SHADY CHARACTERS:
ILlicit ROLES AND THEIR EFFECT ON TEAM RESILIENCE

Abstract
In this paper we theorize about illicit roles—roles whose occupants specialize in activity that contravenes rules or regulations to support organizational goals. Using longitudinal data on professional hockey teams, we examine how teams are less resilient to the loss of an enforcer, the player who specializes in the prohibited activity of fighting, than to the loss of other role occupants. We find that team performance drops when an enforcer is absent from the team due to injury; no similar decline follows an injury of team members as a function of their formal roles (team captain or center forward). In addition, the performance disruptions associated with an enforcer’s exit are magnified as a function of his experience with his team, and a team’s performance recovers more slowly from this setback if it tries to replace him after his exit. We extrapolate from these findings to develop new theory about roles that operate outside official channels and formal structures more generally. We conclude that teams are particularly vulnerable to the loss of these role occupants because they require familiarity with the local social context to enact their roles effectively, making them more difficult to replace upon their exit.