♦ ♦ ♦

MEET THE PERSON

The "Moments that Matter" for Fred Luthans's Academic Career

STEVEN M. SOMMER
Pepperdine University, USA

Keywords: *Fred Luthans; Psychological Capital; research careers*

INTRODUCTION

Roughly a decade ago, *Management Laureates* was begun as a compendium of the careers of notable scholars in the management field. Of no surprise to those who know him, Fred Luthans's research and mentoring contributions since equal if not exceed his biography published in the 1996 volume. Just a few of the additional highlights since that time were being named the Academy of Management's (AOM) Distinguished Educator in 1997, being named University of Nebraska Distinguished Graduate Educator in 2000, as well as being selected to the inaugural AOM Hall of Fame in 2000. When I first proposed this interview, one goal was to show how his work has continued and evolved. In fact, I teased Fred that whereas in 1996 he cited our 1993 *Academy of Management Journal* (*AMJ*) article on Russian factory workers as his best article ever, he states in this interview that I have been supplanted by his 1998 *Psychological Bulletin* article with Alex Stajkovic. Truthfully, I expected that (though that did not prevent a moment of sorrow). Likewise, when you finish this interview, you may get the feeling his best work is yet to come.

Although Fred (always the editor) chose the title "Moments that Matter," it has personal significance for me. I can still remember that cold March night in 1989 looking out the window of an America West flight heading from Lincoln back to sunny Irvine, California. The moment when I "knew" the University of Nebraska was the right place for me. I have never regretted that decision, and Fred is a major reason why. Indeed, doing this interview produced another "moment" that led to my becoming the "Meet the Person" Section Editor. Thus a good amount of what I intended to say here became the "Editor's Introduction"! So if you haven't read that, turn back a page. After that, enjoy learning about the man behind the record.

FRED LUTHANS: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RECORD

Fred Luthans is the George Holmes University Distinguished Professor of Management at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He was president of the Academy of Management in 1986, received the Academy's Distinguished Educator Award in 1997, was named in 2000 as a member of the Academy's Hall of Fame for his numerous publications in *AMJ* and *Academy of Management Review*, and received an honorary doctorate from DePaul University and the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Iowa, from which he received all of his degrees. Currently, with John Slocum, he is coeditor-in-chief of the *Journal of*

JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT INQUIRY, Vol. 15 No. 1, March 2006 37-44
DOI: 10.1177/1056492605285713

World Business, editor of *Organizational Dynamics*, and coeditor of *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, and the author of numerous books. His book *Organizational Behavior* is now in its 10th edition and *International Management* is in its 6th edition, both published by McGraw-Hill. His more specialized books include *Organizational Behavior Modification* (with coauthor Robert Kreitner), *Real Managers*, *The High Impact Leader: Moments Matter in Accelerating Authentic Leadership Development* (with Bruce Avolio, McGraw-Hill), and almost complete *Positive Psychological Capital for Competitive Advantage* (with Carolyn Youssef and Bruce Avolio, Oxford University Press). He is one of a very few management scholars who is a Fellow of the Academy of Management, the Decision Sciences Institute, and the Pan Pacific Business Association. He has been involved with a number of basic research streams published in top-tier journals in the field of management, organizational behavior and industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology. In particular, his studies include reinforcement theory and application, observed managerial activities, self-efficacy, and now positive organizational behavior and psychological capital. In addition to his university position, he has been a senior research scientist for Gallup Inc. since 1998 and does consulting and training for businesses, governments, and nongovernmental organizations locally, nationally, and internationally. He and Kay, his wife of 42 years, have four grown children and so far six adorable grandchildren. An avid golfer, he is also a big University of Nebraska sports fan.

INTERVIEW WITH FRED LUTHANS
THE PERSON

Steve: Let's start from the beginning. Tell me briefly about your roots and what impact this had on you.

Fred: I love talking about growing up in Clinton, Iowa, because I had such a wonderful childhood and memorable high school years. I can honestly say my parents, Carl and Leona, my older sister, Nancy, and all my other relatives, taught me all the life-mattering values and beliefs that have guided me to this day—importance of family, honesty in everything you do, and giving every informed choice you make, in my dad's words, "your best shot."

Steve: Sounds like an ideal upbringing and you seem convinced this has had a lasting impact.

Fred: I was very fortunate to have such loving, supportive parents, midwestern cultural values, and a great public school education. I loved high school. I didn't study hard and received only above average grades, but I had a great time with my friends (always on the edge, but never in trouble) and playing sports (one of the best hurdlers in the state). My close colleague Bruce Avolio and I have a new book out on authentic leadership development, and he has convinced me of the importance of negative and positive trigger events or moments throughout one's life course. We can all identify certain moments that really mattered in defining who we are. For me, a lot of those moments occurred before I left for college at the University of Iowa.

Steve: Moments matter, that's where you came up with the suggested title for this interview. Tell us about your University of Iowa moments.

Fred: I had great college years, all eight straight of them. My dad began to wonder if I was ever going to leave school and get a job. Even though his nine brothers and sisters all were successful, my dad was the only one in his family to graduate from high school, and the value he placed on education was what kept me going all the way through my doctorate at the age of 25 in 1965. My undergrad years were just an extension of high school (partying *Animal House* style and running hurdles on the track team). I majored in math and received my commission in the Army ROTC. I really didn't have a goal to get a Ph.D. but thought I might as well go on for an MBA because I really couldn't do much with a math degree and C+ grades. However, it was that 1st year of grad school that I had one of those defining moments. At one of our parties, I drank a lot of rum and woke up the "day after" sick and up came something red. I was thinking, "I drank white rum," and then realized it was blood. At that point, I tried to rouse my roommates, to no avail, so I attempted to reach my car many blocks away but passed out in a snow bank. A passer-by took me to the University Hospital where I almost bled to death from an ulcer I did not know I had. Here I was, 22 years old with no real goals in life, but fortunately this negative moment turned into a positive for me. It changed my life, because from that moment on I never received anything but A's, became serious with my girlfriend, soon to become fiancé and wife Kay (the best thing that ever happened to me), and had a clear goal of getting a Ph.D. and becoming a professor. In our *Moments* book, Bruce and I make a distinction between moments and more severe, immediate jolts; this life-threatening bleeding ulcer was certainly a jolt for me.

Steve: So now you're jolted into being a serious student, what was your doctoral program like?

Fred: At that time at Iowa (or anywhere else) there was no organizational behavior (OB) program, but I was very fortunate to have a great foundation which later helped me to get in on the ground floor of the OB field. Areas of specialization in general management with Henry Albers, human resources (then called personnel and labor relations) under newly minted Ph.D. Max Wortman who had just come to Iowa from the University of Minnesota, organization theory from Cal Hoyt, a Berkley-educated industrial sociologist, and, probably most important to my future as an OB

scholar, a strong minor in social psychology consisting of a number of courses in the widely recognized Iowa psych department that had turned out Al Bandura and many other giants in the field. This gave me an excellent Ph.D. program to draw from the rest of my career.

Steve: So you feel your education at Iowa has served you well in becoming a scholar in OB?

Fred: Yes, most definitely. I am probably most proud of the Distinguished Alumni Award for career achievement that I received from Iowa a couple of years ago. Especially because I remember the moment when my dad, as a practical joke, but sending a strong message, put a delinquency slip indicating I was not passing a course at mid-semester next to my sister's Phi Beta Kappa certificate on our home's living room wall.

Steve: So now you've covered some of the defining moments of the first part of your life's journey, what happened next?

Fred: The day following being hooded with my Ph.D. degree, I was doing push-ups in the dirt at Fort Benning, Georgia: "Welcome to the Army Infantry School, Doc!" After receiving my officer's commission, I had been on educational delay, so immediately after graduating I had to report for active duty. This was 1965 and the very beginning of the build-up for the Viet Nam War. Here is where my education really paid off. Unlike M.D.s or even dentists, the military gave no consideration to those with a Ph.D. Because I knew I was going in, I looked in the West Point catalogue and saw a great fit for my background and interests in the Department of Military Psychology and Leadership. With the help of my Iowa ROTC colonel (a West Point grad), I was able to be assigned to West Point, after first completing the Infantry Officer's Course at Fort Benning. I think I was the only one in that Benning class that did not go to Nam. In fact, Mel Gibson's movie, *They Were Soldiers*, had scenes of Fort Benning troops getting ready to take off to fight the first big battle of the War. I was there at the time. This was a very sad personal moment for me because many of my buddies during that training, and later some of the cadets I taught at West Point, never came back. As was brought out many times in this last presidential campaign, that War keeps coming back to haunt us.

Steve: Any positive moments coming out of your military experience?

Fred: Oh yes, many, on personal and professional levels. The most positive personal one was that Kay gave birth to our first child, Kristin, at the West Point hospital our 2nd year there. Besides that thrill, we thoroughly enjoyed the cultural opportunities at the Point and nearby New York City—for example, we had numerous free Broadway theatre tickets through the USO. Not only these personal things, but I was able to really develop my teaching skills with wonderful students who snapped to attention when I entered the class. That happens to all of us, right? I can verify that West Point has the very highest admission standards. I just saw Harvard is ranked second on the list. These cadets were very bright and respectful, but once given "At Ease!" were just like all the other students I have had over the years. Besides the teaching, I also was able to do a lot of reading that I really didn't get to do in grad school. Also, as a military officer, I received free tuition to attend seminars at the Columbia Graduate School of Business (wonderful cutting-edge courses from Bill Newman in strategy and Len Sayles in organizational behavior) and at their executive program at Arden House. This was the beautiful old Harriman estate in the Hudson Valley, where in executive sessions I was provided lasting moments for my thinking by Chris Argyris and other true pioneers in the OB field.

Steve: So it sounds as if you actually had a great postdoc experience through your Army duty.

Fred: I really did. I look at those 2 years as critical to my development as a teacher, scholar, and person. Too many of our new Ph.D.s have the pressure to hit the ground running to keep on track to attain tenure, whereas I was able to digest, learn, and have fun. I was offered a permanent position at West Point, but we were ready to strike out on our own and enter into the real world of academia.

Steve: What was the job market like at that time, in 1967?

Fred: At that time it seemed much more low key, if not a better market. I, of course, had 2 years out from my degree with actual experience and several published articles that I had coauthored with Max Wortman before leaving Iowa. After interviews, I received offers from Columbia (I think it was like U.S.$9,000 and the parking was something like $100 a month), University of Michigan, University of Missouri, and Nebraska. I took the University of Nebraska offer of $11,700 and associate professor, so I was never an assistant professor. I have been here ever since and have never regretted it.

Steve: Okay, now tell us about some of your defining moments at Nebraska.

Fred: Well on brief reflection, I would divide this longest and most significant portion of my life course according to the impact several important friends, mentors, and doctoral students I have had that moved me from my actual self (largely based on what I have touched on so far) to my possible self. First and foremost would be my life partner Kay. She, of course, provided me with most of my truly important moments over the past 38 years we have lived in Nebraska. In particular, these moments have revolved around our four children, Kristin, Brett, Kyle, and Paige, and now their spouses and six grandchildren, so far. Our family has always come first, but Kay has also served as a sounding board and mentor for my professional life as well. I can't remember when I did not follow her sage advice and commonsense wisdom. Professionally, however, I would have to start with Henry Albers.

Steve: Wasn't he your major professor at Iowa?

Fred: Yes, he was, and I certainly give him major credit for my doctoral education and advice and encouragement to pursue the then newly emerging management

field, instead of economics, which I had considered. But how lucky can you get? The year after I came to Nebraska, Albers was hired as the first chair of the newly formed Management Department. He obviously not only provided me with the best support I could ask for but also, because he had one of the first texts in *Principles of Management* (John Wiley, first published in 1961), also challenged me to write a text in my passion for the just-emerging field of OB. To this day I feel that was a defining moment for me. Not that textbooks are such a big deal, but when mine came out in 1973 there was no mainline OB text. Canada's Joe Kelly had a book titled *Organizational Behaviour* that Irwin's Dorsey Press had published a few years earlier on their psychology list, but, as far as I know, there was no other straight organizational behavior text. There were, of course, human relations texts and professional research–oriented books dealing with organizational behavior topics. Anyway, it took me 4 years to write that book from 7 to 11 p.m. every night in a converted closet that was my home office. I have been keeping this same writing time ever since, but in a nicer home office.

Steve: So you got in on the ground floor of the OB field with this text rather than a specific theory you developed or research study you conducted?

Fred: The text and the fact it was published by McGraw-Hill certainly gave me a lot of worldwide exposure. McGraw-Hill's stability in the turbulent textbook publishing world, along with the time and effort I devoted to revisions through the years has resulted in the 10th edition now in print. As you know, I was also the consulting editor for the McGraw-Hill Management Series for 22 years. But, back to your observation, unlike many other successful textbook authors, I have always prided myself on doing theory building and basic research. At the same time I was writing that first text, I was also doing the first studies in the workplace using reinforcement theory and what one of my early doctoral students, Bob Kreitner, and I called *organizational behavior modification* or simply *O.B. Mod*.

Steve: Tell me how O.B. Mod. came about.

Fred: Again, a defining moment triggered me into O.B. Mod. I had been doing management-by-objectives (MBO) training and consulting for the Nebraska Mental Health System in the late 1960s when the director, a psychiatrist Dr. Robert Osborne, casually said to me after one of my sessions, "Fred, we have been successfully using behavior mod techniques as a treatment technique with our patients. Why don't you use this same behavior technology when you talk about managing our staff?" That moment was a jolt for me. I blurted out something like, "I have no idea, it makes so much sense." What Danny Kahneman (the recent Nobel Prize winner and fellow senior scientist with me at Gallup) calls my "remembering self" came to the fore in this moment. I reflected back to my grad school background in reinforcement theory and behaviorism from my psych courses. I almost immediately started some research projects with my doctoral students. The very first was to apply a five-step model of behavioral management that we drew from educational psychology with a group of supervisors at a Frito-Lay plant in Council Bluffs, Iowa, not far from Lincoln. We had great results in this initial study by training supervisors to identify critical performance behaviors their workers performed, measure how often these identified behaviors were occurring, analyze the antecedents and the consequences, intervene with contingent social recognition and feedback from the trained supervisors to accelerate the identified performance behaviors, and, finally, evaluate to make sure performance was improving. In other words, we developed and applied the same basic model of O.B. Mod. we are still using today in our research and consulting.

Steve: When did your O.B. mod. book come out?

Fred: I wrote the first articles on behavioral management starting in 1971. I later found out about Walt Nord's article written on the topic a couple of years earlier (no computer searches in those days). Then, when Bob Kreitner finished his doctoral program under me, we wrote the O.B. mod. book published in 1975. I really got into this paradigm because of its logical positivism roots and because our continuing research was showing such a significant impact on performance outcomes in all types of settings (manufacturing, service, and health care). As you know, the *AMJ* article I did with you and Dianne Welsh also showed that it worked in Russia, and my very latest article published with Suzanne Peterson in *Journal of Applied Psychology* shows the relative effects of the various reward interventions on unit-level performance over time, and one of my most recent studies with Shanggeun Rhee replicates our positive findings when applied in one of the most modern in the world Korean broadband Internet provider firms. We have had numerous studies over the years that culminated when one of my former doctoral students, Alex Stajkovic, now a professor at Wisconsin, and I published a meta-analysis of this work in *AMJ* in 1997. We found that, on average, our O.B. Mod. approach increased performance 17%, and a later meta-analysis that incorporated all behavioral management approaches (published in 2003 in *Personnel Psychology*) averaged 16%. I feel these were impressive results, and they resonate very well with practicing managers.

Steve: Before going into your post–O.B. Mod. academic development, were there any other important early influences on you at Nebraska?

Fred: Yes, most definitely, that would be in 1976 when Sang Lee became department chair. My mentor Henry Albers semiretired and moved on, and Sang did not miss a beat in supporting me and providing many moments that mattered. For instance, I will never forget when he challenged me to become more global in my thinking and orientation to my work. Kay and I had done a little traveling to Europe and Mexico, but one day in the late 1970s in his office he said something like: "Fred, you have to broaden your horizons,

come with me on this trip to Asia, I want to show you the world you have been missing." That launched me into my travels with Sang that took me to Asia at least once and sometimes more times a year. Then starting in 1992 till last year, we went to Albania a couple of times a year, and the rest of world in between. On the Albanian project that Sang had with U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S. A.I.D.) to provide business and economic education to this devastated, but beautiful little country, we were there from the very beginning (we were there before the Peace Corps) of their transition from communism to democracy and free enterprise. This was a life-changing experience. Sang has become a best friend and mentor, even though I taught him the game of golf and never have been able to beat him since.

Steve: So you had this broadening of your context into the international domain, and, of course, I traveled with you guys to Albania, and we had our published studies in Russia and Korea together, so I am personally familiar with those moments. However, tell us when you broadened out your academic thinking into social learning and cognition.

Fred: My remembering self goes back to the late 1970s when a triggering moment occurred in one of my doctoral seminars. One of my students, Tim Davis (originally from England and now long-time professor at Cleveland State), openly challenged me that I was being too narrow, too parsimonious with my behaviorism paradigm that I was touting at the time. We had a number of heated exchanges, but, not unlike the moment I had with the Nebraska Mental Health psychiatrist to challenge me to apply behaviorism, Tim triggered the moment to again draw from my Iowa psychology program, the same one that had produced Al Bandura, to think of the application of social learning to the workplace. Tim and I published an article in 1980 in *AMR*, "A Social Learning Approach to Organizational Behavior," that disappointingly received very little attention, but when Kreitner and I incorporated this social learning into an article in *Organizational Dynamics* ("Radical Behaviorists Mellowing Out") and a 10-year revision (1985) of our O.B. mod. book, it did start to be recognized in the OB field. So, at this point in my remembering self, I felt I was, to borrow positive psychologist Barb Fredrickson's term, "broadening and building," but certainly not abandoning my behavioristic approach. I have frequently used the analogy with my students of how Bandura's career went from behavior modification (his well-known 1969 book) to social learning (1977 book) to social cognition (1986 book) to self-efficacy (1997 book). I've never been hesitant to use Bandura's own modeling concept as explaining how he served as an important model (not mentor, because I only met him several years ago when I hosted him at Gallup) for my own interests and evolving theoretical orientation. This example demonstrates that you do not have to have immediately available mentors and role models to significantly affect one's transition from actual self to possible self. This vicarious learning or modeling can be done at a distance in terms of time and space. This is how we learn, of course, but also this is how our personal careers can develop over time.

Steve: When did your concern for self-efficacy enter into your career stream?

Fred: That moment I attribute to Alex Stajkovic. In the mid 1990s in doctoral seminars and through his dissertation research, Alex challenged me and, frankly, educated me about the importance of social cognitive theory and specifically self-efficacy in the workplace. He found an average correlation of .38 in a huge meta-analysis ($N = 114$ studies, 21,616 participants) between self-efficacy and work-related performance. We published this study in a 1998 *Psych Bulletin* article. Alex deserves most of the credit, but I feel this is the best research article I have been associated with and it certainly has received the most attention. More important than this study per se, however, is that the interest I had in this powerful efficacy construct I drew from and translated into the positive psychological capacity and strength of confidence. Self-efficacy, or simply confidence, served as a theoretical platform and springboard into my most recent interest in positivity in the workplace.

Steve: What was the moment that mattered for you in developing positive organizational behavior or what you call POB?

Fred: That moment came when I happened to be in the right place at the right time. The time was 1999, and the place was at then Gallup headquarters in Lincoln, Nebraska. It was the first Positive Psychology Summit. Since 1998, in addition to my university job, I have been very fortunate, mainly through my association with fellow Lincolnite Jim Clifton, president and CEO of Gallup, to be a senior scientist with Gallup. I was sitting in on that first Summit, listening to the founders of positive psychology Marty Seligman, Ed Deiner, and others talk about shifting the focus of the field from almost only what is wrong and dysfunctional with people to what is right with people and how to make them thrive and flourish. This, of course, was right in line with what Jim's father, Don Clifton (the former University of Nebraska ed psych professor and founder of Selection Research Inc. that purchased the polling company Gallup in the mid 1980s) advocated for their business—strength-based consulting. Don had heard and read about Seligman's work and especially his presidential speech in 1998 at the American Psychological Association, where he gave the charge to the field to become more positive. After discussing the considerable common ground, Gallup sponsored the first Positive Psychology Summit in Lincoln. My trigger moment, just like the other turning points in my career, hit me all of a sudden while listening to Seligman's pitch about the neglected impact of positivity on human functioning. I, of course, was steeped in and had always defended my behavioral management approach with the relative importance of positive rather than negative reinforcement or pun-

ishment, and my work with self-efficacy or confidence was certainly very positively oriented and uplifting for people's psychological capacities to perform well. So, like some other OB researchers, such as those advocating positive affectivity and emotions, I was certainly predisposed to a positive approach. But at this first conference, the whole positivity paradigm and its constructs, such as optimism, hope, happiness, resiliency, and flow, which were seldom mentioned, let alone studied as to their impact in the workplace, really struck a cord with me. However, these positive psychologists were at the societal level and talking mostly about clinical applications. They barely mentioned, if at all or only in passing, the application of positivity in general and these powerful psychological strengths, in particular, to the workplace. Therefore, at that first conference, it all came together for me—my own work on positive reinforcement and self-efficacy and/or confidence, my work with and exposure to Gallup's strength-based consulting practice, and now this exciting new positive psychology paradigm. At that time, I was frankly somewhat disgruntled that although we were heading into a new century, nothing in the OB field seemed new or exciting. We seemed satisfied with drilling deeper and deeper into the same old concepts, making the bridge back to relevancy and performance improvement increasingly more difficult, and, for me, there was nothing fresh and exciting on the horizon. We had already clearly shown through the meta-analyses that the O.B. Mod. approach to performance management worked and that self-efficacy had the strongest relationship with performance. Then this moment at the positive psychology conference became a trigger event for my career—positive organizational behavior, POB.

Steve: Why did you think OB needed a positive approach; haven't we had this over the years?

Fred: Just as in the field of psychology, there obviously had been previous positive approaches in OB. What I have tried to do with POB is to not only provide more focus on the importance and impact of positivity in the workplace but also differentiate it from traditional OB concerns, such as positive affectivity, job satisfaction, or even humor, and also more recent work, such as on positive emotions, prosocial behaviors, Big Five factors such as conscientiousness, or Tim Judge's positively oriented self-evaluations. In fact, proponents of many, if not most, of the topics and constructs in OB could argue the positive aspects of their approaches, but I wanted to bring a renewed focus and some unique positive constructs to the field. I found several that particularly resonated with me in the positive psychology movement in general, and especially some overlooked constructs in the clinical area, as opposed to I/O and social psychology from where we have almost exclusively drawn throughout the years. Specifically, I found the positive psychological capacities for hope and resiliency to be particularly new and intriguing and very relevant to our current scene. The good news was these two positive capacities had considerable theory and research backup, were unique to the OB field, and seemed to be open to change and development with potential impact on performance improvement of today's organizations. Obviously, there are many other possibilities. For example, in their new handbook, Chris Peterson and Seligman identify certain character strengths and virtues that would seem to be good candidates for the future of POB, as long as they meet the criteria for what I, at least, mean by POB.

Steve: What are these criteria, how do you specifically define POB?

Fred: In my two articles that came out in *Academy of Management Executive* and *Journal of Organizational Behavior* in 2002, I wanted to clearly define and operationalize *POB* through specific criteria and thus be able to differentiate what I mean by this approach. I had earlier done the same with behavioral performance management through the five-step O.B. Mod. model that I found to be very helpful in guiding our research and application. Therefore, to be included in POB, the criteria that must be met include (a) being positive and unique, (b) based on theory and research, (c) have valid measurement, (d) being open to development and change (i.e., state-like as opposed to fixed and trait-like), and (e) being manageable for performance improvement in the workplace. Often I am asked how POB differs from other positive approaches or constructs, and I go back to these inclusion criteria. Thus, I differentiate POB from the popular positive message books, such as *Who Moved My Cheese?* or the *Power of Positive Thinking*, by virtually all the criteria. Again, I differentiate from the traditional positive OB literature by the uniqueness criterion and many of the newer constructs such as conscientiousness or self-evaluation, on the basis of not being state-like, and thus not being open to development and performance management. Notice that I deliberately use the term *state-like* to recognize that the state-trait distinction is more along a continuum than being polar opposites. But this state-like criterion is a big differentiator for what I include in POB. The Michigan group's positive organization scholarship (POS) movement would be close, and, complementary, but it is still different. Even though much of their work is unique, it still needs better measures, is often not state-like, and has not yet clearly demonstrated performance impact. By the way, the same could be said of emotional intelligence, plus it is not unique enough to be included in POB. Anyway, back to POS, it also tends to reflect the interests of those most closely associated with the movement, such as Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, Bob Quinn, Kathleen Sutciffe, and Gretchen Spreitzer who tend to take more of a macro, organizational level perspective. POB, on the other hand, reflects my interest at the more micro, individual level of analysis. Finally, even though POB is drawn from positive psych, I would differentiate POB from much of it on the basis of the state-like criterion

and especially, of course, the performance management, workplace application. I hope this answer does not come off as implying that POB is somehow better or that I am trying to defend it as being right and the others are limited or wrong. I am simply trying to operationally define one positive framework that can be built on through theory and research and hopefully have an impact on performance in today's workplace.

Steve: How have you and your colleagues built on this POB foundation, or in going back to your earlier discussion, moved it from the "actual" to the "possible"?

Fred: We have several research projects in various stages and continue to build the theoretical underpinnings. In terms of research, I recently summarized the status of our research at a presentation I gave at a Gallup sponsored Positive Psychology Summit in Washington, D.C. I reported that we have several studies on each of the major POB states of confidence and/or efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency. The samples are quite varied, ranging from engineers and managers in a very large high-tech manufacturing firm to nurses in a regional hospital to Midwest entrepreneurs in new small businesses to Chinese factory workers to large cross-sectional studies of managers and employees. So far, these studies indicate significant relationships between various POB states and performance outcomes and other outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and perceptions of the authenticity of their leaders. The simple average, not yet meta-analysis nor corrected average correlations, of these more than 20 relationships is about .3 for the performance outcomes and the other outcomes. In other words, at least our preliminary research indicates that these POB states have about the same degree of relationship with work-related outcomes as other well known constructs in OB. We are continuing to test new samples and possible moderators, but the classic scientific process of going back to further theory building is where I am seeing some exciting, untapped possibilities for leveraging the POB states into even more of an impact.

Steve: Is this where your most recent articles on psychological capital enters the picture?

Fred: Very good Steve, right on cue. Yes, taking off from what Tim Judge had done with his core self-evaluations model and what Alex Stajkovic and, to a lesser degree, I had tried to do with a core confidence model of motivation, I felt that the POB criteria-meeting states that I had been working with could be conceptually and statistically combined into what I call *Positive Psychological Capital* or simply *PsyCap*. I used this term as a takeoff from the growing recognition and popularity of intellectual or human capital and more recent social capital. Just as I had done with getting POB out in published articles a few years earlier, I got a kick writing the first PsyCap article published in *Business Horizons* in the spring of 2004 with Brett and Kyle, my two management professor sons, and your Ph.D. graduates when you were at Nebraska. In that initial article we explained that traditional economic and/or financial capital represented the physical "what you have" to invest and/or develop for a return, human capital is "what you know" for a return, and social capital is "who you know" for a return. The new PsyCap was proposed to be a higher order core construct consisting of the criteria meeting POB states such as, but not limited to, confidence and/or efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency. A few months after this first article, Carolyn Youssef, one of my recent doctoral graduates, and I published in *Organizational Dynamics* (2004) a more fully expanded version of what we mean by *PsyCap* and provided specific guidelines for development. We made the case for PsyCap providing competitive advantage for today's organizations. Specifically, in these two articles we define *PsyCap* as a psychological construct of positivity in general, and POB criteria-meeting states in particular, that go beyond human and social capital to gain a competitive advantage through investment and/or development of "who you are" and "what you can become." Importantly, this PsyCap is a natural progression in my career development journey, and I really feel it has moved me from my actual self to my possible self as an OB scholar.

Steve: Do you have any research results in on PsyCap yet?

Fred: Yes, drawing from several of the data sets I mentioned before and continuing research with my colleagues and doctoral students at the Gallup Leadership Institute here at the university, we have found PsyCap to have a highly significant relationship with performance and satisfaction. Although still preliminary at this stage of the research, this relationship is higher than any of the POB states by themselves. Statistically, we are able to show that PsyCap as a whole adds variance over and above the individual factors that make it up. In other words, we have at least initial evidence that PsyCap may indeed be a higher order, core construct. In addition, we have developed and tested a reliable and valid PsyCap measure. Perhaps most exciting to me, however, is that we have been able to demonstrate that PsyCap can be developed in highly focused, short (1 to 3 hour) microinterventions. Using student samples randomly assigned to experimental and control groups and practicing managers, we are able to significantly increase their level of PsyCap. The control groups submitted to a nonrelated intervention showed no increase. Our PsyCap microintervention is drawn from hope, optimism, efficacy, and resiliency development guidelines. When we conducted a utility analysis based on the actual results of a microintervention with 74 engineering managers of a high-tech manufacturing firm we have been working with, the dollar impact was well over 300,000 value added on the investment of about 10,000 to conduct the 2½ hour session ($50/hour for these high-paid participants and $750 of indirect training costs) the return was 36%. Although these and other study results are still preliminary, we are

very encouraged that PsyCap can have performance impact and that it can be developed in these short, highly focused intervention sessions. We currently have papers reporting our research out for review, and I have a book almost complete with Carolyn Youssef and Bruce Avolio tentatively titled *Positive Psychological Capital for Competitive Advantage* that will be published by Oxford University Press. These are certainly exciting, productive times at our Gallup Leadership Institute at the University of Nebraska.

Steve: So, is that it, have you now reached your possible self as an OB scholar?

Fred: Well, I think I might have, except for the jolt that hit me a couple of years ago when Bruce Avolio arrived on campus. First Henry Albers, then Sang Lee, and now Bruce. I feel very fortunate indeed. We hired Bruce to found and direct our Gallup Leadership Institute (GLI). As I said earlier, Bruce and I not only coauthored the *Moments* authentic leadership development and the soon-to-be-released PsyCap books, but he himself has provided me with many career-changing moments. Just as Albers challenged me to write the OB text and Sang Lee to become a global scholar, Bruce has challenged me to help him develop his "big idea" of authentic leadership. Bruce truly personifies and is an example of an authentic leader—true to himself and true to others. Here I am, already drawing social security checks, and Bruce has me, along with the other core faculty members of our GLI group and about a dozen doctoral students, all charged up and passionately pursuing the theory building and research on authentic leadership development or simply ALD. Bruce and I coauthored the first piece on ALD in the Michigan group's edited book on POS (Berrett-Koehler, 2003). We initially defined *ALD* as the process that draws from what I have been working on with positive psychological capital, but also Bruce's previous work on transformational leadership and a highly developed organizational context, which combined results in greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive, ethical behaviors on the part of leaders and followers. Under Bruce's authentic leadership, each of our GLI associates is currently continuing to build the theory and/or research and inputting our more specialized interests, mine of course being the role that PsyCap can play in ALD. So, Bruce has made ALD the overall mission, the umbrella for GLI that includes not only our more specialized research programs as I briefly described for POB and PsyCap for myself, Bruce and our doctoral students, but also our innovative University of Nebraska–Gallup MBA program. We believe this is the first private corporation–public university partnership to offer an MBA. This program consists of great executive-level students from the top firms delivered in a very unique way combining various locations (e.g., Gallup University, Toyota University, and Oxford University), online courses, and leader coaching, even after the degree is earned. Combined with our international programs such as our just-completed 10-year U.S. A.I.D. initiative in Albania and the annual Pan Pacific Conference, both founded and led by Sang Lee, I am still very excited and know I made the right decision to come to Nebraska 38 years ago. In other words, to answer your question, I feel I am still on my quest to become my possible self as an OB scholar.

Steve: It sounds like it has been quite a journey so far. Any parting comment?

Fred: Only this, I want to take this opportunity to thank not only all those mentioned here, for providing me with the many "moments that mattered" and their continued support, but also to recognize and thank many, many others such as all my doctoral students, and especially Mark Martinko and Ken Thompson, whom have given me much help and special moments over the years, close colleagues here at Nebraska, such as fellow Iowan and strategy professor Les Digman, and my more than able assistant for about 25 years, Cathy Watson, and outside, such as the late Richard Hodgetts, my international colleagues such as Weixing Li, and my journals coeditor and golfing buddy John Slocum, and you too Steve. Thanks for being a wonderful colleague in your early career at Nebraska, we had many great moments to share in our joint projects and personal experiences. I know that will continue into the future. That's it, moments like this to reflect back on one's life, really do matter!

STEVEN M. SOMMER *(Ph.D., University of California, Irvine) is an associate professor in the Graduate School of Business and Management at Pepperdine University. He has a long-time involvement in the Western Academy of Management including serving as president in 2000. His research examines how people seek and process information from their social environment in determining their organizational behavior. Specific studies in this stream have focused on social comparison and referent choice, feedback-seeking behavior and attributions, and cross-cultural differences. His work has appeared in* Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Journal of Applied Social Psychology, Group and Organization Management, *and* Human Relations.