

# Refocusing important on and off the court, says recent study.

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(Phys.org)—If an employee's performance drops in one area, does that mean they're slacking off?

It could mean that they've simply shifted and refocused their efforts on a different set of tasks—a positive sign of [adaptability](#) that should be considered in performance evaluations, says a study lead by a researcher at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

The study, published in *Human Performance*, draws on statistics from professional basketball players for its data and conclusions. Researchers assessed data on more than 700 members of the NBA to see how players shifted their focus on different on-court skills and tasks over several years. A player displaying high performance scoring baskets in one season might show a shift in focus towards rebounding missed shots in another season. That could be because they were responding to a shift in their team's needs and/or a change in their coach's instructions.

Researchers found that about 10 percent of players refocused their efforts over time and were more likely to play again for the league in the next season. The findings support the idea that refocusing among job tasks is an important component of employee adaptability and should be a part of overall performance assessments. As well, they suggest that adaptability is linked to staff retention.

"Our paper is drawing attention to the measurement of performance, that refocusing is something that's important in the workplace, exists in the

workplace, and for organizations to think about It as part of the job, " says Prof. Maria Rotundo of the Rotman School.

Prof. Rotundo acknowledges there are differences between [professional sports](#) and most workplaces.

But "there are parallels," too, she says, including the fact that NBA athletes are focused on a goal and must work together as a team to achieve it as they confront the different opponents. In the same way, employees in a company must work together to face market competitors and achieve their company's goals. And just like basketball players who go through changes in their team's make-up, many workplace staff must adapt to changes brought on by restructuring or the adoption of new technologies, requiring a refocus in their job's tasks.

"From a measurement perspective it's a fascinating area because the NBA [players' performance](#) is tracked meticulously. There's a wealth of data there," says Prof. Rotundo, who co-wrote the study with Prof. Paul Sackett of the University of Minnesota, Prof. Janelle Enns of the University of Lethbridge, and Prof. Sara Mann of the University of Guelph.

Provided by University of Toronto

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