of such stars in the soccer teams do not succeed in one team, and they tend to turn over even higher than the less skilled players. This, in and off itself, is interesting as it raises important questions: Was the selection decision of those players mistakenly made? And do team characteristics have any influence? And how this turn-over can be understood and used as a reference by soccer teams managers?

In this regard, it is important to know what does human capital means. Becker (2002) defines human capital as "knowledge, ideas, skills, and health of individuals". However, Becker also elaborated and stated that even some bad habits and behaviors fall under human capital. This, to large extent, is true as we cannot separate between the components of set of behaviors that all come to play a role in the workplace, and if it does, how can we still label this human capital as star or exceptional. Ployhart et al. (2014) however provided a more integrated and comprehensive definition. The authors incorporate insights from economic, strategy, HR, and psychology and developed a new framework that is radically different from previous definitions. Their proposed framework re-outlines human capital resources as:

“Individual or unit-level capacities based on individual knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that are accessible for unit-relevant purposes”. That is, the individual capabilities and skills should complement each other; interact with other HR in the firm so they can produce competitive advantage, even if they are not unique.

The argument is that the interrelationships among these KSAOs are the antecedents of created or added sustainable value. As argued by Ployhart and his colleagues “Human capital resources based on interactive or causal complementarities have greater opportunities for enhancing performance and generating competitive advantage than resources in isolation.” (Ployhart et al. (2014). p.385). The reasoning is that because of the complementarity among and between these sets of resources, mobility, imitability, or transferability become difficult.

Taken into soccer team’s context, a parallel argument can be made. Star players don’t, off themselves, make the event. In fact, it is the people around them who can assist them to make extraordinary contributions. However, the reason they are the ones who dominates the scene is that they score. Thus, star players who feel that they are independently outstanding are more likely to fail because of the intentions to earn more money, more fame, and more lights. But how soccer teams decision makers come to decide whether to attract such players or not? Little research has been made on the HR practices and decisions in the soccer industry.

It is important for soccer decision makers to realize that, sometimes, not every star can make unique contributions. Looking at the turnover and the endured losses because of failure in deals that cost teams hundreds of millions, it is reasonable to argue that decision makers did not take into account how well the connection would be between such acquired players and the team as a group. For example: Cultural fit, play-style fit, personality traits, previous positions and roles, previous team’s achievements can all play influential role in the decisions of selection.

The argument made by Ployhart and colleague is that the more connection between the existing and acquired resources, the less likely there is a corresponding strategic factor market for the combination between and among these resources. This argument as stated by Ployhart and colleagues is often used by strategy scholars, yet rarely applied by HR scholars. I extend this argument to apply it in the soccer teams. That is, the more fit between the existing and acquired players, the less likely the outstanding players to turn over.

When a group of players are fit together, homogenous, and have been playing together well for quite some time, they will likely function as a unit, knowing that their reputation is a result of such fit and homogeneity, and will cause somehow a fear of failure if the player is to leave the team, we often see distinguished players refuse higher pay offers just to remain in such atmosphere. This may be good reason to stay in the team unless there is an exceptional circumstance such as other teammate’s turnovers, team crisis, and so on. A parallel argument is found in the

organization literature, the stronger the connections between the human capitals (individuals in soccer context); the less likely there is an equivalent strategic factor market for such human capital (Denrell et al., 2003). This is true notwithstanding the type of human capital resources (generic or specific) (Campbell et al., 2012). The cornerstone of the competitive advantage a soccer team might have because of the great combination of the skills of the existing group of players is not often the type of players-although it is sometimes- but rather their interrelationships.

The strategic characteristics of human capital can be contingent upon many other constructs in firms, teams, and even within people themselves. For example, one might be highly intelligent, highly educated, and in the meantime lack the ability to interact, communicate, and engage in productive and positive relationships with others. In this case, we cannot claim a strategic value is being derived if we were to employ such person in a field, where these lacks can be fatal to the firm or to the team. Therefore, labeling the strategic characteristics of individuals, that can add value, create value, and make exceptional and outstanding contributions, is of great importance for HR scholars, as well as practitioners.

In soccer teams, numbers and statistics are viewed as the most important measures and standards through which technical managers select and utilize the players. However, this mechanism by itself, if applied in isolation to the internal characteristics of the team and the external environment variables could lead to crucial failure at the short-term and long-term range. This is, largely, because of the previous argument that statistics of a player cannot be strategic, unless they have something augmentable, complementary, and also accessible for other team members. Furthermore, soccer game is a group-game where each player puts efforts and the collective efforts result in either intended outcome (win) or unwanted outcome (loss), or even sometimes what you might call even outcome (draw). Hence, it is very important that decision makers in soccer teams take into account the factors upon which the intended value of potential players is achievable and also add true value that differs significantly from the value a team is typically achieving before this new potential player is bought.

In this regard, literature on selection of employees and how firms make their decisions of hiring focused on several aspects. Breaugh and Straker (2000) for instance stressed that firms should establish a set of objectives, upon which they should base their selection. Among other issues, the two authors pointed out that job applicants’ expectations-which in this case a soccer player expectations such as position, whether he will be a major player, and whether he will be allowed to use his own character in making money such as ads, and whether the player’s personal life will be monitored and so on. Altogether, will influence the players’ decisions as to continue in the current team, ask for pay boost, or leave to another team.

While it may be well-known that the money plays significant role in attracting highly talented employees, players in this case; the team’s overall reputation, competitiveness, and other country-level factors as well as cultural factors seem to affect the decisions made by the players or their agents. Take for instance, the Brazilian

player Danni Alves who has been playing for Barcelona in Spain for more than 10 years was offered even more money by PSG club in France and he rejected. The reason as to why he rejected is not officially revealed, but yet it is assumed that both his teammates, and his personal attachment has played significant role. Thus, it is also important to see how such decisions are influenced and how can money sometimes be offset by other factors such as congruency and harmony among team members, personal preferences, and the self-achievement goals.

Ployhart et al, 2004; Meglino et al., 1993; Boswell et al., 2003 all pointed out the importance of previous job experiences, job attributes, employee preferences all play an important role in the decisions made by the employees as to whether accept or reject a job offer. It is also the case that soccer players have preferences. For instance, some players who might come from Latin America would prefer to play in league where the language would not be a hinder, as language is indeed crucial in communicating with other team members, the technical manager, and the personal life too.

Also, the fit between the player's culture and the team's national culture matters too, as we might see from the statistics of soccer industry in Europe; where many players tend to either prefer a team in a country that is similar to what they used to have in their home country or in previous teams, or a team where they might have some sort of social support from semi-nationality players who are playing in the same country.

Bell and Harrison (1996) paper provide insights in this regard and help understanding why some players would fail in some countries, and why some other factors, other than their skills, would be vital. The authors posited that the extent of an individual's bi-culturalism life experience will have positive effect on his development of biculturalism competencies, which in turn contributes positively into their adjustment, adaptability, and performance in other assignments. However, this proposed concept has been supported in the literature regarding expatriates. In a soccer context, this logic can be extended to assume that when a professional foreign player goes on market, the more international experiences they have had, the more likely it is to accept the highest offer where other factors such as host country culture and language, as well as norms and general atmosphere will become less crucial in the player's preferences when making decisions. In the same sense, for players who have only been exposed to one particular culture, play style, language, and related traits; it is highly likely that they would prefer an offer that comes from a team in a country where they can easily adapt, adjust, and therefore perform better so they can stay at the top of their form. Furthermore, those who have been exposed to more than one culture, more than one language, and played in different positions are more likely to have more offers from more teams in different countries, resulting in a bid that would increase competition among teams which favors the player.

In all events, this may also be a misleading argument under some circumstances; where such players may not really fit well in their new teams, based upon the unknown homogeneity and team interrelationships as I mentioned earlier. The positions that the players have played previously, may not be performed in the

same manner in particular teams, although it may be the case. Moreover, in some cases, where the team has already its own stars, who are well-connected to all other team members, and also very much liked and preferred because of the time spent together as a team, it may be difficult for new star to find his way around, depending on his unique input, adaptability, and personality. For example, a super star in soccer that has been the spot of attention in his previous team may not be able to find the same attention in a new team that has also superstar or several superstars, which would affect their performance through psychological processes such as self-esteem and the loose of attention.

Ployhart and Moliterno (2011) posited that the task environment has a central influence on the emergence of human capital. Moreover, these authors proposed what they call "emergence enabling" process, which suggests that individual KSAOs encompass collective human capital resources through a process known as emergence. This process has two major parts, the task environment complexity in which the higher the complexity, the more interaction needed among the human capital, which would result in a different nature of the human capital resource and also its relationship with performance outcomes. However, the authors stated that more importantly, the psychological emerging-enabling states and the extent to which they provide support for the human capital resource are crucial (shared behaviors, values, knowledge, trust and cohesion). In other words, the nature of the task and the psychological support provided by the interactions are both central determinants of whether the individual KSAOs would become a human capital resource. Fulmer and Ployhart (2014) put it in a simpler way; they distinguish between "Human capital" which they refer to as being at the individual level, while the "human capital resource" is referred to as a unit or firm level. Building on these arguments, and based upon the well-known nature of the soccer game; I should mention that an extended picture of what Fulmer and Ployhart proposed can be delineated at the team level as though all players are human capital resource, and otherwise the human capital (player) is not as beneficial for the team as desired. One example to illustrate, the super-star that has strong stats and numbers, cannot succeed in any team by his skills only, if these skills and talents are not put into the service of the team, the team would reflect negatively towards such player, and thus the team performance is expected to decrease.

Fulmer and Ployhart (2014) also elaborated more on the effect of planned interventions on the human capital resources and the outcomes related to it. These authors pointed out that utility analysis was the most frequently used perspective in selection, recruitment, and training. The authors pointed out that utility analysis does a good job in evaluating the financial impact of specific HR intervention processes such as selection and training. However, they also believe that it is not of great help in determining the overall added value of HR capital.

"Utility analysis estimates are unlikely to be helpful for conveying the value of HR to non-HR managers, for linking HR interventions to between-firm competitive advantage, or for estimating the overall value of human capital resources (Fulmer and Ployhart, 2014. p. 179).

In the area of soccer or sport in general, it is well-known that the selection of players is being done mostly based upon the technical manager recommendations. It can be argued that decent proportion of these recommendations end up being executed and in many cases, the selection ends up in a failure and turn over occurs mostly by the end of the first season. In applying the utility analysis logic, if managers are to make accurate, or perhaps less mistaken decisions, there has to be a more integrated approach in evaluating the specific added value of the player, and how this value is going to be created, taking into account all the factors that matter in making up the team performance as one unit. Therefore, utility analysis should be done in line with team characteristic analysis.

Another relative argument presented by Sturman et al. (2008) can be used to elaborate more with respect to selection decisions and preferences of HR managers. Struman et al., (2008) argue that firms value transferrable and specific skills of human capital, yet they also argue that as transferability increases, specificity decreases. They studied 9000 executives' moves between jobs, and find that those CEOs who moved to similar firms, received higher pay increases. They concluded that the increases show that there are different values for different types of human capital. In a soccer team, take a striker for example who has great numbers and many titles with prestigious and elite teams throughout his career. If such player were to transfer, if the choices available are only similar teams, that would make it difficult for him to have much choices, and will be forced to commit to the terms suggested by the team, and therefore will be under the mercy of the team financial managers as for the pay increases, due to the limitedness of choices. Thus, the logic suggested for executives doesn't apply here. However, if transferability is higher, meaning that more teams are willing to buy this player, this will give him more choices and will also increase the pay and then maximize his potential income. By transferability in soccer teams I mean the willingness and ability, as well as decent experiences to play in many countries, different play styles, and also personality that are positively perceived by the overall soccer family.

Wilk and Cappelli (2003) suggest that firms need to improve the fit between the applicant and the organization value using appropriate selection methods and practices. In one of their supported hypothesis, they find that skill requirements will moderate the relationship between training and selection practices where training serves as a substitute for selection at lower skill requirements and not at higher skill requirements. In soccer, this means that even if a potential player does not possess unique skills, but have the potential to improve in a team atmosphere, have the personality traits that fit in the team, and have the basic skills needed in a specific position, or have the potential to be utilized-with training- in different positions, it is better to have such player in the team than to buy a super-star that would not fit, or would not have the necessary personality-traits to accommodate himself comfortably within the team. Thus, in the selection of players, it should be noted that it is important for managers and officials of the soccer teams to consult with the existing players, do more comprehensive analysis which would incorporate all the aforementioned factors in order to make good decisions. In support of this argument, Lepak et al. (2006) argued

that HR interventions will influence the quality of human capital (Lepak et al., 2006). Hence, it is likely that if a soccer team has the necessary tools through which they can improve the quality of a normal player with average or moderate skills, and make it more beneficial to the team, rather than purchasing a highly talented player in an arbitrary decisions that is only based on numbers and statistics. This is consistent with the call by Fulmer and Ployhart in their review where they state "multilevel valuation approaches need to focus directly on the cross-level processes - the nature of interactions and collaborations among people. In essence, research needs to move beyond valuing individuals' human capital to also valuing interactions and relationships". I see this as a central key in selection decisions made at team levels in the soccer industry.

There are four general strategies in selection decisions regarding soccer teams:

1. Promotion from within youth (internal or home-grown human capital)
 2. Searching and acquiring in the near-environment (from teams in the same country, then from similar countries-that most frequently have similar level of competition and ranked among best, this could include, or perhaps, in most cases end up buying foreign players-, and then searching in the less nearer environments or markets)
 3. Acquiring from further markets such as searching in African and Latin American teams
 4. Mixed strategy which is the most appropriate strategy among top teams
 5. The previous searches are influenced by several factors including: Intended position (goalkeeper, defender, midfielder, or striker), age of player, culture, language, previous experience, numbers, and the reputation and personality traits which are often ignored, and finally the mentality fit between the player-other teammates, and the player-technical manager
- Table 2.

6. OTHER FACTORS IN SOCCER SELECTION

A considerate body of knowledge suggests that soccer teams in general seek young players. This is due to several reasons: (1) Young players are easy to shape, formulate, train, and adjust (2) They represent investment opportunity (3) They are less costly due to lack of intensive experience and number of won titles. The youth category also has a variety of choices depending on the player race, personality, and cultural background. The literature suggests also that another important category in soccer professional selection is the potential of a player in terms of performance, fit, and integration and the expected contributions taking into account the team style, team characteristics, and team competitiveness.

Barney (1991) article on the resource based view, as well as the associated concepts provide some informative insights when studying soccer industry, players-selections, technical managers' selection, and team performance. The RBV posits that a rare, valuable, inimitable, and in-substitutable would be a source of competitive advantage for the firm. If we are to extend this argument

Table 2: Types of selection strategies

Selection Strategy	Objectives	Cost	Risks	Performance
Promotion from within	Long-term investment	Less costly	Low-moderate Risk of quick adaptability and homogeneity	No guaranteed performance-results (titles, trophies)
Acquiring from near markets-similar level of competition-similar style overall, and similar culture	Can be both short-term and long-term	Moderate-high costs depending on other factors such as player-related and market-related factors	Moderate-High risk of adaptability and quick fitting	But stronger likelihood of better chances of titles and trophies
Acquiring from further markets	Short and long term	Low-unknown players poor countries and teams -high: Well-known player from decent teams	Have been shown as low-moderate risk	Better chances of improved team performance
A mixed strategy	Contingency oriented		Advantageous as it offers substitutes	Been shown the best strategy
Financial position	Influential	-	Influential	Influential

to soccer teams, we then assume that players who meet these requirements are considered sources of competitive advantage. Yet, it is well-known that there are only small or very small proportion of every team that are typically labeled as highly talented, have rare and natural skills, and in-substitutable and inimitable. That said, not every team has such potential, and therefore, hypothetically, not every team will be able to create a competitive advantage from the individuals' skills, abilities, and capabilities. However, if we look at some teams that are considered highly competitive in their leagues, we see that these teams do not have very unique resources; instead they have a well-combined set of skills of individuals who comprise the team. They are well-formed, and have great degree of harmony and they are very well-connected to each other. Such combination creates the competitive advantage of this team. From an HR perspective, cohesiveness; task interdependence, relational demography, complementary person group fit, all contribute to the overall fit of the team as a unit. That said, when these conditions are favorable, player is likely to stay, holding the pay constant, and also the competitiveness of a team.

Bloom (1999) studied the effect of pay dispersion on individual and organizational performance.

Bloom discussed two types of pay dispersions: (1) Hierarchical in which the higher performers and those near top positions have higher pays, (2) Compressed in which pay is less dispersed across individuals. The authors find that pay dispersion negatively affected player performance.

In soccer, it is expected that pay will vary based upon several factors. If a young and new player coming from African or Latin background, they will likely be hired by low-rated or average teams at best. The financial strength of these teams requires paying low, and taking the opportunity of those players as they don't have much options (Bales, 2004). Those players will have to work hard, improve many adaptability skills including language, style, and social skills. Overtime, they improve their experiences, skills, and abilities. Hence, superior teams will then come to make selection decisions and choose what fits their needs the best, the pay will be higher but also dependent on the performance the player has shown, the specifics of the player regarding the potential fit and adaptability with other teammates.

- Proposition 5: The investment strategy of the team (home-grown, acquisition, and mixed) will have varying effects on the players' selection such that:
 - a. For players who have younger age, low experience, but high skills, and were spotted in African or Latin American countries, less superior teams with moderate financial strength are likely to select and acquire such players. That is, young and skilled African and Latin American players are more likely to be selected by low-moderate rated teams at the beginning of their soccer professional careers.
 - b. The more tenure those players spend in such teams, the more likely they will work harder to improve their transfer chances to better rated teams, that is, the more experience they gain, the better their chances, assuming skills and abilities are improving, to be selected by superior European teams.
 - c. This relationship will be positively moderated by the player's adaptability, personality, and flexibility in positions' adjustment and players' peers' support.
- Proposition 6: For Players from Africa and Latin America, the more tenure the player spend in European teams, the better chances they have to be selected from other better rated teams. The better pay offers they will have, depending on the performance they have shown in their current teams.
- Proposition 7: The more the social capital ties with highly distinguished players and technical managers the professional player have with other teams, the more likely the player will have job offers and have higher pay offer.
- Proposition 8: Personal fit with team members, cohesiveness, and cultural fit with the external environment will negatively affect the turnover intention.
- Proposition 9: The team reputation, previous trophies, and current competitiveness level will negatively affect the turnover intention.
- Proposition 10: For players who have low European experience, especially players from Africa, the selection is made for two reasons: Investment and also performance. Teams contract with those players as they are young, they train them and give them the opportunity to play, then they can sell them at much higher prices. Therefore,

- Proposition 11: Teams that have equal emphasis on financial investments and performance will offer low pay packages for players with a Non-European backgrounds.
- Proposition 12: Those Non-European players will start improving their job offerings after having performed and played for the low-moderate level teams, thus their offerings will be dependent on how they perform.

7. DISCUSSION

In this paper, my hope was to spur discussion about a context that has rarely drawn the attention of management scholars. Yet, the global appeal that the soccer game has makes it an interesting field for further exploration. This paper attempts to look at general HR practices by soccer teams.

Namely, I focused on the general factors that would influence the teams' decisions with regard to selection and pay, and the expected outcomes of such teams. Though there are some similarities between superior teams in term of their preferences, a deeper look at their hiring strategies would be noteworthy. For example, Spanish teams may have some unseen strategies that depend on particular agents in the market, and those agents may be violating some institutional rules and European legislations regarding the contracts that teams may sign with very young African players. Further, the general aims of this paper were to touch upon the role of skills, European experience, financial strength of the teams, and specific demographic variables such as age and race. Other important factor might be interesting is that when does age stop being a positive factor in influencing both preference by superior teams and pay offerings? This question remains for further exploration in future studies.

This paper attempted to grasp a general understanding of how HR practices are being implemented by soccer teams. I do acknowledge that due to the lack of specific HR-Soccer related literature, the discussion ought to be somewhat general. However, the facts remain that this is just an attempt to break the wall and a call for more specific research that would address the soccer teams' HR practices and outcomes.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Every study has limitations, and this paper is no exception. I acknowledge that this paper has quiet few limitations: First. The paper does not go deep in addressing each factor of the variables that influence the selection, pay, and turnover in soccer teams. The aim of the paper was to just initiate a general discussion among HR scholars that would motivate researchers for more specific research in this interesting area. Second, the lack of HR-soccer related literature made it difficult for me to provide specific arguments that would lead to a more sound and specific propositions. Third, the paper did not follow a specific style because I felt the flow of the information and arguments presented is interrelated, to large extent.

Future research could benefit from the general propositions provided here in empirically testing specific hypotheses. The study

offers new and novel insights into four strategies that soccer teams follow in their hiring practices. Future research could take each strategy and address it individually to test the antecedents and the outcomes of such strategy.

Future research could also elaborate on each argument provided here, incorporating more relative arguments from the extant literature in the HR and management arena.

Further, future research might also study the influences of coaches and technical managers, as well as the administration. Additionally, the team culture is generally influenced by internal variables and contextual variables. Scholars could study country specific characteristics and their influences on teams' culture, HR practices, and outcomes.

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