Remembrance of Things Past:
Linking Organizational Fortunes and Individual Performance Over Time

Abstract
This paper illuminates the intertwined nature of organizational fortunes and individual performance over time, examining how the economic situation of an organization leaves a lasting imprint on new employees and how that imprint affects subsequent job performance. The core proposition is that the more similar the initially experienced level of organizational munificence to the level of munificence in a subsequent period, the higher the focal individual’s job performance. The strength of this relationship is contingent on the individual’s career stage when entering the organization and the influence of secondhand imprinting, that is, the social transmission of others’ imprints. Moreover, a possible implication of the core hypothesis is a “curse of extremes,” whereby both very high and very low levels of initial munificence might be associated with lower average performance during a person’s subsequent tenure. A longitudinal study of professionals in two information technology services firms supports these predictions, and interview data add depth to the explanations. This research uncovers mechanisms whereby past organizational conditions impinge on present individual outcomes, thus shedding new light how individuals may be influenced both by their own histories and by organizational conditions that existed even before their tenure or career began.