REFLECTED BEST-SELF EXERCISE

Edward Malinowski
Introduction

This paper will examine the process and results of the Reflected Best Self (RBS) exercise available on the University of Michigan, Ross School of Business Positive Organizational Scholarship website, as well as to contrast the RBS against the results of the VIA Human Strengths survey for Ed Malinowski, a student in the MPOD 7 program at Case Western Reserve University and the author of this paper.

Experience

The process of requesting feedback for this assignment began with a broad range of thought on the people that I would actually be able to get meaningful feedback from. This started with some concern on whether or not this was supposed to target only people at work, based on feedback I was receiving from some of my classmates. To me, from reading the instructions in the RBS booklet, it seemed I would want feedback from people that really knew me. The instructions indicated ten to twelve would be a good number to receive feedback from and so I cast my net wide with more concern that I would be able to get ten to twelve people willing to do the work and identify three instances of me being at my best.

I sent the request to fifty seven people whom I thought might have some meaningful feedback for me, though I knew that there were really only about ten of those people that I would consider “knew me well”. I allowed people about two weeks of time to provide feedback, with one reminder e-mail which was sent around four days from the deadline, along with an option to let me know immediately if they weren’t going to complete the request. I received one or two immediate responses that they wouldn’t, a few responses that they would, and some informal
conversation about the request from some people at work. The majority of people either didn’t read their email or planned to respond by the deadline.

I had some reservations about including some people, due to a falling-out that I had a couple of years prior with many of those that I considered closest to me, at work. Many of these people have moved on since the acquisition of my company by another company, and two of them are my current manager and his manager. I did not want to stir up any of that bad past with this request since things have been stable of late with my work environment, but I sent it anyway because I really wanted to get this feedback and possibly give these people an opportunity to look a little deeper at some of the real value that I provide, beyond my obvious technical expertise.

The results were that I received feedback from sixteen people and I was delighted by the majority of the results in that it seemed that the people that did respond seem to “get” me, or what I think about me, when I’m at my best. I did not receive feedback from any of the people I was hesitant to ask of it, including my management, and it helped to clarify for me my lingering thought that they never really did know the real me anyway and I have reconciled with the fact that this is my responsibility. I have been able to use this, and other exercises I have been engaged in recently as further proof that making my Self known to others is very important in day to day, seemingly unimportant relationships and that even the acquaintance type relationship is important and valuable for me in fulfilling my purpose in the world.

As for those who did respond and know me well, it felt great to be known. This was surprising to me because I had never questioned whether or not the people I consider close to me knew the authentic me. Either way, some of the feedback really moved me, some of it was
expected and I could almost predict what people would say, and some of the deepest examples revealed more to me about the person that wrote them than they did about me and it was enlivening to get those different perspectives on why people care about me and want me around.

**Best Self Portrait**

When I am at my best my focus is on other people and how I can best serve them. I have my relationships with people in the forefront of importance and all other decisions or actions are weighed against those relationships first. I am open to other people and draw out the best in them by being authentic, light hearted and humorous when appropriate; dead serious and laser focused when that’s required; or loving, caring and powerful when that’s required. People know that they can count on me for compassionate, yet straight talk that creates a space, or clearing, for integrity and love.

I listen. I don’t just listen to what people say, but I listen for who people are, even when they can’t see that they are or could ever be that. People get to be who they authentically are within the space of my listening.

I am confident and present to who I am and my purpose in this world. In other words I am being true to my Self. This gives me a courageous and adventurous dimension as well as the ability to stand for something in the face of no agreement or to be “the first follower” when another is already leading.

In technical situations I am calm and confident in my ability to look at all the available data and apply it against a number of different models to find out which will best fit the situation to resolve an issue, open up a new set of possibilities, or release tension. In technical situations this allows for solutions to arise and in human situations this allows people freedom to be. I am able to explain technical matters in easily understood language and express appreciation to other human beings so they can experience their own value.

**Comparison to VIA Survey**
The results from the VIA Human Strengths survey are fairly accurate in reflecting what was represented in my RBS portrait. I was surprised after taking the survey that my Top Character Strength was Spirituality, Sense of Purpose and Faith, but I believe that it is accurate and shows who I am being when I am at my best. When I’m at my worst I can usually be found denying that sense of purpose and/or faith. My second strength of Creativity, Ingenuity, and Originality can be found in my technical abilities as well in people’s willingness to come to me for answers, when they’re confident enough to do so, as pointed to in this quote from some of my feedback. “Ed won’t let you get away with not acting to change the circumstance or at least change your view of the circumstance to one that is much more powerful. Many people find Ed difficult for this reason. However, if people have the confidence to hear what Ed is saying, new possibilities appear.” The third, fourth and fifth strengths listed are accurate as well, though I would have ranked some of the strengths beyond number five as higher in the list.

Overall, receiving the feedback and taking the VIA survey gave me assurance that when I am acting as my best self I really do provide value in the world. I think that the exercises, along with the Appreciative Inquiry exercise, gave me some insight into how I can build on the strengths that I do have without being as confrontational or abrasive as I may sometimes occur to people. Ultimately my sense of purpose and faith (strength one) is to more fully exploit my capacity to love and be loved (strength four) and the remaining strengths two, three, five and all the others will only assist me in that endeavor.

Future Trajectory

My originality, ingenuity and creativity will allow me to transition my current skill set to an Organizational Development in Technology role as a consultant while my ability to see the
world through open minded, inclusive and broad scoped eyes will enable me to be effective in this field. I can already see how some differentiation will be required in this field as there can only be so much demand in a field that will only require so many experts. I believe I will be able to exploit my previous technical training and ability to filter things through a technology mindset to allow myself to make a difference in the way technology organizations view the organization around the technology. Inside each technical, analytical IT or engineering professional is a human being that yearns to be known by other human beings and thanked for their contribution to humankind rather than just their contribution to efficiency, IT lifecycles, or ability to isolate a problem within a system. When technology organizations begin to operate that way my purpose will begin to be fulfilled.

Additional Uses for this Tool

These exercises allow people to rely on others and begin to have them see that their perception of themselves is not the one that really matters or makes a difference. This tool can be used in a number of ways to expand appreciation for human beings we work with on a day to day basis. Requesting feedback such as this from each member of your working group is one example of this and would require your team members to examine you in an appreciative way and find what works with you. Receiving this feedback will allow you to better understand yourself and how you’re viewed as a useful resource within a group of coworkers. In another use of the same example, imagine a team where each member requests feedback from each of the rest of the team and all the collective team strengths are shared with the whole group. While this may require a deep level of trust within the group, the very exercise would certainly aid in building that trust. Finally, this tool could be used by management within an organization to request feedback on what they do well as an individual in a group management role. Receiving
feedback in this manner would allow a management team to identify what they are doing well to capitalize and build on those strengths and provide more of what works for their teams.

Summary

This exercise has been a humbling experience and its greatest benefit has been that it has allowed me to revisit and get in touch with the fact that there are attributes of all people that really work for them and that make them who they are. It has allowed me to see that I am not always understood, but when people really get to experience me for who and what I am they are definitely left with the value that I provide. If I apply that perspective to all people and begin to seek out what works in others not only will they know me better and make me more effective but I will know them better and make them more effective.