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

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ABSTRACT
This study examines how the intraorganizational resource environment at the time when individuals join an organization leaves a lasting imprint on them and how that imprint affects their subsequent performance. The core hypothesis is that the more similar the initially experienced level of resource abundance to the level of resource abundance in a subsequent period, the higher the focal individual’s job performance. Under some fairly general assumptions about intraorganizational resource fluctuations over an individual’s tenure, a key implication of this hypothesis is an inverted U-shaped relationship between initial resource abundance and average future job performance. This suggests a paradox of plenty: ironically, highly prosperous initial conditions are less beneficial for average future performance than are moderate initial conditions. Further, I argue that this proposed mechanism will be especially strong if one’s own formative experiences are reinforced by secondhand imprinting, that is, the imprints of one’s initial coworkers. Thus, because imprints are transmitted socially, individuals continue to be influenced by organizational conditions that existed even before their careers began. A multi-method study of professionals in two information technology services firms supports these predictions. This research uncovers several mechanisms whereby past organizational conditions impinge on present individual outcomes, thus shedding new light on the intertwined fortunes of individuals and organizations.