COMPOSING THE REFLECTED BEST-SELF PORTRAIT: BUILDING PATHWAYS FOR BECOMING EXTRAORDINARY IN WORK ORGANIZATIONS

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We present a theory of how individuals compose their reflected best-self portrait, which we define as a changing self-knowledge structure about who one is at one's best. We posit that people compose their reflected best-self portrait through social experiences that draw on intrapsychic and interpersonal resources. By weaving together microlevel theories of personal change and macrolevel theories of human resource development, our theory reveals an important means by which work organizations affect people's capacity to realize their potential.

Being extraordinary does not necessarily mean obtaining a position of honor or glory or even of becoming successful in other people's eyes. It means being true to self. It means pursuing our full potential (Quinn & Quinn, 2002: 35).

Being extraordinary. All of us can recall our own extraordinary moments—those moments when we felt that our best-self was brought to light, affirmed by others, and put into practice in the world. These memories are seared into our minds as moments or situations in which we felt alive, true to our deepest selves, and pursuing our full potential as human beings. Over time, we collect these experiences into a portrait of who we are when we are at our personal best. Sometimes this portrait is composed gradually and without much conscious attention or self-awareness. Other times, work organizations play an active role in providing us feedback, furnishing goals, and enabling relationships with others in ways that make this portrait ex-

plicit and consciously changing over time. Whether implicit or explicit, stable or changing, this portrait serves as both an anchor and a beacon, a personal touchstone of who we are and a guide for who we can become. We call this portrait the "reflected best-self" (hereafter referred to as the RBS).

We choose the word "reflected" to emphasize that this self-portrait is based on our perceptions of how others view us. Family members, friends and acquaintances, and organizations provide us with feedback about who we are, and this information is integrated into our self-concept (Cooley, 1902; Tice & Wallace, 2003). We choose the word "best" to refer to the strengths, contributions, and enduring talents that each person brings to a situation. Taken together, this means that through interpretations of experiences and interactions in the social world, each person composes a self-portrait of his or her own strengths and contributions. We posit that the process of composing the RBS portrait creates a pathway to becoming extraordinary, in that it involves envisioning the self at one's best, and then acting on this vision to translate possibilities for the extraordinary into reality.

Our purpose here is to define the RBS, describe how and when it changes, and articulate the ways in which it influences individual func-

tioning in organizations. By providing a theoretical account of the situational and social mechanisms through which people compose their RBS portraits, we shed new light on how organizations can enable people to develop to their full potential. In so doing, we build on the principles of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Luthans, 2002), which aim to develop theoretical understandings of human strengths, virtues, and health, as opposed to the predominant focus on weakness and pathology in work organizations.

Our theory of how people compose the RBS portrait builds on current research regarding how individuals change their conception of self through socially embedded experiences and resources (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Tice & Wallace, 2003). More specifically, our theory of composing the RBS portrait sits at the crossroads of several important research streams in organizational behavior. First, we build from theories of career and personal change that purport that changes in self-knowledge structures are critical elements in explaining how and why individuals change what they do and how they feel (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Second, we build on research that portrays individuals as active participants in constructing their organizational experience through how they take initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001; Morrison & Phelps, 1999), seek information about themselves (Ashford, 1986), and create and draw from relationships with others (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Third, we draw on research showing that the relational context in which individuals are embedded has a major effect on how people define and feel about themselves (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Ely, 1994; Gabarro, 1987; Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000; Granovetter, 1985; Kahn, 1998) which, in the case of our theory, is captured in the power of mirrored reflections.

THE REFLECTED BEST-SELF

We define the RBS as an individual's cognitive representation of the qualities and characteristics the individual displays when at his or her best. Our definition of the RBS shares some features of self-schemas. Markus defines self-schemas as "cognitive generalizations about the self in particular domains, derived from past experience, that guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual's social experiences" (1977: 64). Like self-schemas, the RBS is based on past experiences and guides the processing of personally relevant information generated in the social world. For example, someone who exhibits resilience and determination in response to being denied a job promotion, to receiving chemotherapy, and to experiencing a setback on a church building campaign may include her "capacity to persist in the face of adversity" as a core component of her RBS. However, as the previous example indicates, the RBS is not based on a single domain but is a more general and encompassing conception of the self that cuts across multiple domains. Thus, we use the term RBS *portrait* instead of *schema* to describe this broader cognitive representation of the self.

As a positive portrayal of desirable, self-relevant characteristics, the RBS portrait also shares some features of the "ideal self" (the cognitive representation of one's hopes, wishes, or aspirations; Higgins, 1987) and the "hoped-for possible self" (the manifestation of enduring personal goals, aspirations, and motivation; Markus & Nurius, 1986). However, the RBS portrait is distinct from the ideal self and the hoped-for possible self in that it is based on qualities and characteristics that the person currently has, as opposed to those the individual wishes or hopes to possess. As an example, take this excerpt of a person's description of his RBS, which he wrote as part of an MBA course exercise to integrate feedback he had received from others about who he is at his best:

> At my best-self: I share, I strip away all that life is not. I live large. I breathe deeply and inhale every whisper of life. At my best-self, I challenge myself mentally, physically, emotionally. At my best-self, I am neither at work [n]or at play, I am living in the moment. I am a lover of life. I am a seeker of truth and beauty. I am responsible for my own actions, my own beliefs, and my own connections with other people and all living creatures. At my best-self, I am small, invisible and insignificant. People don't see me, they don't feel me, however, they see truth and beauty in themselves and in the world around them that they would not have noticed had I not been there, and they feel physically, emotionally and mentally better because of me (Chad Brown, 2001, personal correspondence).

As we can see in the above statement, the RBS is a strength-based conception of the qualities

and characteristics that this person believes he exudes when he is at his best. This description also illustrates that the RBS is more than a catalog of competencies. While one's strengths (i.e., competencies, talents, values, personality attributes) lie at the core of one's RBS, the RBS portrait also incorporates a characterization of the state of being at one's best. In this state of being, an individual actively employs strengths to create value, actualize one's potential, and fulfill one's sense of purpose, which generates a constructive experience (emotional, cognitive, or behavioral) for oneself and for others. Oftentimes, the state of being at one's best is characterized by being true to oneself (Palmer, 2000; Quinn & Quinn, 2002) or authentic (Harter, 2002) and high performing (Spreitzer, Quinn, & Fletcher, 1995).

In addition, in our theory, we look within one individual to learn how that person can enter his or her best state, rather than following the more traditional, normative approach of looking across people to see who is the best among a group or class. Thus, this conception of the "best" stands in contrast to evaluative measures across people, such as performance evaluations that rank order or group people within a given distribution.

To better understand the power of the RBS in shaping human development and functioning, we focus in the next section on illustrating the process by which individuals compose their RBS portraits. Following this discussion of composing the RBS portrait, we describe how the results of this process directly impact identity, well-being, and behavior in work organizations.

COMPOSING THE RBS PORTRAIT

How do people identify the personal qualities and characteristics that constitute their RBS portrait? Through experiences with others, people gather information that enables them to build a composite portrait of who they are at their best. This portrait is shaped by the individual's perceptions, rather than an absolute "truth" of what the RBS is. Research supports that people's perceptions of how they are viewed—not how they are actually viewed by others—have the strongest impact on people's self-concepts (Tice & Wallace, 2003). The self-concept is based on our observations of ourselves, our inferences about who we are (gleaned from others' behavior to-

ward us), our wishes and desires, and our evaluations of ourselves (Stets & Burke, 2003). Thus, the RBS portrait is composed through previous experiences in the social world, where people learn how they create value.

While the RBS portrait, like self-schemas (Swann, 1985), begins to form in childhood, the process of composing the RBS portrait can continue throughout life, as social experiences enable people to see more clearly who they are at their best. However, composing this portrait of the RBS can be challenging, especially in current work organizations. All too often, the information people get about themselves is reflected through rare and imperfect mirrors.

Formal performance evaluations are the most common way individuals get external feedback about their competencies in organizations. Performance evaluations are institutionalized practices in which people, typically superiors but increasingly subordinates and peers as well, grade how employees have performed along a number of prespecified dimensions. Performance evaluations are used to justify rewards and to define developmental opportunities for enhancing current performance and preparing for future career possibilities. While experts recommend sandwiching negative feedback within positive feedback (Beer, 1997), invariably, the focus of a performance evaluation is on identifying weaknesses and combating performance deficits (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Because performance evaluations tend to narrow attention toward the negative aspects of human performance, they tend to provide people with mere glimpses of their RBS.

Individuals might proactively seek additional feedback about their sources of competence from significant others (Ashford, 1986). Significant others are those people whose views and opinions matter to an individual because of power asymmetries, resource dependence, or emotional attachment. Research suggests that more powerful individuals' opinions carry weight simply because they command more attention (Fiske & Depret, 1996). Levinson (1985) suggests that the actions and opinions of guiding figures—people who embody what an individual is trying to move toward in life—are particularly significant when people are undergoing transitions. For example, Ibarra (2003) describes how Ben Forrester's boss (a guiding figure) provided reassurance and feedback as Ben was

trying to shift from an academic to a leadership role in a nonprofit consulting firm. This boss's opinions and questions were significant to Ben because they reflected back new possibilities for who Ben could be, and they provided reassurance in a time of transition (Ibarra, 2003: 125).

Despite the value that reflected appraisals have for enabling people to see and feel new possibilities for themselves, norms of humility often constrain people's willingness to ask others to identify their own sources of strength (Quinn & Quinn, 2002). Alternatively, people monitor their own performance and make inferences about their competence by observing situational cues and others' responses to their behavior (Ashford, 1986; Ibarra, 1999). As a result, people rely on a patchwork quilt of imperfect and incomplete reflections from others, often composed on the fly. And given that cognitive biases and heuristics (Bazerman, 1986; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986), along with the desire to impress others (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 2003), often lead people to overestimate or underestimate their performance, the sole reliance on monitoring during everyday interactions may not produce a substantive and vivid portrait of the RBS.

Despite the challenges involved, work organizations can enable individuals to compose more substantive and vivid portraits of their RBS. We posit that altering the kinds of social experiences one has can induce a substantive shift in how one envisions oneself. As individuals learn more about their personal strengths, limitations, and ability to add value, they are likely to change the content of the RBS portrait by adding and subtracting qualities so that the RBS is more closely aligned with their revelations from these experiences. Tice and Wallace provide the following example of a content change in one's RBS:

> One day Denise's rabbi asks her to paint a mural for the synagogue wall. Denise is surprised when her rabbi tells her, "We all think you are a terrific painter. Your father and sisters brag about you all the time." When Denise realizes that her family and friends think she is a good painter, she changes her view of herself and starts to think of herself as artistically talented (2003: 91).

In addition, as individuals participate in social experiences that reveal their personal strengths, the image of their RBS may become more vivid, because it is associated with specific action tendencies that supplement their values, beliefs, and wishes. For example, a manager already has a vague sense that he enjoys administration and is particularly skilled at organizing major projects and events, but the experience of receiving feedback from important people in his life causes him to put this dimension of himself at the core of his RBS.[1] His RBS portrait includes the statement, "At my best, I create a vision and then develop the roadmap for achieving that vision." In the process of heading the global reorganization task force for his firm, he further develops this component of his RBS portrait by qualifying that being a visionary is not an isolated, lonely process. Quite the opposite, he realizes it is an inherently social process of cocreation. As a result, he includes an additional statement in his RBS portrait: "In planning and executing, I incorporate others' strengths, talents, and gifts so that they will be constantly reminded that their contributions are valued." After his experience, he has a more vivid picture of what he does and how he does it when he is at his best. His RBS portrait is more deeply rooted in his personal experience. This process of changing the content or clarity of the RBS portrait, which we term *revision,* is an important phase in the lifelong task of composing the RBS portrait.

In the next section of the article, we explain how social experiences facilitate revisions of the RBS portrait. We posit that revisions to the RBS portrait are catalyzed by trigger events, which we refer to as jolts. RBS revisions are most likely to occur when individuals who experience jolts also possess critical socially embedded resources (i.e., positive affect, positive relationships, and personal agency) that enable them to respond to the jolts in constructive rather than destructive ways. There is likely to be variation in the degree of change in one's RBS that results from any given jolt, based on (1) the magnitude of the jolt one experiences (which can range from a major life event to the "straw that breaks the camel's back") and (2) the level of socially embedded resources one possesses.

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[1] This example is disguised, although the facts are real.

REVISING THE RBS PORTRAIT

On a daily basis, people are exposed to many experiences that could potentially lead to changes in their RBS portrait. Most of the time, no change in the RBS occurs, because many experiences in life are routine and fit within the current image of the RBS. Only occasionally do life events intrude on or interrupt daily routines, prompting individuals to pause and make sense of life events in a way that triggers a revision to their RBS portrait. Sensemaking involves placing life experiences into a framework in order to help people comprehend, understand, and explain experiences in a way that gives meaning, purpose, and direction to action (Weick, 1995). Revising the RBS portrait is a sensemaking process, in that it involves deriving new self-relevant information from social experiences, imposing meaning on the information, and using the information to inform one's understanding of the RBS.

Surprisingly, there is a dearth of research on what triggers changes in self-knowledge structures like the RBS, but the dominant intuition is that schemas change as a function of some discontinuity in the environment (Swann, 1985; Walsh, 1995). We suggest that revisions to the RBS occur when individuals undergo an "aha" experience or jolt—a discrepant or surprising event that causes people to pause and reflect on their experience (Louis, 1980). Losing a job is a classic example of a jolt (cf. Lee & Mitchell, 2001), but jolts can also include joyful events like a birth of child or a promotion.

A jolt doesn't have to come in the form of a major event. Rather, jolts can vary in magnitude. A person can be jolted by a new piece of information that serves as a tipping point (Ibarra, 2003) for revising his or her RBS portrait. For example, when a law clerk gets yet another piece of positive feedback on his writing talent, this time from a federal judge, he can no longer ignore his passion and skill for writing legal briefs. Similarly, after the senior management team accepts her fourth marketing campaign, an associate begins to discover a pattern of success, which reveals her unique talent for creative design.

Jolts trigger changes in self-knowledge structures because they disrupt routines in ways that release emotion (Mandler, 1984) and help people change cognitive gears (Louis & Sutton, 1991).

Jolts disrupt automatic modes of information processing and reliance on well-grooved ways of thinking about the self that accompany an automatic processing mode (Bargh, 1982). As Poole, Gioia, and Gray suggest, experiences "that generate strong emotional responses are more likely to induce schematic change" (1989: 288).

Jolts punctuate experience by unfreezing people so they can begin to move away from the old and focus energy toward the future (Ibarra, 2003; Weick, 1995). Because they intrude or interrupt, jolts provide what Ibarra calls an "alert admission" (2003: 138)—a moment when pivotal events catalyze change. These alert admissions or "defining moments" (Badaracco, 1997) trigger a need for explanation (Louis, 1980), and they test, shape, and reveal something about how people think about themselves and their capabilities. Jolts can test whether the new information revealed from the jolts fits with the current RBS portrait. They can also shape revision of the RBS as the individual integrates new pieces of information into the RBS portrait. Jolts can reveal aspects of the RBS that have been hidden and can provide a sharp, clear view of aspects of the RBS that were previously obscure. In short, jolts get people's attention and jar people toward deliberate judgments about their RBS because they are an occasion for sensemaking.

We propose that in work organizations jolts that provide occasions for revising RBS portraits come in at least four forms. While the word "jolt" may connote an experience that is negative in tone, we use the term more broadly. As our previous examples indicated, positive experiences can also jog people out of routines and prompt them to think about themselves in new ways. As such, we talk about jolts along two key dimensions: (1) jolts based on challenge or based on affirmation and (2) jolts generated by formal or informal mechanisms (see Figure 1). By juxtaposing these two dimensions, we create a typology of jolts, which we describe in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Challenging Jolts

Challenges require special effort and dedication to overcome because they take individuals out of their routines and provide an opportunity for action (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). Challenges stretch individuals in new directions. To re-

FIGURE 1
Typology and Examples of Jolts That Spark Revisions to the Reflected Best-Self Portrait

Form of core prompt

	Challenging	Appreciative
Formal	A structured or planned developmental opportunity (e.g., stretch assignment)	A structured or planned event to acknowledge and affirm one's contributions or strengths (e.g., retirement party)
Informal	An unstructured or spontaneous developmental experience (e.g., impromptu leadership)	An unstructured or unexpected experience that affirms and acknowledges one's contributions or strengths (e.g., spontaneous compliment)

Formality of mechanism

spond to a challenge, one has to let go of the tried and true, be open to possibilities, seek out novelty, be curious, and be willing to take risks. Challenges—what Bennis and Thomas (2002) call "crucibles"—move individuals to transcend the usual ways of doing things by putting them in difficult but not impossible situations (Tomaka, Blascovich, Kibler, & Ernst, 1997). Unlike threatening jolts that imply the real potential for failure or harm, challenging jolts imply the possibility of gains and, thus, energize individuals (Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, & Leitten, 1993).

Formal challenges. Often, in work organizations, formal, organizationally sanctioned occasions provide employees with challenges that could prompt them to change how they see themselves at their best. For example, when organizations elevate performance targets, plan job rotations and "stretch assignments," institute managerial training or executive development programs, or provide difficult new goals based on individual performance evaluations, they create settings that are designed to challenge employees in significant ways. Individuals may be prompted by these situations to per-

form novel tasks, which may extend their current knowledge base of their strengths and abilities to include additional self-knowledge regarding how they perform in these new domains. Simultaneously, they may receive feedback from others in their environment regarding their competence in this new domain. This expanded knowledge base of strengths and capacities can serve as input for revising the content of the RBS portrait. In addition, engaging in an experience that draws on one's strengths and competencies may make the RBS portrait more vivid.

For example, Kyle Vest, a successful family practitioner, was part of a novel medical practice that encouraged physician sabbaticals (at half pay) to explore old talents and to develop new ones. For Kyle, the sabbatical provided a chance to try out his teaching talents in a novel course for medical students on the power of narratives of healing. Kyle was astounded by the feedback that he received from his students and other physicians regarding his effective means of challenging students, his thoughtful portrayals of patients' pain, and his capacity to inspire excellence from the students. These meaningful

assets were much more visible in the teaching context but had been hidden in his more private medical practice role. The teaching experience changed how Kyle envisioned his future possibilities. As a result, he negotiated a change in his employment contract so that half of his time could be devoted to teaching.

Thus, organizations that provide formal opportunities for accomplishing challenging goals and assignments may also facilitate the process of composing the RBS portrait by enabling employees to revise the content or increase the clarity of their image of who they are at their best. In fact, if work organizations were effective growers of employees' potential, employees' work lives would be sprinkled with appropriate and well-orchestrated formal challenges (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). But too often organizations fail to design developmental opportunities so that a revision of the RBS can occur, or they offer generic opportunities that fall short of meeting the needs of specific individuals (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988).

Informal challenges. Jolts also occur in the form of informal challenges that arise at work, often appearing when employees least expect them. Such occasions afford developmental opportunities that could give rise to an altered view of one's RBS. For example, when a colleague is a "no show" for some important event, another employee is called on to take the colleague's place and perform a new task (e.g., presenting task force recommendations to the board of directors). In a more extreme example, Ferit Şahenk, CEO of Turkish conglomerate Doğuş Holdings, was thrust into the senior leadership position of the organization when his father was diagnosed with cancer (Khurana, Carrioga, & Johnson, 2001). In both examples, an employee had to accept a difficult challenge and learned that he or she "has what it takes" to perform in a new task domain. Such impromptu challenges confront individuals with occasions in which their current capacities are stretched. These spontaneous occasions usually call for new behavioral patterns; consequently, individuals may learn about limitations as well as new possibilities for themselves that prompt a revision of the content and/or clarity of their RBS portrait.

Appreciation Jolts

Appreciation jolts are a different type of prompt to self-revision. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1999), citing Kolb (1984), describe appreciation as a form of knowing that stands in sharp contrast to critical comprehension:

> Appreciation of immediate experience is an act of attention, valuing and affirmation, whereas critical comprehension of symbols is based on objectivity (which involves a priori controls of attention, as in double-blind controlled experiments), dispassionate analysis, and skepticism (Kolb, 1984: 104–105, in Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1999: 90).

Research shows that when people are fully aware of how others view them, their reflected appraisals shape their self-concept (Jussim, Soffin, Brown, Ley, & Kohlhepp, 1992; Tice & Wallace, 2003). Appreciation stimulates reflection and action because it disrupts expectations for the future, induces positive emotion, and also may engage physiological changes that are generative and constructive, helping one move toward a more positive image of oneself and resulting in positive action (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1999).

Formal appreciation. Formal appreciation jolts are occasions in which organizations have planned and institutionalized opportunities to endow individuals with expressions of positive affirmation. Award ceremonies are the most common manifestation of formal appreciation jolts. For example, when people are endowed with an award for early career contributions, they gain information about the value they add to their field, which encourages them, in turn, to expand their vision of the RBS. The reward induces positive emotion, which facilitates a person's ability to see the self differently (Fredrickson, 1998). In addition, these occasions provide individuals with access to previously hard-to-find social resources. For example, the early career contributions award recipient may feel affirmed in her choice of career path, energized to pursue her goals with confidence, and better able to pursue those goals because of the new positive visibility the award has given her. As a result, the RBS can be affirmed and clarified through formal appreciation jolts.

Formal appreciation jolts are rare in practice and often occur as organizational members are leaving situations, eliminating the opportunity

for the individuals and their organization to benefit from enduring changes brought about by the formal appreciative acts. For example, retirement ceremonies (or festschrifts for academics) provide venues for people to tell more senior colleagues what impact their work and actions have had on others' lives. Often, retirees' reactions to such events are, "I had no idea people felt this way about me." Letters of recommendation also describe one's strengths, but in order to maintain objectivity, such feedback often is not shared with the recipient of the recommendation.

These formal appreciation jolts could prompt a revision of how people see themselves at their best by providing specific information about how they contribute to the social system. Take the example of Inari Kaju,[2] who started a software development firm five years ago. Every quarter he has each member of his eight-person top management team e-mail descriptions of the three strengths each person has exhibited during the quarterly period. The e-mails are shared with the whole team. Kaju has found that this practice has kept people focused and excited about what the firm is accomplishing, while at the same time helping people to become familiar with their own unique strengths (as seen and affirmed by others). This practice also helps people know how strengths are distributed among the top management group. Kaju suggests that this knowledge has helped the firm adapt competitively, because the team knows who is the "go to person" for different challenges (because of demonstrated success in the past), facilitating speed in decision making in the present and building confidence about decision making in the future.

Informal appreciation. Organizational settings also afford opportunities for more impromptu, unplanned, and spontaneous jolts that are appreciative and informal. While rare, these occasions can jar and disrupt how employees see themselves. For example, an African American medical student described the spontaneous encouragement that he received from hospital staff, patients, and other members of his community (Black, 2003). When African American hospital staff and other community members noticed his stethoscope or lab coat in the hospital

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[2] This example is disguised, although the facts are real.

elevator, they expressed the pride they derived from his presence. Further, when he treated an African American patient, the patient expressed sincere gratitude for his respectful and conscientious care, remarking that it felt good to know that the medical student was looking out for his best interests. These conversations surprised the medical student, who previously saw himself only as an intelligent but inexperienced student. This feedback prompted him to revise his RBS portrait; he broadened his best-self image to include being a healer, whose successful educational pursuits and considerate patient care positively impact the lives of many people, particularly other African Americans who value interactions with African American physicians.

In another example, one of the authors was treated to one such act of informal appreciation. As she described it:

> Marty Johns, the head of Change Management Teaching Team, assembled his team designed to create the next generation of classes for Executive Education. The team had never been face to face in a room, although the reputations of the people assembled preceded them. There was excitement in the air, with everyone anticipating the stretch and high standards involved in this new assignment. Marty began the meeting in a highly unusual way. Rather than having everyone introduce him or herself, he began with an appreciative introduction of each person, offering his take on the unique talents, perspectives, and qualities of each chosen team member as a human being. The introductions weren't long, but each adjective and example Marty offered seemed compelling and heart felt. The descriptions named what Marty loved and appreciated in each person. Each person being introduced was visibly embarrassed when they were described, but inspired and thankful to be on the team as they learned of the positive qualities of their team members. The soil for growth of the team had been tilled with respect and positive regard. In this simple act Marty had taken an ordinary routine used when first meeting strangers and turned it into an extraordinary opportunity for informal appreciation (Dutton, 2003b).

In this case, members of the team had to revise their sense of self, drawing more fully on the publicly acknowledged strengths Marty noted he saw in them. For Meg, one of the team members, this meant realizing that her enthusiasm actually motivated others to get work done. For Rob, the introduction meant he needed to act in accord with Marty's portrayal of him as a creative writer and courageous thinker. For both

Meg and Rob, the introductions deepened their confidence that they did have these qualities and committed them more fully to bring these qualities to the team.

Research supports the relationship between informal appreciation and self-perceptions described in the previous two examples. When significant others perceive an individual as possessing the characteristics of his or her ideal self, the individual then changes his or her self-views to be more consistent with the others' appraisals (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Malloy, Albright, Kenny, Agatstein, & Winquist, 1997; Tice & Wallace, 2003). In addition, after people receive explicit positive feedback, their self-appraisals become more favorable (Kernis & Johnson, 1990).

Thus, appreciative and challenging jolts can be important triggers in revising the RBS portrait. We have provided several examples of how appreciative and challenging jolts can enhance one's positive self-construal by increasing the clarity and/or enriching the content of one's RBS portrait. It is important to acknowledge that not every jolt results in a revision to the RBS, owing to the nature of the jolt, the timing of the jolt, and, most important, how one makes sense of the jolt.

Like self-schemas, our RBS portrait is quite stable over time. Since self-schemas are resistant to change, some jolts may not be strong enough to radically change one's image of the RBS. Completing a novel yet relatively simple task may not require a radical shift in behavior that could lead to self-discovery. Likewise, a single compliment regarding a minor accomplishment at work might not have a lasting impact on one's sense of self. External factors, especially the timing of the jolt, might also interfere with RBS revision. For example, a person who is not psychologically ready for a change can ignore the jolt, dismiss it as irrelevant, or deny its validity (Ibarra, 2003).

Also, a person may not have the space or a "window of opportunity" for a revision to the RBS. As Ibarra suggests:

> Reinvention . . . requires a stepping back to obtain a new way of seeing what is. The full emotional and cognitive complexity of the change process can only be digested with moments of detachment and time for reflective observation. In the same way, time away from the everyday

grind creates the "break frame" that allows people to transition (2003: 148).

If a person is overloaded (cognitively, emotionally, or physically), it will be difficult for him or her to transcend the current situation to create the space for a RBS revision.

Furthermore, a person's life stage may also influence the extent to which he or she responds to a jolt. Research on adult development suggests that at certain points in life, like midlife (Levinson, 1985), individuals are highly receptive to major changes, whereas at other periods of life, individuals meet even small changes with resistance. For these reasons, many external triggers fail to propel a person to change self-knowledge structures, including the RBS.

Finally, individuals must make sense of jolts in a constructive manner in order to trigger RBS revision. Often, challenging and appreciative jolts are met with a sense of fear, threat, and cynicism, rather than with a sense of possibility for envisioning oneself in a more positive manner. Individuals who focus on the negative, potentially punishing effects of jolts are less likely to revise their RBS portraits than individuals who focus on the positive, potentially rewarding effects of such experiences. For example, individuals might interpret challenging jolts as significant threats to their organizational status and focus on potential failure in new job assignments, rather than the possibility of success. Individuals might also question the accuracy of affirmative feedback they receive from others, as well as their ability to live up to others' positive expectations. In both scenarios individuals will likely resist revising their RBS portrait, even after experiencing challenging or appreciative jolts, because their sensemaking leads them to focus on personal limitations rather than personal strengths and contributions.

Our goal in this paper is to present a theoretical framework that captures how work experiences enhance one's sense of self and result in revisions to the clarity and content of the RBS portrait. Thus, we focus our theoretical attention away from the inhibitors and toward the key resources that can positively shape the way individuals appraise or make sense of a jolt. We posit that certain socially embedded resources enable individuals to counteract the effects of inhibitory factors (such as threat, fear, or cynicism) so that they can respond positively to jolts.

Socially embedded resources equip people to respond to jolts with a capacity and willingness to see themselves differently, because they draw or attract people to change. In the next section we describe how three specific resources play an important role in the process of revising RBS portrait by favorably influencing responses to challenging and appreciative jolts.

Resources That Enable Revisions of the RBS Portrait

A central premise of our article is that socially embedded resources enable revisions of the RBS portrait, particularly during times surrounding a jolt. Revisions of the RBS portrait do not occur easily or often, because they involve changes in how we think about ourselves. Before such revisions occur, individuals need a sense that resources are available to counteract the negative responses that may result from jolts. Psychological and physiological[3] resources help individuals to withstand the uncertainty and fear of failure that arise from challenging jolts. They also spark individuals' desire to live up to the social expectations that are raised through appreciative jolts.

We suggest that a trio of psychological and physiological resources—(1) positive affect, (2) a sense of relational connection, and (3) personal agency—enable revision of the RBS portrait. Positive affect enhances openness and personal capability, relational resources provide social support and inspiration, and agentic resources provide a sense of efficacy and guidance to facilitate changes in the RBS.

To better understand why these three resources matter, we discuss their causal logic next. For explanatory purposes, we artificially treat each resource as if it were a separate causal force. In reality, many developmental work experiences tap into all three resources, activating them to work in concert to focus on and revise our sense of ourselves at our best.

Positive affective resources. The first durable resource that can enable revision of the RBS is

positive affect. By affect, we mean the emotional and subjective feelings of individuals. Positive affect is composed of positive emotions, such as joy, peace, hope, or gratitude, which are durable resources that individuals can draw on during times of change, owing to their effect on individuals' thought-action repertoires (Fredrickson, 1998). Unlike negative emotions, which promote quick, decisive action by narrowing the array of thoughts and actions that come to mind, the broaden-and-build theory states that positive emotions broaden the thought-action repertoire, creating openness to new ideas and new courses of action (Fredrickson, 2000), such as revising the RBS. Joy, for instance, sparks the urge to play. Interest creates the urge to explore. Contentment evokes the urge to savor and integrate. Thus, positive affect enables the revision of the RBS by creating more openness to the idea of personal change.

In addition, Fredrickson (2000) proposes that a critical outcome of the broadened thought-action repertoire is increased personal capability and knowledge. The playfulness that comes from joy, for instance, builds personal skills and capability. The exploration that comes from interest creates knowledge and intellectual complexity. And the savoring that comes from contentment produces self-insight and alters world views (Fredrickson, 2000). As such, the broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions are resources that build enduring capability and knowledge, which also enable revisions of the RBS. We suggest that experiences at work that engage positive emotions are more likely to contribute to the revision of the RBS in terms of reflecting domains of additional competence and talent, along with broadening the self-conception of strengths and positive contributions.

The resources brought to bear by positive emotions are particularly important during jolt experiences, because they work to undo the destructive effects of negative emotions, such as enabling the body to return to baseline levels of physiological activation after experiencing a challenge (Fredrickson, 2000). Laboratory experiments have demonstrated that evoking positive emotions during times of distress is the most efficient way to quell or "undo" the lingering aftereffects of negative emotions (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000). Following experiences of

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[3] While physiological research is new to organizational behavior, researchers working at the interface of the social and medical sciences use physiological measures to understand the mechanisms explaining the powerful effects of positive affect and interpersonal relationships (see Heaphy & Dutton, 2004).

negative emotions, one can cultivate positive emotions to speed the return to cardiovascular normalcy and to fuel resilient coping. In the midst of a jolt, positive emotions aid resilient responses so that people bounce back to precrisis levels of functioning more quickly. In fact, prior research suggests that when jolt experiences are combined with a strong base of positive affect, we may see the most potential for revisions of the RBS, because the positive emotions increase individual receptivity to and motivation for personal growth (McCauley et al., 1994). In contrast, without the positive affect, any distress accompanying a jolt is likely to interfere with a willingness to open oneself up to new skills and capabilities. The discomfort of a jolt may mask the potential for revising the RBS, since the individual can become defensive and seek a fast solution to overcome the discomfort (McCauley et al., 1994).

In summary, positive affect provides an important resource for enabling individuals to revise their RBS portrait because it opens them to the possibility of revising the RBS and builds personal capability and knowledge.

Relational resources. The second durable resource that can enable a revision of the RBS portrait is positive interpersonal relationships. We assume that all human beings have a need to develop and maintain enduring personal connections with others, and these connections of affirmative belonging are sources of support (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The positive impact of supportive relationships is well documented in the literature on social support (e.g., Uchino, Cacioppo, & Keicolt-Glacer, 1996) and high-quality connections (e.g., Dutton, 2003b; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Supportive relationships provide security and safety for individuals to process and affirm a clearer sense of their own possibility. They may do this in part by inducing physiological changes that enable individuals to bounce back from past negative experiences, such as releases of oxytocin and endogenous opiad peptides, lowered blood pressure and allostatic load (Adler, 2002; Seeman, Singer, Rowe, Horwitz, & McEwan, 1997), and a strengthened immune system (Cohen, 2001; Ornish, 1998). Being in relationships with others can also buffer people from future setbacks and stressors in their lives (Cohen & Wills, 1985), allowing them to devote more mental energy to their own sense of possibility

rather than potential failure, thus enabling revision of the RBS.

Research on holding environments at work (Kahn, 2001) and on healing connections more generally (Miller & Stiver, 1997) affirms the role that positive connections play in supporting a person's revision of the RBS. Drawing on studies of infants and the importance of secure attachments (Bowlby, 1988), as well as the power of effective caregiving relationships (Winnicott, 1965), Kahn (2001) argues that holding environments are critical interpersonal resources that individuals draw on in anxiety-provoking work situations. Safe relationships "hold" people while they recover from stressors and, thus, enable them to move forward to a clearer sense of possibility (Kahn, 2001). Friends, mentors, and other close connections act as significant others who help to reduce the emotional angst of being confronted with an alternative view of oneself. When these connections with significant others are secure attachments, individuals feel comfortable in branching out in new directions and embracing new identities. These significant others can offer inclusion and provide a secure base (Ibarra, 2003), helping people evolve toward their best-self. Without them, individuals may be more reticent to change. These sorts of relational resources are particularly relevant during jolt experiences (McCauley et al., 1994) and during transition points or life stages when an individual may be more open to others' feedback and help (Levinson, 1985).

In organizations, developmental relationships constitute a specific type of relationship that provides important resources for making sense of and responding to jolts. A person may have one such relationship or a "constellation" of developmental relationships (Higgins & Kram, 2001). When a protégé experiences a jolt, a developmental relationship can provide the context to make sense of what the jolt means from someone with a different, often more senior position in the organization, and it can provide ideas as well as support for how to revise the RBS. In addition, a mentor can provide social and emotional support to help the protégé integrate his or her identities through counseling, acceptance, confirmation, and friendship (Kram, 1985). In essence, developmental relationships can assist the protégé in interpreting a jolt, making it intelligible and actionable.

In summary, relational resources are important enablers, because they provide support for individuals to feel comfortable embracing the personal change that underlies revisions of the RBS portrait.

Agentic resources. Personal agency is the third psychological resource that enables the revision of the RBS portrait. Agency refers to people's capacity to exercise control over their own thought processes, motivation, and actions (Bandura, 1989). Agentic resources are those beliefs, guides, and external motivators that facilitate personal action and fuel one's intention to revise the RBS. They include a sense of self-efficacy in revising the RBS portrait, as well as constructive guidance about how to revise it. Examples of these enabling forces are discussed below.

Agentic resources encompass the sense of self-efficacy—the belief that one can successfully execute the behavior required for producing desired outcomes (Bandura, 1989). When individuals feel self-efficacious, they see their behavior and identity as not completely shaped by external forces; instead, they see themselves as being able to make things happen by their own action. With self-efficacy, individuals feel potent and capable of revising the RBS portrait in several ways. First, the fundamental belief that a person can make things happen in significant ways alleviates the tendency to avoid risks or to avoid trying new things. Second, self-efficacy determines how much effort people will exert and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles such as jolts. Self-efficacy helps people recover quickly from failures and setbacks before losing faith in their capabilities. Thus, when employees are confronted by jolts at work, but agentic resources are present, their sense of heightened capacity to respond encourages revision of the RBS portrait.

Agentic resources also influence how people envision themselves and their future and, thus, guide changes to the RBS through the notion of hope. Hopeful people have an understanding of the will—that is, efficacy beliefs that a hoped-for goal can be achieved—and the way—that is, a plan to achieve the hoped-for goal (Snyder et al., 1991). Research shows that without hope humans are paralyzed and unable to change in any meaningful way. But with hope people act, change, and achieve (Stotland, 1969). Thus, a

sense of hope also enables a sense of the "way," thereby providing constructive guidance about changing the content or clarity of one's RBS portrait. When individuals possess a large degree of agency, they set higher personal goals, providing a positive guide for revising the RBS portrait. On the contrary, low levels of agency may induce the visualization of failure scenarios, where individuals dwell on what can go wrong (Bandura, 1989), which leads them to focus on their deficits rather than their strengths.

In summary, agentic resources enable revisions of the RBS portrait because they create feelings of personal efficacy, as well as provide constructive guidance about how to change the RBS portrait.

The multiplicative effects of jolts and resources. This trio of resources works in concert to enable the revision of the RBS by reducing the destructive elements and increasing the constructive elements of jolts. For example, an appreciative jolt is usually associated with positive emotions and a sense of belongingness (e.g., one feels valued by others, and this engenders positive emotions). Similarly, a challenging jolt is usually associated with an increased sense of personal agency (e.g., one learns that one is able to effect change in the social system).

In work organizations, it is rare, but not impossible, to experience such a combination of jolts and to have sufficient amounts of the trio of resources that are powerful enough to yield significant revisions of the RBS portrait. A prime example of this combination is an intervention that was developed several years ago with the explicit aim of helping executives to compose their RBS portrait (Quinn, Dutton, & Spreitzer, 2003; Quinn & Quinn, 2002). In the intervention a person requests written feedback from significant others describing the person at his or her very best. The person asks between ten and thirty friends, family members, and coworkers, who the person feels know him or her well and will provide honest opinions, to provide best-self feedback. The descriptions usually include detailed stories and examples of the person when he or she is making a distinct and extraordinary contribution—of when and how he or she creates the most value for the system. No negative feedback is solicited. Once the person has received the individual responses, he or she

compiles them and searches for themes that describe the individual at his or her very best. The pattern that emerges across the feedback from the individuals is a sketch of the individual's RBS portrait. Often there are surprises; sometimes the tasks or domains that the person believes are areas of competence don't emerge as a primary theme of contribution. At other times a storyteller may relate an experience that made a difference to him or her, about which the feedback recipient was completely unaware.

Our research suggests that collecting this composite of RBS sketches from a variety of people from different realms of one's life is a powerful, integrative, and creative act. It is also a generative act, in the sense of creating a social product that constructs oneself in the world in a particular way, and this construction, in turn, creates a trajectory for future action that propels one in a direction that affirms rather than denies one's sense of unique possibility in the world. In sum, this formal appreciative jolt is imbued with positive affect, relational connectedness, and personal agency so that the recipient of the feedback is able to revise his or her RBS portrait and advance along a trajectory toward becoming extraordinary.

One who is extraordinary can be considered a positive deviant, because he or she exemplifies qualities and behavior that exceed standard or normal expectations. Extraordinary people, like extraordinary events, are remarkable; their actions are difficult to ignore because they have a major, positive impact on individuals, systems, organizations, and the environment. Social change agents, like Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesus, and Gandhi, were extraordinary leaders (Quinn, 2000).

Although they often lack notoriety and organizational rewards, many current organizational members are extraordinary; they, too, approach their role with the intention of improving efficiency and quality of work life for those they support by leveraging their strengths. This trajectory toward becoming extraordinary is charted by expanding knowledge about one's RBS and putting this knowledge into practice with increasing regularity. In the final section of this article, we make an explicit link between composing the RBS portrait and becoming extraordinary.

THE RBS AND BECOMING EXTRAORDINARY

Our theory of the RBS proposes that there are three pathways by which the RBS portrait helps employees to become extraordinary: (1) expanding the constellation of possible selves, (2) facilitating social architecting, and (3) enhancing personal expressiveness. The core premise of each pathway is that individuals' self-constructions guide their future actions through intrapsychic and social processes (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Gioia & Poole, 1984). Taken together, these three pathways encompass an increased prevalence of extraordinary *thoughts* about one's identity, extraordinary *actions* that shape the social system, and extraordinary *feelings* of well-being. In turn, these thoughts, actions, and feelings (re)generate resources that enable these individuals (and many other organizational members) to advance along the trajectory of becoming extraordinary (see Figure 2).

RBS and Possible Selves

When employees revise their portrait of who they are at their best, they necessarily paint new possibilities for their future. These possibilities are captured in their constellation of possible selves. As defined by Markus and Nurius (1986), possible selves refer to the selves that a person could become, would like to become, or is afraid of becoming. For example, consider the case of a professor who revised her RBS portrait to include her newfound capability as an executive education teacher. Previously, she had only considered herself as one who was effective at teaching master's and undergraduate students. This change in her RBS fundamentally transformed her sense of what she could become. Her constellation of possible selves expanded to accommodate new future work domains, and she started to see new possibilities for incorporating these talents in her vision of herself. She took new risks and tackled new tasks. She sought out new opportunities for executive teaching, even flying to another university to do so. She also wrote a book that drew on her research but that could be used exclusively with executives. At the same time, she noticed that revising her RBS portrait also affected her vision of what she was unlikely to become: a teacher whom executives experienced as stifling and disengaging.

FIGURE 2
Composing the Reflected Best-Self Portrait
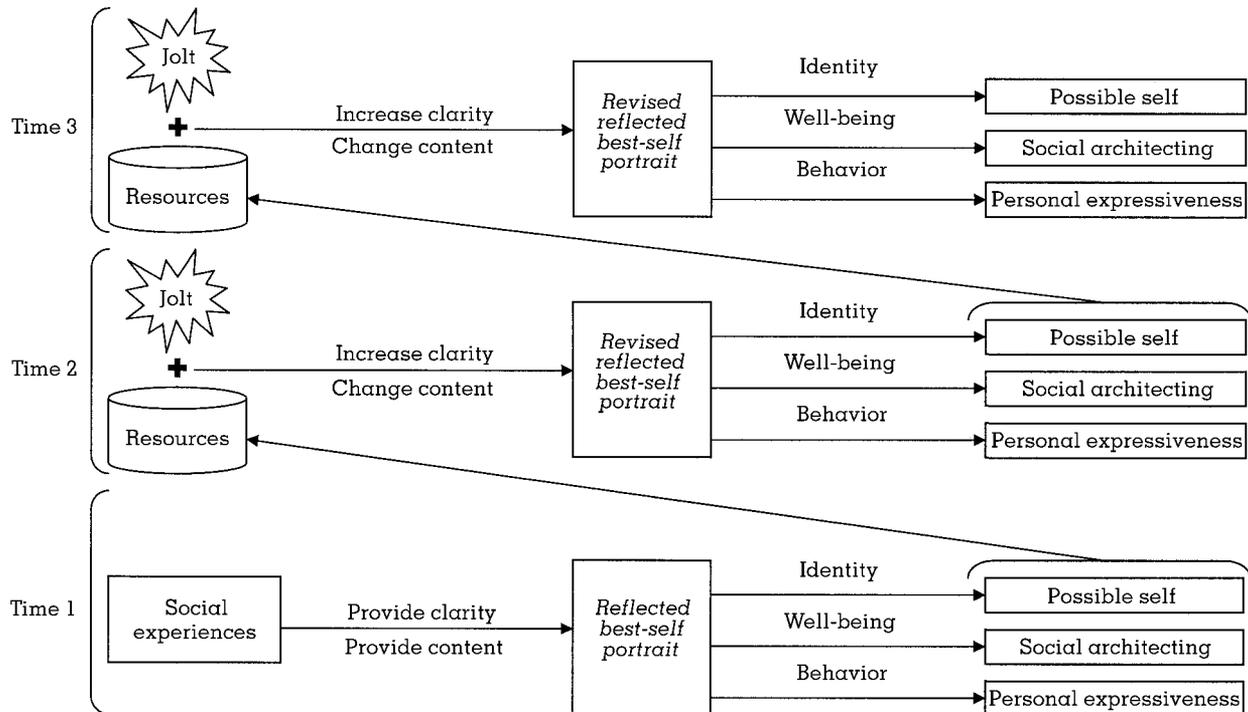
Research on possible selves suggests that these shifts in how one sees future possibilities are consequential. They shape how people approach future tasks by sparking anticipation and simulations of task performance (Cross & Markus, 1994). Possible selves help people focus on specific thoughts and feelings that affect their ability to accomplish relevant tasks (Inglehart, Markus, & Brown, 1988). The more vivid and elaborated the possible self is in a particular domain, the more powerful its link to a person's performance will be in that domain (Cross & Markus, 1994).

In the context of work organizations, Ibarra (1999) illustrates the power of possible selves in shaping people's career trajectories. She argues and demonstrates empirically that possible selves serve as filters for identity change: they motivate people to make changes so that the possible self can become a reality. Her work is particularly relevant, since it suggests that as individuals embark on career transitions, their possible selves capture images of the type of professional they aspire to become. These images of hoped-for possible selves shape professionals' capacity to successfully construct and

project images of competence and credibility to key constituents (i.e., colleagues and clients). In the professions Ibarra studied—investment bankers and management consultants—crafting a viable professional image was critical for eventual career success.

Because the RBS portrait (who one is at one's best) and possible selves (who one can become) are both elements of the self-concept, they are experientially and cognitively intertwined. However, we think it is important to distinguish the two schemata types in order to test how, separately and in unison, they help individuals make behavioral adjustments that propel them along the pathway of becoming extraordinary.

RBS and Social Architecting

As people acquire a clearer sense of their competencies, this self-knowledge endows them with sensibilities about the types of contexts that best facilitate the expression of and appreciation for these strengths. In addition, as people revise their RBS portrait, they are better able to detect and design situations that help them strengthen their RBS. These sensibilities allow

people to be better architects of the connections, the places, and the tasks that enable their extraordinariness. Thus, we call individuals' proactive selection of settings, people, and tasks that draw on their strengths "social architecting."

The idea that individuals engage in social architecting is well established in psychology and sociology (e.g., McCall & Simmons, 1978; Schlenker, 1985) and is implied by some models that portray individuals as proactive agents in their own self-development (Ashford & Tsui, 1991) and in the design of their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). These views portray individuals as active crafters of their social environments in ways that support and sustain desired views of themselves. For example, Dweck, Higgins, and Grant-Pillow (2003) found that visions of the ideal self result in an overall promotion focus whereby people create goals that relate to their aspirations, advancement, and accomplishments. Schlenker, in his model of identity formation, argues that "people strive to create environments in both their own minds and the real world that support, validate, and select desirable identity images" (1985: 89). The RBS portrait is clearly a desirable identity image that is grounded in feedback and reflections from others. Composing a clearer and more substantive RBS portrait allows people to be better social architects, in that they control their own destinies and constructively shape their futures by shaping the contexts of which they are a part.

A critical part of social architecting involves forming connections with individuals who enable the RBS to thrive. Research on how individuals craft jobs that enhance self-meaning illustrates this point. For example, in a study of how hospital cleaners enact their job differently, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) found that cleaners who enjoyed the work and saw it as a type of "calling" (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) perceived themselves at their best as healers and hope providers, playing a critical role in patients' recovery and care. Cleaners in this group actively architected the context by building relationships not only with patients but also with patients' families and friends—relationships that served to affirm and enact their RBS as healer. In this case, the cleaners were architecting the relationships in context to derive affirmative meaning and to create jobs that were more satisfying and fulfilling.

This example illustrates Wrzesniewski and Dutton's claim that people are often "agentic architects of their own jobs" (2001: 194). We add to their formulation the idea that if individuals architect the context in ways that play to their RBS portrait, they create a pathway toward becoming extraordinary.

Similarly, social architecting may involve rearranging one's time and tasks so that one is involved in tasks that draw on one's strengths. For example, in the story of the professor who came to see that she could enact her RBS more often as an engaging teacher of executives, this RBS revision fueled her choices to spend more time teaching executives and less time teaching master's and undergraduate students. This transformation was clearcut and visible to her and to others. More subtle were the gradual investments that she made in conversations and connections with other executives that helped her to communicate more effectively with executives in her classes and in her writing. She gradually created a different landscape of learning that deepened her knowledge and experience base. In turn, she strengthened her competence in teaching to an executive education audience. Thus, she traveled in big and little steps toward being extraordinary by architecting the context that simultaneously leveraged and strengthened her RBS.

RBS and Personal Expressiveness

When people revise the RBS portrait, they do more than cognitively change what they see as possible. Our theory suggests that changes in the RBS portrait also alter how people feel about who they are becoming, which creates a sense of vibrancy and energy that fuels travel toward being extraordinary.

To capture the feelings that accompany the process of composing the RBS portrait, we draw from psychological work on optimal functioning, in particular the idea of personal expressiveness (Waterman, 1993). Personal expressiveness refers to a state of well-being in which people are living in accord with the "daimon" or true self (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This state of well-being, known as personal expressiveness, is associated with a set of feelings that indicate someone is "intensely alive and authentic" (Ryan & Deci, 2001: 146).

Waterman argues that this state is captured by six indicators: (1) an unusually intense involvement in an undertaking, (2) a feeling of a special fit or meshing with an activity that is not characteristic of most daily tasks, (3) a feeling of being alive, (4) a feeling of being complete or fulfilled while engaged in activity, (5) an impression that this is what the person is meant to do, and (6) a feeling that this is who one really is (Waterman, 1993: 679). A focus on the importance of this form of eudaimonic well-being has also been emphasized by psychologists studying psychological well-being and health across the life span (Ryff & Singer, 1998, 2000). Their theory of human flourishing also emphasizes the importance of people's psychological sense that they are realizing their potential, and they link this state to healthy functioning of physiological systems.

As people receive more reflections of who they are at their best, their RBS portrait becomes more substantive and more vivid. We propose that this revision of the RBS portrait is associated with a heightened sense of personal expressiveness. As individuals compose a more elaborated and vivid RBS portrait, they are better able to identify goals that are aligned with their true self (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). When these self-concordant goals are acted on, they contribute to a heightened sense of personal expressiveness.

Further, as the RBS portrait becomes more focused and elaborated, individuals acquire a greater sense of relatedness to others, which fuels great personal expressiveness. In composing the RBS portrait, individuals develop increased clarity regarding how they add value to their social context, which also strengthens their sense of purpose and identification (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 1980) with other people who share that social context. A variety of studies document the association of greater relatedness and attachment to a heightened sense of well-being (see Dutton & Heaphy, 2003, for a summary; see also Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

Finally, as individuals compose their RBS portrait, they are likely to become better able to cope with stress. Revising the RBS portrait enhances one's sense of self, and self-enhancement has been linked empirically to healthier physiological and neuroendocrine functioning (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000). Self-enhancement is correlated with lower cardiovascular responses to stress, more rapid cardiovascular recovery, and lower baseline cortisol levels, which help individuals ameliorate damaging biological responses to the stressful conditions they may face (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003).

In sum, the RBS portrait is associated with a range of outcomes that individually and collectively equip individuals to move down the path toward becoming extraordinary. The link between the RBS and possible selves creates a cognitive image of a desired future state that helps guide an individual's path. The RBS also furnishes individuals with a portrait of what is possible that helps them architect situations that bring the portrait to life. Finally, the RBS portrait leads to personal expressiveness, which gives individuals affective resources that can nourish them as they move down that path toward becoming extraordinary.

COMPLICATING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IN FUTURE RESEARCH

We have sketched a basic model of how social context and individual behavior may work together to propel an individual's growth and development through the composition and revision of the RBS portrait. Our theoretical story has necessarily simplified a complex developmental and situated process. However, we see theoretical complications of the story as invitations to conduct important theoretical and empirical extensions in the future. Four complications serve as invitations to future research: (1) the timing of jolts, (2) the quality of one's relationship with feedback givers, (3) the degree of discrepancy between others' reflections and one's own image of the RBS, and (4) the influence of the macro social context on RBS composition.

In this paper we have described the mechanisms that enable the revision of the RBS portrait. We invite further research that considers mechanisms that limit or expand the likelihood that a jolt will trigger a positive change in the RBS portrait. Barriers to RBS revision may arise from the individual, the organization, or their interaction, complicating the growth trajectory of individuals through the RBS revision process.

For example, as we noted earlier, one's stage in life or career may affect the revision process. When people are aware that they are at a transitional period (Levinson, 1985), such as a

midlife transition or adaptation to a new role (Ibarra, 1999), they may be particularly open to the information and potential a jolt provides. However, when the transition occurs in a potentially threatening organizational context, people may see a jolt experience as jeopardizing a tenuous position within the organization. For example, an associate who is being considered for partner at her firm may be quite overwhelmed with feelings of uncertainty and doubt. Instead of viewing a challenging assignment as a developmental opportunity, she may consider it the final test of her competence, making her more vulnerable to "choking under pressure" (Baumeister & Showers, 1986), rather than seeing a new opportunity to exercise and develop her strengths. Thus, one such potential barrier to revision may be the timing of the jolt in relation to one's location in a developmental trajectory.

Another possibility is that people may not have the individual capacity or social resources to integrate the jolt experience if they have just revised their RBS. For example, after the associate described above is promoted, she may turn her attention away from her work life as a respite from an intense period of work, missing or bypassing jolt experiences that might alter her RBS, simply because her attention is diverted elsewhere and her individual and social resources may be low. In future research scholars need to consider how this process unfolds differently for people at different developmental stages.

A second complication involves consideration of how reflections from different people have more or less impact on the revision of the RBS. Our analysis suggests that variance in other people's structural and emotional significance affects the degree to which their reflections are incorporated into the self-revision process. Future research might test how the connection quality between people affects the level of impact of reflected appraisals on the RBS revision process.

For example, if the relationship between two people is marked by authenticity and mutuality, then one person's reflected appraisal might strongly impact the other's RBS portrait, because both people experience the connection as one in which they are fully known and understood by the other and in which they can engage in fuller self-disclosure (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Miller & Stiver, 1997). If a relationship lacks authenticity and mutuality, then cynicism and lack of trust may lead individuals to discount the positive feedback that they receive from significant others and to view the feedback as insincere, inaccurate, or irrelevant to their identity. Research shows that individuals are prone to focus on negative information (e.g., competency gaps) and to subvert positive information (e.g., strengths), given that negative emotions often tend to have a stronger impact on psychological functioning than positive emotions (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Imagine the subordinate whose boss tells him he did a fantastic job with his recent quarterly report, after demeaning and threatening him for weeks about completing the report on time. The likelihood that the subordinate will incorporate this feedback into his RBS portrait is extremely low.

In addition, the level of identification that someone feels with a person providing a reflection should affect its level of impact on the self-revision process (Ibarra, 2003). For example, role models, mentors, or people with whom one identifies are likely to affect the revision of the RBS portrait more strongly. Identification with a mentor means that an individual already sees him/herself as similar to the mentor and projects movement toward more similarity in the future (Thomas, 1989). This form of connection may enable an individual to integrate RBS feedback more easily from someone with whom the individual identifies than from someone with whom he or she identifies less. By identifying with each other, individuals may come to know themselves through their relationships with one another (Kaplan, 1984).

At the same time, there are instances in which a high-quality connection with a feedback giver might actually inhibit, rather than enable, the revision of the RBS. For example, Ibarra (2003) argues that changes in self-identity often require new connections, because old connections (particularly strong connections) may bind people to old ways of viewing themselves. The quality of the connection may be considered both a potential enabling mechanism and a potential interfering mechanism for revising the RBS. Thus, a fruitful direction for future research involves developing and testing how the qualities of the connection that one has with feedback givers shape the RBS revision process. This elaboration would help to illustrate how the RBS

revision process is deeply affected by the structure of relationships in which one is embedded.

A third complication involves specifying the extent to which inaccurate or inconsistent perceptions of reflected appraisals affect the impact of an appreciative jolt on the RBS. It is important to acknowledge that people may send each other inaccurate information about their strengths and capabilities. For example, some people might use stereotypical images of social identity groups to form the basis of their assumptions about who one should be at one's best (e.g., women as nurturing, men as forceful and commanding during a crisis), and they may impose such expectations on others (see Acker, 1990; Darley & Fazio, 1980; Snyder & Stukas, 1999) rather than share feedback about who one actually is at one's best. In future research scholars should investigate whether there is an optimal degree of positive discrepancy between one's current RBS portrait and the feedback one receives from one's social context regarding one's RBS.

Even though a jolt inherently implies a discrepancy or disruption, when one receives feedback that is too discrepant from the self-concept, one is unlikely to incorporate this feedback into one's self-schema (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Swann, 1987). Yet revision of the RBS hinges on learning new information about one's strengths and capabilities. If one were only to receive information that confirmed one's current portrait of the RBS, this portrait would become more rigid and narrow, rather than more vivid, substantive, or expansive.

Research shows that individuals are able to live with contradictions in their self-concept, given that they are only aware of a small part of self-knowledge (i.e., the phenomenal self) at any point in time (Baumeister, 1999). They can also sustain a small number of positive illusions (i.e., beliefs about the self that are not necessarily true), because such illusions afford heightened motivation and persistence (Taylor & Brown, 1988). In fact, research suggests that the desire for self-enhancement or favorable information about oneself is stronger than the desire for consistent or accurate knowledge about oneself, at least for most individuals (Baumeister, 1999). These distinctions suggest that it is important to examine the extent to which enhancing yet discrepant reflected appraisals spark revisions to the RBS portrait. The above cited research on

self-verifying versus self-enhancing feedback illustrates the need for specification of the conditions under which an individual will internalize versus reject social information about his or her RBS.

Finally, a fourth complication involves elaborating and testing how the *organizational context* affects revisions to the RBS portrait. In our model we have focused on the power of jolts and resources in explaining the level of change in self-knowledge, but numerous opportunities for extension are possible. For instance, researchers could examine how reward systems and organizational culture affect the content and structure of people's RBS, as well as shape how they change over time. For example, some organizations institutionalize practices (such as reward schemes or appreciation rituals) that make developing and "growing" their employees an important activity. In these kinds of organizational contexts, people receive frequent and elaborate feedback about the value that they contribute to others and to the work of the organization. The care-enabling infrastructure of such contexts cultivates a care-conducive culture that promotes employee growth and self-redefinition (McAllister & Bigley, 2002).

In these kinds of contexts, changes in self-knowledge that are consistent with a revised RBS are likely to be a normal and expected part of being an organizational member. At St. Luke's of London, for example, people assume "Everyone is brilliant" and "It's a matter of finding their place and allowing them to reach their potential" (Lewin & Regine, 2000: 261). At Verifone, growing people and growing the business are assumed to go hand in hand (Lewin & Regine, 2000). In both of these organizations, affirmative practices embedded in formal reward systems and reinforced by informal norms of interpersonal treatment can make upward revisions of the RBS a natural part of being an organizational member.

Just as features of organizational contexts could enhance the likelihood of a positive RBS portrait, characteristics of organizational contexts could directly diminish the possibility of this form of self-development. For example, in organizational contexts where it is unsafe to learn from mistakes (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2002), where individualistic achievement trumps collective achievement, and where silence as opposed to voice is the norm and expected practice

(Morrison & Milliken, 2000), the conditions for revision of the RBS portrait work against the trajectory of becoming extraordinary. In these kinds of contexts, individuals generally are encouraged to conform to uniform standards of "best" and are discouraged from drawing on their personal best-self to make unique contributions to the organization. In addition, jolts may be rare, and socially embedded resources that enable an RBS revision might be in short supply, short-circuiting the possibility of positive self-growth through the RBS revision process. In future research scholars should endeavor to build testable hypotheses about what organizational features create the context and process for self-development that move people in the direction of becoming extraordinary.

DEVELOPING METHODOLOGIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To extend theoretical and empirical accounts of how RBS portraits are composed and revised in organizations, researchers must develop appropriate methodologies to capture the nature of the RBS and changes in the RBS. First, researchers must develop measures that capture the structure and content of the RBS. Eliciting this newly conceptualized cognitive construct from people will require using innovative quantitative and qualitative methods to examine how diverse groups of people think about themselves at their best. Researchers will need to create reflection and narrative exercises that help individuals document their RBS portraits in writing. The next useful step might be to identify whether there is a common structure among individuals' RBS portraits by conducting content analyses of several RBS portraits. Such analyses should capture aspects of the RBS that are common across portraits, without losing the unique combination of qualities and experiences that make the RBS distinctive within individuals.

Further, the theory we present in this article represents a dynamic process of individuals' active composition of the RBS. As such, we are presented with a need for methods that can represent changes in an individual's construal of the RBS over time. One way of approaching this problem might be to capture participants' notions of the self through descriptive measures, such as "I am" statements (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954), or through relational mapping (Josselson,

1996) before and after a jolt intervention, and analyzing the differences between the portrayals of the RBS. We also propose that jolts can vary in magnitude, from a subtle comment or smile to a grand event in a public forum. This implies that one should also measure the magnitude of change in the RBS portrait, ranging from incremental changes to radical transformations, in response to minor versus major jolts. Such methods may help researchers to understand how jolts of particular magnitudes and/or qualities produce systematic changes in RBS portraits.

A third area for methodological development involves finding valid ways to measure the resources available to an individual at the time he or she faces new information and images of who he or she is at his or her best. Our theory suggests that emotional, relational, and agentic resources act alone and in combination to enable the revision of self-knowledge about one's RBS. Experimental studies may provide a controlled method for studying the effects of resources on the RBS revision process by inducing the amount and type of resources available to an individual when he or she confronts a jolt. Research could also pursue a nonexperimental route, using a combination of quantitative, qualitative, and ethnographic approaches to discover how the perceived presence of resources available to an individual when he or she is exposed to positive self-relevant information influences subsequent revisions to the RBS portrait.

CONCLUSION: A COLLECTIVE JOURNEY TOWARD BECOMING EXTRAORDINARY

In this article we have proposed a theory of how social context enables individual development in work organizations. In particular, we have described a process by which social experiences (i.e., jolts) and socially embedded resources (i.e., positive affect, positive interpersonal relationships, and personal agency) spark and nourish positive shifts in how people envision their own sources of strength, competence, and added value. These revisions to the RBS portrait promote positive changes in identity, action, and well-being and advance individuals along a trajectory toward becoming extraordinary—the state in which they fully enact their RBS.

Our theory of the RBS portrait helps organizational researchers to see the links between theories of personal identity and career change in organizations (e.g., Higgins, 2001; Hill, 2003; Ibarra, 1999, 2003) and theories of resource-based views of the firm (Barney, 1991). In particular, our theory helps researchers see how the microcontext inside organizations contributes to the creation of difficult-to-imitate, rare, and valuable organizational resources in the form of individuals striving, growing, and developing themselves in ways that move them toward excellence and extraordinariness. We see real promise in helping to uncover some of the microdynamics through which strategic human resources are built and sustained. We view the RBS (and the processes that create and direct this important knowledge structure) as a keystone in the sustainable development of strategic human resources that contribute to an organization's capacity to compete effectively over time.

Instead of considering human capital as a fixed asset, we describe the dynamic process of creating social contexts where individuals are able to evolve in the direction of their capability and potential (Coleman, 1988; Schultz, 1961). More traditional notions of human resource management are based on two assumptions: (1) organizations benefit by effectively using the human resources they acquire, which suggests that they attempt to employ the "best" individuals, and (2) organizations benefit from identifying and eliminating personal weaknesses in employees. In this paper we present an additional means of human resource management: creating contexts that maximize the possibility for employees to envision and enact their best-self. In contrast to normative methods of human resource management, such as traditional performance evaluations, which encourage looking across employees to see who is the "best," our theory of the RBS aligns with developmental theories that highlight means of building human capital through enhancing employees' skills, talents, and performance. Thus, it is important to be clear that while organizations can use the RBS portrait for employee development, it is not intended to be a new method of evaluating people. Instead, we discuss the strategic human resource capacity inherent in helping people discover who they are when they are at their personal best.

Implicit in our theory of the RBS is the assumption that organizations cannot maximize their strategic human resource capacity with a solitary focus on eliminating limitations and weaknesses; organizations must also focus on building the strengths that reside within their employees, systems, and structures (Clifton & Harter, 2003). In line with the Gallup Organization's research on human strengths (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Harter, 2003), we posit that organizations experience the greatest gains in human development when they invest in what people do best naturally. We do not encourage organizations to ignore weaknesses, but we do suggest that organizations will be more likely to achieve excellence (via customer loyalty, employee retention, and productivity) when they focus and build on employees' strengths, with only a secondary focus on understanding and managing weaknesses (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Changes in the RBS portrait over time provide one explanatory theory for understanding why a strength-based approach to employee development is effective from an individual's point of view.

We do not consider the resources that enable development to be limited or depleting (e.g., money, time, promotions); instead, we describe socially embedded resources that are regenerated through human development (e.g., positive emotions, positive relationships, personal agency). This view of socially embedded resources parallels descriptions of social and human capital as resources that are generated through use but that depreciate with nonuse (see Adler & Kwon, 2002, for a review). As individuals discover their core competencies and draw on these competencies to add value to their social system, the system is enriched, and the core competencies of the organization (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990) are transformed.

In this way, the theory of RBS composition maps a microlevel process for individual growth that may result in upward spirals of increasing collective capability and potentiality in organizations. However, it is important to note that although revising the RBS portrait enhances individuals' identity, well-being, and action, these changes may not always benefit the organization. If, for example, employees discover that they are unable to actualize their RBS within their current organization, they may seek employment with other organizations that will pro-

vide opportunities for them to enact their RBS more frequently.

This theory of RBS composition also has implications for managing change in organizations. We describe both personal and social factors that enable the composition of the RBS portrait—the individual and the organization cocreate the context for change through psychological, relational, and physical resources. In so doing, we paint a picture of individuals as having personal agency; they proactively negotiate their work identities to determine who they are and what they do. This perspective builds on research on job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), self-development (Ashford & Tsui, 1991), feedback seeking (Ashford, 1986; Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003), and identity construction (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997) in organizations.

Yet work organizations also expand or constrain the possibilities for being extraordinary. They do this by both affecting the pattern of jolts that confront individuals and by affording or denying the resources that contribute to revising the RBS portrait. Creating workplaces where people can be authentic or "fully there" (Kahn, 1990, 1992) involves not only facilitating self-discovery to discover true sources of strength and competence but also allowing these sources of strength and competence to flourish. Rather than expecting mediocre performance, organizations that operate by setting stretch goals as part of their business strategy might also expect extraordinary contributions from employees. Thus, our theory suggests that leaders might create high-performing organizations (Collins, 2001; Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Tichy & Sherman, 1993) by creating high-performing individuals (Spreitzer et al., 1995).

For example, consider two organizations that vary systematically in the degree to which their culture values developing employees as part of the core ideology. One organization, vitality. com, sees passion, growth, development, and long-term tenure with the organization as desirable and normal. The other organization, transaction.com, values individuals' direct and regular contributions to the bottom line and is unconcerned about development and long-term employment. Work organizations that have cultures (values, norms, and shared beliefs) that promote employee development are more likely to have more formal and appreciative jolts (such as the RBS intervention), and when employees face challenges, they are more likely to have access to critical resources (e.g., positive affect, positive relationships, and personal agency) for self-revision. In these kinds of organizations, we would expect individuals to flourish as a result of continual revisions of the RBS portrait. While hypothetical, this contrast invites theoretical and empirical exploration of what features of work organizations enable individuals' movement toward becoming extraordinary.

Becoming extraordinary is about a pursuit of potential—a never-ending journey with new joys to uncover. The journey of becoming extraordinary is ongoing and evolves over time, with no discernible final end state. By understanding how individuals continually evolve into the RBS, without comparing them to other individuals, we can determine how to generate extraordinary contributions and performance in work organizations. The theoretical quest to understand and empirically test how organizational contexts help individuals thrive is a direct answer to the call for more studies that extend the field of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003; Dutton, 2003a; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, in press). As such, we encourage the continued pursuit of theory and data that help to uncover pathways toward becoming extraordinary in work organizations.

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