A CASE STUDY OF SELF-IDENTIFIED LEADERS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGH-POTENTIAL
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide insight into the experiences of high-potential employees in an education sector leader development program to understand leader identity development. By examining the lived experiences of this population, specifically, how high-potential development shapes leader identity; this research may shed light on solutions to issues of derailment with high-potential leader transitions. My perspective on this topic was drawn primarily from three management and organization theories with roots in social psychology. First, role and interactionist role theory; second, social comparison theory; and third, social identity theory. The research and analysis generated were viewed through a social constructivist lens. A conceptual framework was developed from relevant literature that helped to build an understanding of the lived experiences of five high-potential employees who were also self-identified leaders. This case study employed Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series as the primary data collection method and used grounded and phenomenological methods in the data analysis to identify themes and construct a synthesis of the participant experiences. Findings from the study brought out two major themes: 1) Individual Maturity; and 2) Social Interactions. Out of these themes, several sub-themes are important to describe the phenomenon. The sub-themes for theme 1 (individual maturity) include: a) using emotional intelligence; and (b) valuing professional development. The sub-themes for theme 2 (social interaction) include: a) managing relationships, and b) work-life balance. The study concludes with suggestions to help Talent Management professionals develop and implement modules or assessments for leader development akin to the protocol used in this study, to encourage personal reflections specifically related to experiences that shaped beliefs about leadership. Organizations may also consider adding a values-based aspect to the interview process to gain insight into the strength of culture fit and probability of loss. The study also provides recommendations for Managers, Applied Behavior practitioners, and Policy Makers. This study also recommended that scholars conduct subsequent studies using grounded theory with multiple researchers, in both corporate and nonprofit
settings with a larger population sample to encourage multiple perspectives on the phenomenon, develop a theory, and possibly facilitate even richer findings.
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To God be the glory, great things He has done.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Research indicates that nearly 40% of internal job moves made by employees identified as a high-potential end in failure (Martin & Schmidt, 2010). In a 2009 study by Bersin & Associates it was reported that on average companies spent nearly $500,000 per year on leadership development initiatives with costs ranging from $170,000 for small organizations to nearly $1.3 million for larger ones (O'Leonard, 2009). On a per-person basis, organizations spent just over $2,000 for each participant. Hence, despite significant financial investment into these programs to cultivate future leaders, or to retain and develop current top-talent, four in 10 high-potential job moves will be unsuccessful, or will cause derailment. McCall and Lombardo (1990) shed light on derailment in high-potential executives, and provide three main reasons. The reasons included the individual’s managerial skills (e.g., administrative skills, strategic thinking), personal qualities (e.g., insensitivity, overly ambitious), or ability to lead others (e.g., failures of leadership, over-managing). Ironically, both successful and unsuccessful executives had outstanding records of success, were identified early as high-potential, had few flaws, were ambitious, and made many sacrifices. However, successful executives had done many things well, maintained composure under stress, handled mistakes with poise and grace, focused on solving problems, and had good relationships with a diverse group of people, while maintaining an outspoken disposition without being offensive. There is increasing interest in other possible factors that might increase success. Some research asserts that manager accountability, oversight, and support during position transitions would increase the success of high-potential job moves (Loew & Hill, 2012). Insight into the experiences of high-potential employees in a development program may be the way forward to decrease derailment.
At a macro level, much of the research on high-potential employees has focused on assessment and identification, common development practices, and program improvements. This research is often solution-focused to improve retention and candidate success. Remarkably, few studies or conceptual approaches give voice to the experience of those being developed and their thoughts on derailment. One area not widely examined for possible implications on job transitions is the experience of leader identity development in high-potential employees. No studies have examined the influence high-potential development programs have on the incumbent’s identification with the organization as a leader, and/or how that leader identification impacts the individual’s success. Given the significant financial investments made by organizations to develop high-potential employees, and the personal sacrifices required by the incumbents, it behooves these stakeholders to understand how various approaches to high-potential development shape leader identity, how this phenomenon occurs, and the potential implications for candidate success.

**Statement of Purpose**

The initial purpose of this qualitative study was to examine high-potential leadership development practices in a corporate North American organization across seniority levels to explore how informing a high-potential employee about the organization’s views on his or her future in the company (transparency) affects their engagement. After reviewing pilot study data, and reflexively exploring my substantive and epistemic interests, I refined the purpose of this research study to provide insight into the experience of high-potential employees in an education sector leader development program as a possible means to understand leader identity development. By examining the lived experiences of this population, this research may shed light on solutions to issues of derailment with high-potential leader transitions. DeRue and Ashford (2010) conceptualized leadership identity construction with three elements: (a)
individual internalization, (b) relational recognition and, (c) collective endorsement, elements discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

My perspective on this topic is drawn primarily from three management and organization theories with roots in social psychology. First, role theory as exemplified in the works of Biddle (1979), Linton (1936), Sarbin (1943), and interactionist role theory (Hilbert, 1981); second, social comparison theory in the works of Festinger (1954) and Wood (1989); and third, social identity theory articulated by Tajfel (1981), and Tajfel and Turner (1979). I am also claiming this research to be social constructivist in nature, where the research conducted and analysis generated is viewed through a social constructivist lens (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1998). “Social constructivists hold the assumption that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2014, p. 248). The constructivist researcher typically focuses on the process of iterations among individuals, the settings, and contexts in which they work and live, while recognizing that their background will shape interpretation (Creswell, 2014).

The target population for this study was high-potential employees. The term high-potential has many synonyms that include fast-track employees, superstars, high fliers, water walkers, high pots, runners, and golden children (Gritzacher, 1989). High-potential employees are also sometimes referred to as emerging leaders. Along with these many ways to refer to the population, there are also various ways to define them. In fact, “[d]ifferent organizations will have their own definitions of high-potential talent, but the essence remains the same” (Campbell & Smith, 2010, p. 6). They are “highly valuable and unique employees” (Gelens, Hofmans, Dries, & Pepermans, 2014, p. 159); and “demonstrate the ability to see things from new perspectives and to quickly adapt to change; [he or she] would be difficult to replace due to the value he/she brings to the company” (Grubs, 2004, p. 191). “For some organizations, high potentials are only those who might move into C-suite roles running the organization” (Silzer & Church, 2009c, p. 220). Echoing this vein, Derr, Jones, and Toomey (1988) assert, the high-potential employee is
“an employee [that] will move up the [organization’s] hierarchy into increasingly important management positions and eventually reach a position close to the top… and potential [is] operationally defined as the ability to move up into specific managerial positions to which the corporation attaches value” (p. 275).

Silzer and Church (2009a) further define potential:

By role—the potential to move into top/senior management roles…by level — the potential to move and perform two positions/levels above the current role… by breadth— the capability to take on broader scope and leadership roles, and to develop long-term leadership potential…[and] by record — a consistent track record of exceptional performance. (p. 392)

In most corporate settings, leader development of high-potential employees differs from what is offered to other employees. In some organizations, every 12-18 months the incumbent could change positions either vertically or laterally, within the same function or external to it, and within the same country or overseas. As it relates to geographic mobility, Silzer and Church (2009c) provide some historical context:

Forty years ago, most leaders did not have to move geographically to advance their career, unless it was to corporate headquarters from a remote location. Then as organizations began to restructure more frequently, leaders were expected to change locations accordingly, in order to obtain broader experience and to more quickly advance their careers. In some organizations, particularly in the 1980s, individuals were simply “tapped on the shoulder” one day and told to pack up and take a new position in another location or lose any hope of ever getting another advancement opportunity. In the 1990s, this trend expanded to include moving individuals across functions, business units, and even countries as companies diversified and developed global businesses. As a result of all this movement, mobility has often historically been seen as a key indicator (even a requirement in some cases) of a high-potential individual. (p. 250)

In some organizations, geographic mobility has become an indicator of potential, and somewhat associated with commitment and loyalty to the organization. In organizations that use location moves for development, high-potential candidates that reject geographic mobility risk losing the good graces of those who selected them. It is a sacrifice expected from future leaders, and those who will remain on the development fast-track. Many high-potential employees are also provided with internal and external training and development, and sometimes coaching and mentoring to build the skills the organization
deems important to their success in the company. A more detailed review of approaches to high-potential development is discussed in the next chapter.

High-potential programs are key elements of leader development since they serve to not only provide key skills and competencies but also shape the way the incumbent will identify with the organization as a leader. Success in these programs is reflected by many organization-specific behaviors and competencies, demonstrated and internalized by the employee being developed to become a leader. Understanding the experiences associated with this development will not only shed light on leader identity construction, but the impact of those experiences both personally and professionally. In fact, “the quality of experiences and the ability of the leader to learn from experiences and integrate them with leader identity determine the extent to which any particular experience has developmental potential or impact” (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009, p.186). Leader identity development is a process of construction in the private self-consciousness (Sosik & Dworakivsky, 1998) that is built on social interactions and reactions on prescribed and acceptable modes of behavior in an organization context, namely the organization culture. I assert that how the incumbent in a high-potential development program is socialized forces the individual to decide about how to behave and whom to become in the organization.

In the context of leader development and the assertion above on high-potential socialization, role theory is highly important. Role theory is rooted in the theatrical, namely the predictable roles that actors play in a particular context. According to Biddle (1979), the theory proposes that an individual’s performance is based on a particular situation or context that forms a role based on a common or prevalent identity or a social position. These roles are embedded in larger social systems and have behavioral expectations, and persist. It is possible that the individual socialized into a role may find enjoyment in it. The interactionist view of role theory takes the perspective that individuals are constantly negotiating and creating their roles by testing their behaviors, and monitoring the responses of others. The role is created by the interplay of the individual and his or her environment (Miles, 2012).
These roles are acted out in a broader socio-cultural environment, where the individual’s awareness of broader organization expectations is realized foundationally by social comparison theory. Social comparison theory posits that people make assessments about who they are based on the opinions of others. These comparisons with others can lead the individual to evaluate himself as a contrast (pull away from, and be avoided) or as an assimilator (be drawn towards, and to become) regarding particular people. For example, sociability has historically been a desirable leadership trait typically associated with extroverts (Grant, Gino, & Hoffman, 2011). An introverted employee may view their inability to be gregarious as a contrast to leaders who possess this trait, and may not aspire to a position held by individuals in those roles.. Social identity theory helps explain how an individual gains a sense of belonging to a group.

My substantive interest in this study was high-potential leader identity development. A high-potential employee is “someone with the ability, engagement, and aspiration to rise to and succeed in more senior, [and] more critical positions” (Tansley, 2011, p. 272). According to Rothwell (2010a), these employees “are doing at least acceptable work where they are, but are also promotable because they already meet the competency demands of the next level” (p. 128). In this research study, high-potential employees are also referred to as emerging leaders, a synonym for high-potential (Martin & Schmidt, 2010). They are high-performing faculty and staff who demonstrate high leadership potential. The observable indicator of high-potential in this study was acceptance to, and graduation from the research site’s emerging leader certificate program. The unit of analysis was individual high-potential employees in the emerging leader certificate program. The study was conducted in a central Pennsylvania university. The epistemic interest of this study was transcendental phenomenology to gain insight into the lived experiences of high-potential leader identity development.

With these interests and theoretical undergirding in mind, the data I gathered to describe the experience of leader identity development in high-potential employees can be categorized in two groups: (a) data about the organization, and (b) data related to the leader identity experience of individual high-
potential employees, from their perspective. The data I gathered related to the organization includes its history, notable leaders, and leadership development practices to provide a context in which the high-potential employees are developed. I collected information specific to organization structure, systems, explicit and implicit cultural messages as expressed by employees, and print and electronic materials. Data on the individual high-potential employees were collected using their narrative accounts and archival data from leader development application materials such as applicant essays. The narratives provided insight into the experience of leader identity development, namely salient moments, situations, places or particular interactions when leader identity was recognized, undergone, or brought about.

Overall, this research took a social constructivist stance because it posited that reality is socially constructed and that the meanings of an individual’s experience are subjective. It also recognized the influence of the researcher’s background in interpreting the multiple perspectives that can emerge from a participant. Not that there is no such thing as reality: as Schwandt (1998) describes, “one need not be antirealist to be constructivist. One can reasonably hold that concepts and ideas are invented (rather than discovered) yet maintain that these inventions correspond to something in the real world” (p. 237).

The refined purpose of this research sought to provide fresh conceptual descriptions of the phenomenon of identity development in high-potential employees in an academic institution in Pennsylvania using transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994) to “develop a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience” (Creswell, 2006, p. 60).

**Research Question**

In a phenomenological investigation, the first challenge of the researcher is to arrive at a topic and question with both social meaning and personal significance (Moustakas, 1994). The central question undertaken in this research sought to understand and answer: What is the experience of leader identity
development like for a high-potential employee in a leader development program? My study also dealt with these sub-questions:

- How did the leader development program affect leader identity?
- What were the circumstances that brought about recognition of a leader identity?
- What feelings were generated by the experience? How did those feelings relate to thoughts about leader identity?
- How did the experience affect significant others?

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study stemmed from my desire to provide insight into the lived experiences of high-potential employees undergoing leader identity development. According to Day (2001), there are profound changes shaping the competitive business environment also affecting how organizations prepare people for present and future challenges. Having well-prepared leaders is a concern for organizations in multiple sectors. The projected scarcity of leadership talent due to planned retirement of baby boomers, nonprofit leaders, and community college leaders calls attention to how employers can urgently meet these leadership needs without sacrificing competence. For over ten years both scholars and practitioners have written about the looming skill and competency gap anticipated to emerge from a wave of a retiring population which challenges talent management professionals to consider ways of identifying, training, developing, and retaining employees capable of filling these anticipated gaps. Casner-Lotto, Rosenblum, and Wright (2009) state:

>T]here is a huge cohort of well-educated baby boomers, 78 million strong, expected to retire in the decade ahead, and not enough skilled and educated younger workers to take their place. By 2014, the number of workers aged 35 to 44 years is actually projected to decline by 2.8 million. The boomers’ anticipated retirements could reduce overall labor force growth and increase labor and skills shortages in several fields, [with] serious shortages … already occurring in the healthcare industry. (p. 8)

In a 2006 study by The Bridgespan Group on the leadership requirements of nonprofits with revenues greater than $250,000 (excluding hospitals and institutions of higher education), results
indicated that “these organizations will need to attract and develop some 640,000 new senior managers—the equivalent of 2.4 times the number currently employed … [B]y 2016, these organizations will need almost 80,000 new senior managers per year” (Tierney, 2006, p. 2). Further, a survey of community college CEOs conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) in 2001 stated “…45 percent of responding presidents indicated they plan[ned] to retire between 2001 and 2007 … [which will] create a leadership gap” (Shults, 2001, p. 3). Larsen, London, Weinstein, and Raghuram (1998) assert:

High-flyer programs are of theoretical and practical significance for several reasons. First, their persistence in light of dramatic organizational changes raises important questions concerning the choice of career-development strategies. Second, high-flyer programs represent a very interesting example of an organizationally molded career system, reflecting in most cases explicit objectives in terms of screening talent, developing managerial competence, and the emergence of a stock of high-potential managers for future jobs. Finally, organizational changes common to many firms suggest that alternative career development concepts require research and practical experiments. (p. 65)

The literature is not extensive in answering “why do companies so often end up with a shortfall in their talent pipeline? And what distinguishes organizations that have been able to prepare their rising stars for postpromotion success?” (Martin & Schmidt, 2010, p. 2). There is little known about the nuances of high-potential leader transition derailment. There are no phenomenological studies examining the lived experience of this population as it relates to their leader identity development.

This research examined high-potential development practices from the perspective of the incumbent to gain insight into the experience of leader development activities. Tansley and Tietze (2013) state that “there is little consideration of how talent management strategies and protocols are experienced and responded to by talent at different stages of the organisational talent management process and how these responses inform, incorporate and involve identity work by such talent” (p. 1799). In leader identity development, Luhrman and Eberl (2007) suggested that qualitative research focusing on narratives of leaders and followers was needed, specifically by “using interview questions which are more subtle and indirect (e.g., asking about taboos, critical relationship incidents, perception of how one is viewed by
others, etc.) might be more promising” (p. 123). Using the qualitative methodology—transcendental phenomenology allows for significant contributions to research and practice since this methodology has not been widely used to examine high-potential talent management practices. According to Moustakas (1994) “transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness” (p. 49). Foundational to the method is the use of semi-structured interviews, and the narratives derived from those interviews to collect rich textual descriptions of a lived experience. Since using “phenomenology and narrative methods are found infrequently in the leadership literature” (Klenke, 2008, p. 232), there is an unprecedented opportunity to contribute to the literature, which may influence how organizations use resources towards this population.

**Role of Researcher**

In qualitative research such as phenomenology, the researcher is acknowledged as a key instrument (Creswell, 2014). When going through the phases of phenomenological thematic analysis, particularly bracketing (Moustakas, 1994), the researcher must scrutinize herself, and her interpretations while also continuously revealing and questioning presuppositions. Even with these checks and balances, my identity as a researcher plays an important role in the topic selection and subsequent research process. Moreover, “[t]he challenge of transcendental phenomenology was to develop a method for understanding the objects that appear before us. Such a science requires a return to the self and employment of a self-reflective process that enables the searcher increasingly to know herself or himself within the experience being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). In this section, I will discuss aspects of my national, racial, professional, and academic identity.

I believe it was Al Sharpton who said that, other than the Native Americans, everyone in the United States is an immigrant. I was born on the island of St. Lucia when the country had just experienced independence from the British. Not that Great Britain was the only colonialist. Over 100
years, the battle for St. Lucia as a colony was constant between the British and French resulting in 14 changes of power between them, seven times each. This constant fighting for what the colonialists believed was a strategic foothold in the West Indies led to the island being dubbed “the Helen of the West Indies”—referring to Helen of Troy. The resulting culture is a mix of British—as it uses the same structures in government, and the English as the official language—and French—a major part of the Island’s second language, itself a patois/vernacular that blends French, English, and some African-derived words. I was introduced to a world betwixt and blended with cultures and uniquely St. Lucian. That was my identity unquestioned for many years until my family immigrated to the United States in the late 1980s. Suddenly, I was no longer St. Lucian, but an immigrant, black, and from “The Islands.” When I became a naturalized citizen, my identity expanded further to recognize my citizenship in both countries, I was an American and St. Lucian.

My educational interests drew me towards social science, and I studied Psychology at the undergraduate level and Industrial-Organizational Psychology at the graduate level. On the one hand, I always had an interest in helping others reach their full potential. On the other hand, I was curious about my identity and the definitions imposed on me; and so I identified with the social science community as an academic.

Regarding imposed definitions, I will address race since it is the most prevalent. Having lived and worked in both the United States and the United Kingdom, I came to a deeper appreciation for self-identification. In America, most forms that request the selection of race are limited to a few choices: Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native American. However in Great Britain, a wide range of choices recognize the ethnic origins and race mixture prevalent in the country. Although I consider myself a person of African descent and Black, and will likely always be identified upon view as Black, I also identify as a mixed race person, acknowledging equally the non-Black roots from which I also came.

My career has afforded me the professional identity of a Global Human Resources and Talent
Management Professional that has facilitated the opportunity to leverage my interest in developing people. In my work, I was directly involved in high-potential development processes and understood the value such programs brought to organizations. I also learned of the challenges faced by those being developed and was often in the position of exit interviewer as some of the brightest emerging leaders left the organization. Research suggests that many employees “leave their jobs because they are unhappy with their boss” (Hay, 2002, p. 53), and the major factors influencing employees who are most likely to leave were that their skills or talents were not properly developed, or that managers failed to take an interest in their career development (Hay, 2002). Yet, Manzoni and Barsoux (2002) go a step further and say:

> When an employee fails—or just performs poorly—managers typically place the blame outside themselves …research strongly suggests that bosses—albeit accidentally and usually with the best intentions—are often complicit in an employee’s lack of success. (pp. 1-2)

Are these findings true for a high-potential population? How would the leader development influence these findings? These questions led me to consider the experience of high-potential talent in a leader development program.

My current work as a Graduate Assistant at the Center for Workplace Learning and Performance (CWLP) in the Office of Human Resources at Penn State has allowed me to continue my professional growth and development in leadership and management development by designing and facilitating training for employees in the University. The majority of my work has been with the emerging leaders program—a high-potential program where I refined the application and selection process, developed an ethical leadership module not previously part of the program curriculum, and served on the selection committee for the 2014 cohort. In addition, I have observed every training module offered in the curriculum, and conducted focus groups and interviews with the population, all in the two years of my tenure with CWLP. This emerging leader population is also the subject of my dissertation research, a group from which a pilot study was conducted in the Fall 2013 semester.
I am deeply committed to personal and professional development and am drawn into the concept of leader identity as I have almost always dealt with issues of identity, from nationality, ethnicity, race, and professional contexts, to academic approaches and concerns about belonging, staking claim to parts of who I was, am, and will become. From a leadership development standpoint, there is a seductive quality in knowing that an organization values you in ways that would compel it to invest in you—but at what cost to one’s personal identity? High-potential employees typically participate in these programs at great personal cost (Ready, Conger, & Hill, 2010). Having participated in a rotational development program myself, I struggled to find reflections of myself in the organization but was never short of reminders of what I should become. I am interested in understanding the experience of leader development from the viewpoint of the incumbent; and the influence of the development process on their leader identity. My identity construction has been international, spiritual, personal, and public. I have embraced aspects of my identity, and approaches to life that have resulted in closeness and separation, unity and alienation in personal and professional settings. I am committed to doing the personal development work by which I remain rooted in who I am irrespective of the context.

These experiences uniquely position me to bring practical knowledge of working with high-potential populations while also understanding the environmental and developmental context. These experiences colored how I designed, analyzed, and interpreted findings. I used reflexive approaches such as journaling, and bracketing to note my interpretations. I also made use of member checking, and peer debriefs to aid in staying true to the informant responses, and data collection methods discussed in Chapter 3.

**Definitions of Key Terminology**

**Constructive Dismissal**—“In some circumstances an employee may terminate his own contract of employment, with or without notice, by the employer's conduct towards him. The essence here is that
although the employee resigns, it is the employer's conduct, which constitutes a repudiation of the contract, and the employee accepts that repudiation by resigning” (Porteous, 2002, p. 82).

**Derailment** – “In the eyes of the organization, do not live up to their full potential” (McCall & Lombardo, 1983, p. 1); “The failure or underperformance of a candidate at the next level” (Martin & Schmidt, 2010, p. 59).

**Development Track**—“[P]rograms in place to identify and provide special development opportunities for managers identified as ‘high potential’” (Fulmer, Sumpf, & Bleak, 2009, p. 19).

**Engagement**—Kahn (1990) first introduced the concept of personal engagement as occurring when “people employ and express themselves, physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances” (p. 964); Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. They operationalize these three aspects as:

Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge … [and] absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. (p. 74)

**Inclusion - Exclusion**—“The concept of inclusion-exclusion in the workplace refers to the individual’s sense of being a part of the organizational system in both the formal processes, such as access to information and decision-making channels, and the informal processes, such as ‘water cooler’ and lunch meetings where information and decisions informally take place” (Mor Barak, 2005, p. 149).

**High-Potential Employee**—“An employee [that] will move up the hierarchy into increasingly important management positions and eventually reach a position close to the top” (Derr et al., 1988, p. 275); “[S]omeone with the ability, engagement and aspiration to rise to and succeed in more senior, [and] more
critical positions” (Tansley, 2011, p. 272). Further, according to Rothwell (2010a), the term high-potential applies to those who:

[A]re doing at least acceptable work where they are, but are also promotable because they already meet the competency demands of the next level…capable of promotion to two or more levels higher on the organization chart within five years based on objective assessment, such as an assessment center or 360-degree assessment…are capable of being promoted to CEO at some future time…are well matched to the organizational leaders’ definition of an HiPo, which may be specialized. (p. 128)

**Job Rotations**—“[A]n on-the-job training tool that uses carefully planned and monitored rotations through key positions in an organization” (Derr et al., 1988, p. 280); Krewson (2004) states job rotations were:

Long the mainstay of management development programs, [that]… provides breadth and depth of experience that serves to build solid knowledge of an operation or business segment. The rate of learning and assimilation of new tasks is usually more rapid among high-potential types, so it’s important to match the competency level of the individual to the challenges of new knowledge and skill. Successful rotational assignments include several carefully planned elements. Specific learning objectives are identified upfront, performance expectations are clearly conveyed, and there is a fixed start and end time for each phase. (p. 298)

According to Fernandez-Araoz, Groysberg, and Nohria (2011):

Rotations that develop [high-potential] managers include bigger scale, bigger scope, line-to-staff or staff-to-line switches, cross-moves (handling a very different set of activities across divisions, functions, or industries), start-ups, turnarounds, change management initiatives, and international assignments. Changes in level, organizational unit, location, industry, and circumstances all help managers grow. Ideally, job assignments will involve novelty and the need to adapt. (p. 82)

**Potential**—“Potential indicates whether someone will be able to succeed in a bigger role. It is a person’s ability to grow and to handle responsibilities of greater scale and scope” (Fernandez-Araoz et al., 2011, pp. 78-79); Silzer and Church (2009a) define potential:

By role—the potential to move into top/senior management roles…by level — the potential to move and perform two positions/levels above the current role…by breadth—the capability to take on broader scope and leadership roles, and to develop long-term leadership potential…by record — a consistent track record of exceptional performance. (p. 392)

**Psychological Contract**—“The term psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party.
Key issues here include the belief that a promise has been made and a consideration offered in exchange for it, binding the parties to some set of reciprocal obligations” (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123).

**Succession Planning**— “[I]s the process that helps stabilize the tenure of personnel, [and] it is perhaps best understood as any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, replacement, and strategic application of key people over time” (Rothwell, 2010b, p. 6).

**Transparency**— “[A]llow[s] people to know exactly where they stand in the succession system” (Conger & Fulmer, 2003, p. 83).

**Talent Management**— “The identification, development, and management of the talent portfolio—i.e., the number, type, and quality of employees that will most effectively fulfill the company’s strategic and operating objectives” (Knez & Ruse, 2004, p. 231).
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was designed to understand the meanings that high-potential employees, in an education sector leader development program in Pennsylvania, give to lived experiences of leader identity development. The purpose of this chapter is to review related literature that contributed to the development of a conceptual framework. The literature review consists of five sections: (a) high-potential development approaches and challenges, (b) self-identified leaders, (c) social and organizational identity construction, (d) leader identity construction, and (e) a conceptual framework of high-potential leader identity development based on the reviewed literature and my own professional experiences.

High-Potential Development

Comprehensive talent management often includes areas of candidate selection, development, reward systems, competency management, performance management, succession planning, and aspects of diversity. When discussing talent management, no universal contemporary definition exists in any one language for talent since an organization’s perspectives will shift the meaning (Tansley, 2011). However, contextualized by the work and business need, some organizations use a systematic approach to identifying and developing talent deemed capable of filling future succession needs, the most selective of which are deemed as high-potential.

High-potential. In the 1980s, organizations used several synonyms to refer to high-potential employees, including high-fliers, runners, and golden children (Gritzmacher, 1989). More recently, some organizations have adopted the term emerging leader as a synonym for high-potential employees (Martin & Schmidt, 2010). These employees are those who possess the ability, engagement, and aspiration to
perform in positions of greater seniority, while having the expressed commitment to making a difference, sharing insightfulness, and having the courage to take risks (McCall, 1998; Tansley, 2011). Dalziel (2004) states, high-potential employees should also present themselves with a constant balance of self-confidence and self-awareness, an ability to objectively evaluate situations and others, and have possession of emotional fortitude.

**Development Approaches.** High-potential employees selected for development often move up an organization’s narrow hierarchy into increasingly important management positions with great speed, and eventually reach a position close to the top (Derr et al., 1988; Kotter, 1990). Vloeberghs, Pepermans, and Thielemans (2005) affirm that the content of high-potential development programs differs from what is offered to other managers. The former are dedicated more time and offered a broader set of vertical and horizontal activities. These time-tested activities often include formal education programs, self-directed learning, on-the-job development, targeted mentoring, coaching, job rotations, stretch assignments, overseas assignments, and visibility with senior executives (Fernandez-Araoz, et al., 2011). These initiatives identify, recruit, develop, and provide accelerated management and leadership opportunities (Derr et al., 1988; Harris & Feild, 1992; Kotter, 1990).

**Common High-Potential Employee Selection Approaches.** Silzer and Church (2009a), in their conceptual paper provide a comprehensive summary of 11 models and frameworks used as selection criteria for high-potential identification and development programs, “and provided a broad integration for understanding the components of potential” (p. 406). “There seemed to be several key categories among the components in the various models: cognitive skills, personality variables, learning variables, performance records, and other factors” (p. 391). They noted three types of potential dimensions: (a) foundational dimensions—“are consistent and hard to change…typical examples are cognitive abilities, and many personality variables, including interpersonal characteristics” (p. 399); (b) growth dimensions—“these components can facilitate or hinder a dimensions person’s growth and development…typical examples are adaptability and learning orientation” (p. 399); and (c) career
dimensions—“these dimensions of potential are early dimensions indicators of later end-state skills needed in specific careers…[and] the specific dimensions of potential may depend on the specific career path…often these dimensions can be growth dimensions” (p. 399). For example, “supervisory skill is likely to be an early indicator of potential for an organizational leadership role” (p. 399).

Building on these categories and dimensions of potential, the identification process in organizations can be formal or informal, standardized or ad-hoc, but often “tries to ensure that senior managers are at least aware of the exceptional talent in the organization” (Silzer & Church, 2009c, p. 232). Smaller organizations are more likely to have an informal process since there is less need to coordinate across business units. Cross business collaborations are more prevalent in larger organizations (Silzer & Church, 2009c). At a macro level, the process is usually top down, with senior managers agreeing on categories and dimensions while considering salary bands, key positions, and how far down talent decisions will be applied (Silzer & Church, 2009c).

From a micro level, Silzer and Church (2009c) provide a concise list of six classic approaches key to high-potential identification:

- Reach agreement on categories and definitions of potential.
- Solicit nominations of high-potential candidates.
- Managers identify candidates based on organization criteria.
- Collect additional assessment information on the candidate (e.g. competency ratings, assessment centers, interviews).
- Review candidate portfolio at unit or functional level, then again at senior management level for acceptance.
- Develop the accepted candidate using what are often accelerated opportunities, and tag them for possible future roles.

A recent study by Ready et al., (2010) investigated programs for high-potential leaders to gain insight into organization practices for this population. Forty-five companies from around the world were surveyed on how they identify and develop high-potential employees. Twelve Human Resources executives from those organizations were interviewed to learn about specific experiences designed for high-potential employees, and their organization’s criteria for getting on and remaining on the list. At the direction of the Human Resources Executives, interviews were then performed with high-potential employees.
managers. The number of managers was not disclosed, and no additional details were shared regarding the methodology.

Results indicated that “high-potential talent lists exist, whether or not companies acknowledge them and whether the process for developing them is formal or informal” (p. 79). Gaining membership in this elite group starts with three essential elements: (a) they always deliver strong results, (b) they master new types of expertise, and (c) they recognize that behavior counts. It is the high-potential leaders’ “intangible X factors that truly distinguish them from the pack” (p. 80). There are four somewhat intangible yet distinct X factors of high-potential talent: (a) drive to excel, (b) catalytic learning capability, (c) enterprising spirit, and (d) dynamic sensors.

The first X factor, a drive to excel, highlights that “high potentials aren’t just high achievers. They are driven to succeed…[and] are more than willing to go that extra mile, and realize they may have to make sacrifices in their personal lives to advance” (p. 82). The second X factor, a catalytic learning capability, is demonstrated when high-potential leaders “have the capacity to scan for new ideas, the cognitive capability to absorb them, and the common sense to translate that new learning into productive action for their customers and their organizations” (p. 82). The third X factor, an enterprising spirit, is founded on a need to “blaze new paths” (p. 82). “They are explorers…leaving their career comfort zones periodically in order to advance. It might mean a risky move—a tricky international assignment, for instance, or a cross-unit shift that demands an entirely new set of skills” (p. 82). The fourth and final X factor, dynamic sensors, means that “[their judgment] enables them to skirt risks. They have a feel for timing, an ability to quickly read situations, and a nose for opportunity. [Essentially], high potential employees have a knack for being in the right place at the right time” (p. 82). Findings suggest that even with limited resources, companies place a disproportionate amount of attention on developing those they believe will lead the organization. Limitations in the study were not disclosed, nor a particular research method. This may have been due to the intended audience of Harvard Business Review, a general management magazine, rather than an academic journal.
**Challenges with High-Potential Development Approaches.** Managing a high-potential employee can bring several challenges. “The immediate manager’s skills and perceptions can noticeably influence who is identified as high-potential and how they are developed” (Silzer & Church, 2009b, p. 488). Often direct managers of these employees are reluctant to support high-potential employees, or equally reluctant to release them to another part of the organization (Kotter, 1990). Given the high-level of confidentiality in high-potential identification, promotion and development, some managers of high-potential employees view the program with suspicion, and its participants as threats, especially when they know little about the program’s inner working (Harris & Feild, 1992). Some managers may be reluctant to give significant work to high-potential employees knowing these individuals may not be in the position for an extended period. The organization must incentivize manager participation to have successful identification and day-to-day experiences for the high-potential employee’s assignments (Harris & Feild, 1992). A report published by Burke, Schmidt, and Griffin (2014) included samples drawn from the CEB Talent Analytics database covering competency assessments for 6.6 million people across 10,000 clients globally. From surveys and research studies conducted between 2005 and 2013, this report indicates that there is an even bigger problem in that “[t]oo many programs focus their efforts on the wrong people” (p. 2). They say that managers are “prone to misidentification of candidates to high-potential programs for a variety of reasons” (p. 2). These reasons include: (a) they believe that a nomination will help with the retention of an employee they are worried may leave, (b) they yield to pressure from an employee who persists in advancing their case to be a candidate, and (c) the manager sees these programs as a means to deal with a specific employee development need.

Besides manager reluctance to develop a high-potential employee or inaccurate nominations, there is an issue with the frequent use of different definitions of potential by management within the organization (Silzer & Church, 2009a). Clarifying exactly what the high-potential employee has potential for is paramount to the development track on which they are placed, and what they are expected to achieve (Silzer & Church, 2009a). Furthermore, “[o]ne common error is to assume that the organization’s
high-performers are also its high-potential employees… Having a clear definition of high-potential is an essential starting point for identifying the right employees and realizing their potential to succeed” (Burke et al., 2014, p. 3).

It is worth mentioning that from a development standpoint, a consequence of moving the high-potential employee through jobs every 12 to 18 months allows no opportunity for in-depth learning, or an understanding of the results of their actions, and can instill a shortsighted management approach and little about leadership (Kotter, 1990).

Here we understand the technical aspects of high-potential leader development, how they are selected, and some activities they may be involved in. We have also come to understand pitfalls of high-potential development such as the cultivation of a shortsighted management approach, and a lack of buy-in and support from the direct managers of these employees. These considerations have not changed significantly in the last 25 years. According to Vicere and Fulmer (1996), “the ability of a corporation and its leaders to learn is often hampered by the ‘traditional paradigm’ for leadership development” (p. 20). This traditional paradigm yields traditional leadership development processes typically comprised of four developmental phases: (a) learning the ropes—as an individual contributor in the age bracket of the mid 20s to early 30s; candidates typically come from specific colleges and universities, and high-potential candidates will advance to the second phase. In the second phase, (b) rotational assignments—promotable mid-career managers have increased management responsibilities with additional exposure across business environments, functions, and cultures. They are often in the age bracket of the early 30s to early 40s. Success in phase two yields advancement to the third phase, (c) becoming a general manager—as an experienced mid-career manager, these individuals move into senior functional positions, and may be involved in executive education programs. If they successfully complete phase three, they move to the fourth and final phase, (d) foundation for the future—as a senior leader in the age bracket of the early 50s, these individuals move into senior leadership positions, and are viewed as achieving full executive potential with little need for further leadership development (Vicere & Fulmer, 1996). Individuals who
remain in the organization over 30 years might successfully complete all four phases, but this is unlikely to be the norm; in reality, derailment is prevalent.

In the last few years, there has been increasing interest in understanding and preventing failure and derailment of high-potential employees. According to Conger and Fulmer (2003):

[W]hile companies maintain meticulous lists of candidates who could at a moment’s notice step into the shoes of a key executive, an alarming number of newly minted leaders fail spectacularly, ill prepared to do the jobs for which they supposedly have been groomed. (p. 76)

This finding, among others came from research conducted by the authors in collaboration with the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC), and 16 sponsoring companies. Using detailed questionnaires and site visits for in-depth interviews, Conger and Fulmer (2003) gathered information across two samples. The sample included the following six organizations that had achieved a high degree of success in succession management, and compared their best-practice approaches to the sponsoring companies. The six organizations were: Dell, Dow Chemical, Eli Lilly, PanCanadian Petroleum, Sunoco Products, and Bank of America. Additional information regarding the methodology was not disclosed.

In a 2010 study published by Harvard Business Review, Martin and Schmidt (2010) investigated current organization practices to identify what works and what does not in high-potential development, and to explore how high-potential employees viewed their employers, the way they are managed, and their reactions to changes in the economy. The research team included the authors and members of the Corporate Leadership Council. They studied over 20,000 employees identified as “emerging stars” in over 100 organizations worldwide over six years. Further details on the methodology and limitations were not disclosed, however results provided insight into what the authors note as the six most common errors made in developing high-potential employees that are: (a) Don’t assume they’re engaged, (b) Don’t mistake current high performance for future potential, (c) Don’t delegate talent development to line
managers, (d) Don’t shield talent, (e) Don’t assume high-potentials will take one for the team, and (f) Don’t keep young leaders in the dark.

A rather startling finding from Martin and Schmidt (2010) was that 40% of internal job moves made by employees identified as a high-potential end in failure, and that “more than 70% of today’s top performers lack critical attributes essential to their success in future roles” (p. 57). These statistics raise several questions. First, are organizations identifying the right people? Second, are current high-potential leader development programs sufficient in their approaches—which have remained largely unchanged in the last 25 years? Third, do businesses understand what is needed by the next generation of leaders to succeed—and ought that business adapt to the leader, or the reverse?

Of the ten strategies outlined by Martin and Schmidt (2010) as critical to identifying and managing high-potential talent, only one is focused on the viewpoints of the individual. Building on the concept of transparency, this viewpoint suggested that regular, open dialogues between high-potential employees and program managers should be held to monitor star employees’ development and satisfaction (Martin & Schmidt, 2010). The majority of strategies derived for managing high-potential employees come from the business, top-down, with little reflection from the experiences of the incumbent, or its appropriateness for the individual. The voice of the high-potential individual in the organization is not prominent in the research literature.

We see a shift in the research to capture the voice of high-potential employees in the works of Campbell and Smith (2010)—discussed later in this section—then Dries and De Gieter (2014). The latter sought to examine the implicit beliefs held by this population—and HR Directors—as it related to the effect of their organization’s approach to information sharing about high-potential programs, and the risk for a breach in the psychological contract. This study was qualitative and was not ascribed to any of the five common approaches. Dries and De Gieter (2014) sought to explore “whether strategic ambiguity and information asymmetries in high potential programs create a heightened risk of psychological contract breach” (p. 136). Using semi-structured interviews as the primary mode of data collection, nine
organizations “identified as best practice organizations by a major consulting company” (p. 141) participated in the study. The sample included 11 Human Resources Directors and 20 high-potential employees. The former held average organization tenure of 14.25 years (SD = 2.54), representing six male and five female directors.

Each Human Resources Director selected one or more employees in their organization identified as high-potential who would be interviewed. These employees knew that they were identified as high-potential. All interviews were held at the office locations of the participating companies during business hours and were conducted in Dutch. Using a standardized semi-structured interview guide, the Human Resources Directors were asked questions that related to their organization’s high-potential program, and the high-potential employees were asked questions related to their expectations of a high-potential program.

By way of data analysis, all interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Coding was performed iteratively using ATLAS.ti (5.0), first using thematic content analysis, based on open coding, then, using a coding scheme that developed after clustering codes and developing categories. The authors and an independent subject matter expert initially coded a sample of five transcripts separately. After coming together to discuss their codes, definitions were formulated, and reliability conditions were determined. The next stage involved further open coding before moving to axial coding. Finally, a paradigm model was developed.

Regarding limitations, the reluctance by organizations to share archival data about their high-potential population made representative sampling across organizations impossible. The study had no control group with which to compare that population’s perception of a high-potential development program. Additional studies could examine entry into a high-potential program as a causal antecedent to psychological contract change.

Results indicated that information asymmetry in high-potential development programs poses a potential risk for psychological contract breach. They found that strategic ambiguity by the organization
creates an imbalance of power towards the organization (Dries & De Gieter, 2014), and expressed a need for future research on the effects of high-potential programs from the perspective of those being developed.

Campbell and Smith (2010) performed a study that sought the insights of 199 high-potential managers attending The Center for Creative Leadership development programs. The study sought to: (a) learn more about how organizations designate their high-potentials, (b) understand the impact that high-potential status has on talent, (c) examine the importance of high-potential status, (d) explore what being labeled a high-potential individual feels like, and how it affect a leader’s behavior, (e) explore the level of commitment and engagement in high-potentials, and f) determine how this population influences the development of others. Participants were 73% male, between the ages of 36 and 50, of which 74% represented upper-middle management or the executive levels.

By way of data collection, an in-class survey was given to 199 participants attending a leadership development program at the Center for Creative Leadership in the Colorado Springs, campus. Two weeks later, a post-program qualitative Internet survey was given to 51 participants who volunteered their perspectives on being a high-potential leader. Findings indicated three key strategies for organizations to consider: (a) Be deliberate about process transparency, (b) Create a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the talent, and (c) Leverage high-potential employees to become developers of talent. As it relates to identity development, Campbell and Smith (2010) found:

Official recognition, it seems, fosters the leaders’ identity as a high potential. Without that recognition, leaders may doubt or second guess their skill level or importance to the organization. This implies that positive feedback, a good track record, or informal acknowledgment of one’s value is not equivalent to official status as a high potential, as recognized by the organization. (p. 11)

In summary, this section discussed common approaches and challenges in high-potential selection and development. Practices focus on the needs of the individual only as it relates to the needs of the organization, namely competencies, behaviors, or experiences believed essential for future leader roles. Only 60% of internal job moves for high-potential employees succeed, with over 70% of top performers
lacking key characteristics critical to success in future roles (Martin & Schmidt, 2010). High-potential programs are challenged with obtaining the appropriate support and buy-in from managers of high-potential employees to develop this population. There is inconsistency in defining employee potential by management, which creates a challenge in identifying the right candidates for development (Silzer & Church, 2009a).

We do not yet understand the implications of how the varying definitions of employee potential influence the individual being developed in choosing whom to emulate. The literature is silent on this, and also silent on the role of identity development in a high-potential program. There has not been a study focused on the relationship between leader identity development and current high-potential development practices. Dries and De Gieter (2014), assert a need for future research on the effects of high-potential programs from the perspective of those being developed. However, Campbell and Smith’s (2010) findings that link high-potential leader identity to formal organization acknowledgment as a high-potential should be investigated further. It is worth noting an additional shift in the voice of high-potentials from the work of Silzer and Church (2009c) who state:

There also has been a growing resistance from many leaders to the frequent moves required to progress and a greater interest in balancing career opportunities with family priorities. This trend is particularly evident among the millennials now entering the workforce, and has many organizations scrambling to determine how best to respond. Going forward, it is less likely that organizations will be able to require high mobility from high-potential individuals, and they will need to become more tolerant and understanding of family issues that may require the individual to stay in one location for a while. (p. 251)

This shift in personal mobility is paramount, as I believe one’s mobility was a key symbol of organization commitment. However, no longer are high-potential employees willing to make some of the most difficult sacrifices that once required uprooting their families. Organizations are increasingly taking an approach to filling key leadership positions in other countries (particularly in the emerging markets) with local candidates (Silzer & Church, 2009c). This means that companies that use mobility as a staple in high-potential development must adapt approaches if they want to retain key candidates.
My study aimed to examine the lived experiences of high-potential employees in a leader development program. I sought to grasp the essences of those experiences related to shaping their leader identity and paid particular attention to elements of the development program that were embraced or rejected. The results may shed further light on the value current practices have on an incumbent, and may serve as a foundation for future program refinement in high-potential leader development.

**Self-identified Leaders**

Far from normative practices in high-potential development is the notion of self-nomination or self-identification as a future leader in an organization. In some institutions, the practice exists by way of formal mechanisms for these assertions, while in other organizations, though not formalized, self-identification can either be direct or indirect. DeRue and Ashford (2010) propose a theory of *claiming* and *granting* in an identity work process that expounds on the direct/indirect aspects of leader identity development through a socially constructed reciprocal dynamism. “Claiming refers to the actions people take to assert their identity as either a leader or follower…granting refers to the actions that a person takes to bestow a leader or follower identity onto another person” (DeRue & Ashford, 2010, p. 631). Moreover, “granting can occur in response to other individuals’ claiming behavior and/or it can be the motivation for future claiming behavior” (p. 631). An individual’s belief about him or herself will be reflected in the claims made regarding his or her status as a leader or follower. Also, these assertions require validation by others within the organization.

Along this vein those who “receive grants supporting their claims of a leader or follower identity…are inclined to respond with more frequent and stronger claims for that identity. In contrast, a negative spiral occurs when claiming or granting behaviors are not positively reinforced” (p. 633). The recursive interplay of asserting claims of leadership with either positive or negative reinforcement influence the strength and frequency of an assertion. It is not enough to believe or convey that he or she is
a leader. DeRue and Ashford (2010) propose that validation of that belief is also important to an individual either developing as a leader or follower. This validation process may occur through self-verification. Since “people are motivated to acquire social feedback that confirms their self-conceptions” (Swann & Read, 1981b, p. 1123); “people may use their social interactions as opportunities to gather social feedback that will verify their self-conceptions” (Swann & Read, 1981a, p. 370).

**Self-verification.** The self-verification theory is grounded in the notion that people want to be seen by others in the same way as they view themselves. Depending on the conditions, some people with negative self-views/conceptions would either seek self-verification or self-enhancement to resolve any dissonance; “we define self-conceptions as thoughts and feelings about the self that are derived from past experience, especially the reactions of others. Once established, these conceptions play an important role in enabling people to predict and control their social environment” (Swann & Read, 1981, p. 352).

**Self-concept.** A self-concept is a subjective evaluation that refers to thoughts held by an individual regarding who they are. These views may or may not align with what he or she is actually like. “Self-conceptions may therefore be construed as the lenses through which people view the world, the means whereby they define their existence and understand the world around them” (Swann, 1987, p.1039). However, when an individual’s self-concept in asserting their identity as a leader is validated, the previously subjective evaluation becomes more objective. Moreover, “although self-verification processes ordinarily tend to stabilize people's conceptions of themselves, under certain specifiable conditions they can be used to promote self-concept change. Self-concept change may be particularly desirable when people have negative self-conceptions because such individuals are trapped in a crossfire between a cognitively based desire for self-verification and an affectively based desire for self-enhancement” (Swann, 1987, p. 1048).
Identity Construction

The topic identity has been examined through a myriad of lenses, and bifurcated into individual and collective perceptions. Definitions of identity—“a theory (schema) of an individual that describes, interrelates, and explains his or her relevant features, characteristics, and experiences” (Schlenker, 1985, p. 68)—have roots in philosophy. At the heart of this kind of examination are questions about the knowledge the individual has of him or herself, and the knowledge others have of them. Philosophers attempted to bridge our understanding of identity by questioning the role of memory and consciousness as the way identity is revealed to the individual (Locke, 1894; Williams, 1956). From Locke’s standpoint, a person’s recollection of a matter served definitively as a confirmation of their identity. However, Butler (1897) posited that memory presumes but doesn’t constitute personal identity, and this reliance on memory as an indication of identity has been largely abandoned.

Other philosophical considerations of identity are the issues of sameness and change. Using himself as the test case, Hume (1896) argued that people are in a constant state of change, and were only a collection of different perceptions. There was no individual identity. Hume asserted this stance since he believed perceptions were all he could detect in himself. However American philosopher and psychologist William James (1890) analyzed concepts of the self—what we would now refer to as identity and said that everything an individual associated with his or her identity becomes part of the self (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1999). James’ research “identified three components of self-experience: the material me (bodily self, along with surrounding physical objects), the social me (your awareness of how others view you), and the spiritual me (the self that monitors private thoughts and feelings)” (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1999, p. 574).

Identity Formation. In the realm of identity formation, two major theories have had great impact: Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950, 1968), and James Marcia's (1966) identity status theory built on Erikson’s work. In each of Erikson’s eight psychosocial stages of development, one of two outcomes are possible: (a) trust vs. mistrust, (b) autonomy vs. shame and doubt,
(c) initiative vs. guilt, (d) industry vs. inferiority, (e) identity vs. role confusion, (f) intimacy vs. isolation, (g) generativity vs. stagnation, and (h) integrity vs. despair. Stage five, identity vs. role confusion, is most relevant to this study; it begins in adolescence and continues through adulthood. James Marcia (1966) identified two dimensions from Erikson's writings—searching or identity crisis process and an outcome of commitment—that are aspects of identity formation. In this framework, commitment refers to the development of a comfortable sense of identity. When there is no searching and no commitment, Marcia refers to this as identity diffusion. When there is no searching yet with commitment, this is foreclosure—an identity formed passively based on acceptance of family ways from a previous generation. When there is searching and no commitment, this state is a moratorium. In this state, there is an active attempt to develop a sense of self through discovery and or self-creation. In the last state, identity achievement, there is evidence of previous searching and current commitment.

Identity Theory. Identity theory seeks to examine role choice behavior from a structural symbolic interactionist perspective (Stryker, 1980). Foundationally, there are four key aspects to this perspective. First, an individual is both an actor and a reactor. Second, actions and interactions are shaped as an individual defines or interprets situations based on shared meanings developed while interacting with others. Third, self-conceptions have an important influence on actions and interactions. Fourth, self-conceptions are shaped through interaction with others and are in part attributed to the way others respond to an individual (Burke, 1980; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Stryker, 1968). These cognitive aspects of self are part of self-concept—“a dynamic mental structure that motivates, interprets, organizes, mediates, and regulates intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors and processes” (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1999, p. 574). Markus and Cross (1990) assert that without others, there can be no self, so the individual will often seek situations whereby they can experience “self-verification—circumstances that confirm their self concept … even when the circumstances confirm a self-concept that is relatively negative” (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1999, p. 574).
Social and Organizational Identity Theory. Social identity has roots in the concept of group identification (Tolman, 1943). The process of identifying with a group is cognitive. “To identify, an individual need not expend effort toward the group's goals; rather, an individual need only perceive him or herself as psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21).

Tajfel (1974) informs us that social identity is the part of an individual’s self-concept that is “derived from knowledge of his membership to a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 69).

In social identity formation, there are two key processes, self-categorization and social comparison, each of which has different results (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). According to Stets and Burke (2000), the results of self-categorization are elevated perceptions of an individual’s similarities between himself or herself and other in-group members. The results of social comparison are selective applications of the elevated perceptions to aspects that the individual believes will enhance the self. “Specifically, one’s self-esteem is enhanced by evaluating the in-group and the out-group on dimensions that lead the in-group to be judged positively and the out-group to be judged negatively” (p. 225). Therefore, elevated perceptions between the individual and an in-group are important to social identity formation.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) in their theoretical paper argue that organizational identification is a form of social identification. However, Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) in their conceptual comparative work assert that identity theory and social identity theory “occupy parallel but separate universes, with virtually no cross-referencing” (p. 255). Stets and Burke (2000) however, outline what they deemed as substantial similarities between social identity theory and identity theory. The similarities are noted in three areas. First, person identities—the set of meanings tied to sustain the self as an individual. Second, the concept of salience that includes two ideas—situational activation of identity at a particular level (social identity theory), and the probability that identity will be activated in situation (identity theory); different but not mutually exclusive. Third, core processes that are activated in identity—

“depersonalization in social identity theory, where the individual sees the self as an embodiment of the in-
group prototype; self-verification in identity theory, where the individual sees self in terms of the role as embodied in the identity standard” (pp. 231-232). This research is inclined to adhere to the thoughts of Stets and Burke (2000) noting the similarities and overlap between many aspects of identity theory and social identity theory.

**Organization Identity.** Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) emphasize the importance of examining the dynamism of organization identity. They provide insight into organization identity as it relates to continuity:

> [I]dentity is not, and indeed cannot be, enduring in any strict sense, even though it apparently retains continuity in its essential features… The notion of an identity that is enduring implies that identity remains the same over time—that it has some permanency. An identity with a sense of continuity, however, shifts in its interpretation and meaning while retaining labels for "core" beliefs and values that extend over time and context. (p. 65)

Therefore, in examining organization identity, we should clarify the distinctions between endurance and continuity, while accounting for dynamism. Additional distinctions must be made when discussing organization identity. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), some empirical work has often confused organizational identification with related constructs such as organizational commitment and internalization and with affect and behaviors, which they assert, “are more appropriately seen as antecedents and/or consequences of identification. Social identity theory (SIT) can restore some coherence to organizational identification, and it can suggest fruitful applications to organizational behavior” (p. 20).

In summary, some criticisms of social identity include notions that elements in its conceptualization are redundant: Salience occurs when individuals act as a group, and does not occur when they don’t act as a group; self-esteem is a motive for discrimination against out-group members, and is also a consequence for discrimination (Mor Barak, 2005). This research sought to bring fresh textual descriptions of how social and organizational identity development are parts of high-potential
leader identity development. It also provided an opportunity to gain insight into the effect of the leader identity experience on significant others.

**Leader Identity Construction**

Leader identity construction and development are complex and bridge aspects of identity theory and social identity theory. “Identity development is the process of becoming more complex in one’s personal and social identities” (McEwen, 2003, p. 205). DeRue and Ashford (2010) provide a three-level conceptualization of leadership identity construction. These three elements are individual internalization, relational recognition, and collective endorsement. Individual internalization occurs when an individual incorporates the identity of someone else as part of his or her self-concept. Relational recognition implies there is a contextual acknowledgment of a role enacted reciprocally (e.g., leader/follower or sergeant/private). Collective endorsement occurs when an individual is recognized by the broader social environment as belonging to a social group (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). “Internalizing and enacting a leader identity involves identity work aimed at resolving the intrapersonal and interpersonal incongruency between one’s personal identity and the leader identity to which one aspires” (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012, p. 1220). Therefore, the individual in a leader development program faces the challenge of selecting which aspects of the self, or personal identity, to retain, adapt, or release compared to the expectations of the organization and established leaders in that organization.

According to Day et al., (2009) “[a] leader identity does not necessarily relate to formal leadership roles, but more importantly how an individual comes to think of oneself as a leader. For this reason, leader identity development is an indispensable component of leader development” (p. 183). McCauley, Van Velsor, and Ruderman (2010) explain the three elements of a developmental experience: (a) assessment, which provides the individual with an understanding of where they are now, gaps in capabilities, and what is the ideal state; (b) challenges, which aim to shift the individual out of their
comfort zone to develop new ways of thinking and behaving; and (c) support, which can come from a myriad or sources within and external to the organization, and is key to maintaining motivation to learn and grow. Without support “the challenge inherent in a developmental experience may overwhelm them rather than foster learning” (p. 13). The authors say there are three broad purposes that commonly direct an organization’s leader development. They are performance management, succession management, and organizational change. Performance improvement allows an individual to be effective in their current role; succession management allows the organization to have people ready to move into particular positions; and organizational change requires new behaviors, skills or competencies from leaders.

The literature has much to say about the process of identity construction, yet little is known about the intersection of leader identity development in those identified as high-potential employees. In his dissertation research Lemler (2013) undertook an ethnographic study over a four-year period between April 2009 and May 2013 to examine leader identity development of military personnel at West Point. The primary sources of data included unstructured and semi-structured interviews from September 2011 through May 2013, for which participation was voluntary, and informants were not incentivized monetarily. Interviews lasted from 10 to 150 minutes, with an average duration of approximately 25 minutes. By examining cadet development, the author proposed “the formation and growth of self-identity as a leader is neither sequential nor continually upward. Rather, it can vary significantly over time, and passes through phases of leader identity development which [he] term[s] leader identity construction, stagnation, and destruction” (p. 156). These propositions would be interesting to examine in my study. Lemler (2013) also mentioned where he believed future research should focus: On “the importance of organizational identity in reducing turnover intention. [He posits] if a member has a strong leader identity…he is more likely to compare himself to others within the organization, and is therefore perhaps less likely to leave” (p. 141). I agree with Lemler’s theory that there may be a link between leader identity as it relates to some comparative element of fit between self and the organization, and resulting turnover. I provide a conceptual framework for this in the next section.
In summary, leader identity development is a complex process that considers the individual and social interplay on ideas of belonging. The incumbent being developed is challenged to negotiate which aspect of self to embrace or reject while simultaneously adapting, enmeshing, or dismissing particular organization expectations. This research provided an opportunity to explore the effect of the leader identity experiences qualitatively. It also provided an opportunity to possibly expand the narrative about failure and derailment in high-potential leader development in the context of these complex negotiations.

**Conceptual Framework**

The review of the literature and my professional experiences have contributed to the development of a conceptual framework that served as a guide to the design and execution of the study. The conceptual framework helped to focus the research process, inform methodological design, and influence data collection approaches. The conceptual framework served as a guide in organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing findings. The framework draws upon identity theories discussed in Chapter 3, and other theoretical, interactionist role theory, and social constructivism assumptions discussed in Chapter 1. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1. The figure outlines what theoretically takes place during a leader development program. First, the individual compares himself or herself to other leaders within the organization, then adapts a role or the characteristics of the organization leadership that do not offend his or her personal identity, which results in a personalized version of an organization identity. If the individual feels that the organization has accepted his or her complete emulation of current leaders’ identity, then they are embraced as part of the in-group and retained in the organization. “As individuals come to view themselves as leaders, they will likely seek out more experiences to develop requisite leadership skills and competencies … [p]articipation in these experiences also strengthens a leader identity” (Day et al., 2009, p. 211). Conversely, if the organization does not accept the current personalized emulation, it will then begin a process of exclusion resulting in constructive dismissal where
the individual leaves the unit or the organization. In summary, leadership development can be thought of as an integration strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives (Day, 2001).

This framework is based on the assertion that the organization culture, as demonstrated through the behaviors of managers and leaders in the organization, shape the high-potential employee’s leader emulation. The behaviors are based on implicit expectations as demonstrated and rewarded by other organization leaders. In fact, “very strong psychological pressures on the participants [of high-potential programs] usually facilitate assimilation in the cultural environment and management ideology of the organization” (Larsen et al., 1998, p. 68).

Figure 1. Conceptual Research Framework
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter begins with a project plan for the research study in a flowchart that describes four major steps: (a) research design; (b) instrumentation – including phenomenological and grounded theory approaches in this case study; (c) study approval; and (d) data collection and data analysis—with tasks within each step (see Table 1). This approach was based on a tool for conceptualizing empirical research (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 29, 2014). The remainder of this chapter provides a narrative on how the tasks were conducted and will also discuss the use of, the pilot study using grounded theory, trustworthiness, assumptions, and finally limitations.

Table 1. Project Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>Propose a researchable topic</td>
<td>• Selected an idea that invites debate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Stated the idea in language that connects it to the literature</td>
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<td>• Stated the idea broadly enough to allow examination from different</td>
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<td>theoretical perspectives and research approaches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prepare to conduct the</td>
<td>• Explored and recounted my personal experience with the topic experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>literature review</td>
<td>to reveal sources of personal curiosity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Identified social issues arising from the recounted experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Used the social issues to generate open-ended questions to pose to the</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>literature</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Generated search terms and search term combinations from the questions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Used the search terms and combinations to identify suitable databases</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Searched the literature</td>
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<td>Provide social rationale</td>
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<td>• Demonstrated selected topic matters to others</td>
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<td>• Showed the current situation is less than ideal</td>
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<td>Step</td>
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<td>• Provided evidence that change is necessary</td>
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<td>• Documented scholarly agreement and debates</td>
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<td>• Identified what scholars agreed need further investigation</td>
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<td>• Identified aspects of the research purpose I can address</td>
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<td>• Selected qualitative methodology based on research question</td>
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<td>• Identified Emerging Leader Program population</td>
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<td>• Determined appropriateness of population</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Used purposeful sampling</td>
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<td>• Emailed population for volunteers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Developed interview protocol</td>
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<td>• Determine data collection methods</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Performed pilot study using grounded theory; primarily semi-structured interviews</td>
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<td>• Used journal to record reflections</td>
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<td>• Adapted research question after reflexivity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Changed research approach to case study method using transcendental phenomenology and grounded theory</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Further refined interview protocol</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Obtained IRB approval for Pilot Study (Status is Exempt)</td>
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<td>• Completed Draft of Dissertation Proposal</td>
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<td>• Confirmed Research Study Design Feasibility with Research Site</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Researched Non-Disclosure requirements and limitations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Performed additional theoretical sampling on variables</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Finalized study design and communication approach</td>
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<td>• Received approval from research location HR leadership; including language in informed consent and broad protocol</td>
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<td>• Received questions for comprehensive exam in February 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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</table>
| Data Collection             | Grounded Approaches combined with Phenomenological Thematic Analysis | • Answered comprehensive exam questions, and provided the final draft thesis to advisor  
• Took Oral Comprehensive Exam  
• Prompted HR Liaison to begin email communication requesting volunteers (purposeful sampling)  
• Obtained a list of volunteers and narrowed list to five interviewees  
• Developed a schedule of interviews and confirmed meeting space  
• Used Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series  
• Obtained verbatim transcriptions of interviews  
• Familiarized self with data  
• Generated initial codes, and performed axial coding on interview transcriptions using NVivo 10.2.2 for Mac  
• Organized data into meaningful constructs/concepts  
• Compared and contrasted attributes and grouped them  
• Developed categories from data  
• Used interrater reliability coding exercise with two independent reviewers  
• Searched for themes related to codes  
• Reviewed and refined themes  
• Developed a data structure based on Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013)  
• Identified significance of themes  
• Created report representative of final analysis  
• Used above steps for horizontalization, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis. |

**Research Design**

The field of leader development is constantly examining ways in which to add value to the individual and the organization. High-potential leader development is part of the top talent management priorities in many organizations. This research study identified an important issue for examination in the
field and developed a conceptual framework to systematically investigate research questions by way of different theoretical perspectives.

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the experience of high-potential employees in an education sector leader development program as a possible means to understand leader identity development, how the leader development process shapes leader identity, the circumstances that brought about recognition of a leader identity, the feelings generated by the experience, and the ways the experience affect significant others.

This study used qualitative research methodology. When compared to quantitative studies, “[q]ualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). In fact, “quantitatively generated leadership descriptors often fail to lead to an understanding of the deeper structures of the phenomena we study” (Klenke, 2008, p. 4). “Qualitative research allows for more detailed accounts of the processes and nuances under investigation” (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009, p. 707). The study used Husserl’s (1931) transcendental phenomenology and identified aspects of the research purpose I could address based on my experience and resource constraints.

The conceptual framework was rooted in theoretical conceptions of identity development from the extant literature discussed in Chapter 2.

Instrumentation

This section provides information related to the research approach, the case study method integrating phenomenological and grounded approaches, population sample, sampling, and recruitment and interview protocol.
Research Approach

In research methods, the question drives the methodology. “Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied…[w]e could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). In this study, exploring the lived experiences of high-potential employees in a bounded system was the central purpose, which led to selecting phenomenology and grounded approaches in this case study. These research approaches then influenced data collection and analysis discussed later in this chapter.

Case Study Using Phenomenological and Grounded Approaches

According to Stake (2005), “[a] case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 444). Moreover, “[s]ometimes it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a seemingly typical case” (p. 451). When compared to other programs in the education sector, the emerging leader program is an atypical case for this study. In the summer of 2014, I led a field-based research project aimed at evaluating current application and selection practices of the PSEL program. The project had four goals:

- Evaluate the application and selection process of the Penn State Emerging Leaders Certificate Program
- Research similar programs for comparison
- Research scholarly and practitioner approaches to emerging leader selection
- Offer recommendations based on diagnosis/needs assessment

The data set for the second project goal began with 21 Universities for comparison, which included all the Big 10 colleges, and 11 other non-Big 10 institutions. The final comparison group comprised only of seven schools of which, 57% required nomination from a combination of feedback from the immediate manager and senior level University officials such as Deans, Department Chairs, Unit Leaders, and Vice Presidents. These recommendations were tied to University succession plans. Most of
the Universities with a comparable emerging leader development program required senior leadership nomination rather than self-nomination and also had a career track for those completing the development program.

The uniqueness of this program as demonstrated through a self-nomination process, an absence of an organization-wide succession plan, and the program’s lack of recognition within the broader organization are atypical to a high-potential/emerging leader program even within the education sector, which not only warrant examination, but also establish parameters and boundaries of the case itself. In fact, “[q]ualitative researchers have strong expectations that the reality perceived by people inside and outside the case will be social, cultural, situational, and contextual – and they want the interactivity of functions and contexts as well described as possible” (Stake, 2005, p. 452). Merriam (1998) asserts, “[being] [a]nchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences” (p. 41). To help facilitate these rich descriptions, the research methods used to conduct this study were phenomenological, given my aim to describe the essence of particular lived experiences in high-potential employees, and also used a grounded approach. Regarding the former, I have chosen transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 1977). According to Moustakas (1994):

Husserl's phenomenology is a Transcendental Phenomenology. It emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge (1965, pp. 5-6). Husserl's approach is called "phenomenology" because it utilizes only the data available to consciousness—the appearance of objects. It is considered “transcendental” because it adheres to what can be discovered through reflection on subjective acts and their objective correlates. It is a "science" because “it affords knowledge that has effectively disposed of all the elements that could render its grasp ‘contingent’” (p. 23). It is logical in its assertion that the only thing we know for certain is that which appears before us in consciousness, and that fact is a guarantee of its objectivity. (p. 45)

Husserl (1977) does not claim that transcendental phenomenology is the only approach to knowledge of human experience, but emphasizes that “it is a science with systematic concreteness that makes empirical sciences possible” (p. 72). According to Creswell (2007), population sizes for
phenomenological studies can range from 1 to 10 participants. Therefore, the goal was to collect data with no more than ten participants.

According to Moustakas (1994), there are three broad elements to transcendental phenomenology: Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation. *Epoche* is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment. “In the Epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (p. 34). Following the Epoche, the next essential process is the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. Moustakas (1994) informs us:

It is called transcendental because it moves beyond the everyday to the pure ego in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time. In transcendental-phenomenological reduction, each experience is considered in its singularity, in and for itself. The phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way. A complete description is given of its essential constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors, and shapes. (p. 34)

Through the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, we derive a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon, the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness, from the vantage point of an open self. The Imaginative Variation follows the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. Its aim is to grasp the structural essences of experience. “From this process a structural description of the essences of the experience is derived, presenting a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Anticipated outcomes from this study include:

- Conference presentations and journal articles.
- A guide to developing high-potential leaders.
- Insight into identity development theory in high-potential employees.
Population Sample

The current research used semi-structured interviews from an education sector emerging leader program in Pennsylvania as the primary source of data. This program is a 12-month high-potential certificate program for faculty and staff. Each October, employees from across the organization are invited to apply. A selection committee chooses 25 to 30 candidates in December, who are then invited to participate in the program beginning in January of the next year.

In determining the appropriateness of the population, I evaluated current organization practices against common practices outlined in the literature. There were a few differences. First, this program allowed self-nomination that required validation from the direct manager, or another manager. Second, the program was not widely recognized within the broader organization. Third, there was no method of tracking the program participant’s career progression since there is not an organization-wide succession practice for any population. With these differences, I still determined there was merit in researching this population due to the uniqueness of the nomination approach. Since these employees identify themselves as leaders, their perspectives would be interesting since this program emulates a transparent high-potential program. My experience working with this population began in August 2013 and ended in May 2015.

I also used my experiences with this population and archival data including print and electronic media to help contextualize my understanding of the organization culture.

Sampling, Recruitment, and Interview Protocol

The participants in the study were graduates of the emerging leader certificate program representing various units across the organization. To recruit volunteers, the organization’s Human Resources liaison for this program emailed graduates from the program and requested volunteers to participate. The email informed the interested parties to contact me directly for additional information, and to schedule the interview. Five volunteers were interviewed, as 10 are the maximum recommended in
phenomenological studies. (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 30, 2014). “Typically in phenomenological investigation the long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). The interview protocol was refined from the pilot study discussed later in this chapter, and was based on the general interview guide provided by Moustakas (1994), using broad questions to help facilitate rich, substantive descriptions. Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series served as the framework from which to conduct in-depth phenomenological interviewing (see Appendix E for refined protocol). “The first interview establishes the context of the participants’ experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). Ideally, each interview series is conducted within three days to one week apart for 90 minutes each time. Seidman (2013) affirms the impact of three interviews in building rapport when he says:

[T]he fact that the interviewers come back to talk three times for 1½ hours affects the development of the relationship between the participants and the interviewers positively…[by performing] the three actual interviews, interviewers have an opportunity to establish a substantial relationship with participants over time. (p. 25)

**Study Approval**

The current research obtained IRB exemption status and approval by way of the pilot study. This was a crucial step in establishing the viability of the study. IRB officers indicated that even when questions in the interview protocol change, as long as those questions remain related to the initial study submission, and those named in the IRB document remain involved, there was no need to resubmit for approval.

The study feasibility was confirmed with the location site, and non-disclosure and limitations were discussed. With input from the study site stakeholders, the study design was finalized, and a
communication approach agreed to. The participant informed consent forms were also reviewed by study site stakeholders and amendments made. Finally, the committee approved the dissertation proposal.

**Data Collection**

Both phenomenology and grounded theory offer the qualitative case researcher methodological guidance to not only bound the case’s object of study but to also guide how data is gathered and evaluated. Observations and interpretations are scrutinized by the researcher through bracketing and reflexivity, by peers through debriefs, and by informants through member checks to ensure accurate representations of ideas and constructs.

These constant comparisons, use of negative case analysis, and triangulation allow an iterative development of a case report; all of which can aid in clarifying meanings from the perspective of the informant as a way of identifying the essence of an experience.

**Recruitment, Selection, and Initial Contact Meetings**

Recruiting efforts for this study were collaborative. I drafted an email to inquire the interest of the nine pilot study participants. This initial email was then sent by the Human Resources program liaison for PSEL; however, I directly sent subsequent communications. Five PSEL graduates from the pilot study volunteered to be interviewed. Each volunteer was then contacted via email separately with a request for an initial meeting to discuss the study requirements, and to confirm participation. “A contact visit before the actual interview aids in selecting participants and helps build a foundation for the interview relationship” (Seidman, 2013, p. 50). Initial contact meetings can be useful to the researcher to build mutual respect, explain the nature of the study and expectations, determine the level of interest in potential participants, and to initiate the informed consent process (Seidman, 2013). Four participants had
a face-to-face initial contact meeting, and one participant had the initial contact meeting via telephone. The next step was to schedule each of the three-interview series.

**Interviews**

“Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience” (Seidman, 2013, p.8). For this study, I conducted 15 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with five emerging leader program graduates who had also participated in the 2013 pilot study. Using Sieidman’s (2013) three-interview framework, I developed a protocol where (a) the first interview explored the participant’s life history as it related to his or her development as a leader, (b) the second interview examined the participant’s present lived experience, with questions that sought to understand what his or her work day was like, and (c) the third interview explored the participant’s reflections on meaning from the previous two interviews (see Appendix E).

The interview durations ranged from 55 to 103 minutes and averaged 67.7 minutes. Forty percent of the study participants were women. All participants were current employees of The Pennsylvania State University, and their average organization tenure was 7.5 years. All 15 interviews were audio-recorded and literally transcribed. Transcripts had an average length of 15 single-spaced pages and totaled 224 pages from all 15 interviews. Table 2 provides a brief participant inventory by gender and length of interviews in the series.

Before conducting the first interview, I reviewed the informed consent with each participant and explained that participation was voluntary. Participants were also reminded of the right to terminate participation and of the right to not answer any question he or she was uncomfortable answering. At the beginning of each interview, I requested permission to use a recording device. While many of the same questions were asked to all participants to have a common base, the interview protocol was periodically
refined to follow-up on participant comments or to explore interesting themes. When I felt that the participant had particular difficulty with the phrasing of my questions the first time, I requested permission to address a topic or question a second time, in a later interview.

Table 2. Participant Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Length of Interview One</th>
<th>Length of Interview Two</th>
<th>Length of Interview Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64 minutes</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
<td>61 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86 minutes</td>
<td>84 minutes</td>
<td>103 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
<td>63 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74 minutes</td>
<td>69 minutes</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding

Coding in this study was based on a grounded approach that did not rely on preconceived information common in quantitative analysis but was rather an emergent process (Charmaz, 2006). “Coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Moreover, “[a] code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 3) My initial analysis of the transcriptions was through open coding INITIAL PHASE CODING that served as the basis for development of categories (Charmaz, 2006). “Straus and Corbin (1998) advise that at least 10 interviews or observations with detailed coding are necessary for building a grounded theory (p. 281)...the First Cycle process is labeled ‘initial’ or ‘open’, suggesting a wide variance of possibilities” (p. 104).

Open coding of 15 transcripts resulted in 1281 discrete codes (see Figure 2 for Word Cloud), which is not surprising as “[i]nitial codes often range widely across a variety of topics” (p. 51). Saldana
(2013) refers to this initial coding as first cycle coding which “can range in magnitude from a single word to a full paragraph to an entire page of text to a stream of moving images” (p. 3).

Figure 2. Word Cloud of Open Codes created on Wordle.net

In the initial phase of coding, I took a line-by-line coding approach, which meant, “naming each line of your written data” (p. 50). However, as the coding process progressed, through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I leveraged the leads from the line-by-line coding and used an incident-to-incident coding approach, where “making comparisons between observations gives you clues to follow” (p.53).

During my second phase of coding – a process Charmaz (2006) refers to as focused coding where “the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (p. 57) – I used codes from the previously coded transcripts to apply to similar content in other interviews, and refined them as the coding dictionary expanded. I went back and forth between the definitions I recorded for an earlier node to make sure that I was classifying the new content appropriately. I also frequently edited the
coding dictionary. “Grounded theory coding is flexible; if we wish, we can return to the data and make a fresh coding” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 71). All of my codes were re-coded in NVivo 10.2.2 for Mac.

The coding process was an iterative process and not linear. In reading and rereading codes and coding definitions, I considered how codes were related and sometimes, placed a code above or below another, creating parent and child codes. However, it was not until I read through my journals and memos in NVivo that considered how I might more deliberately group similar coded categories and sub-categories together through axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). It should be noted that “[f]ocused coding, as a Second Cycle coding process, is a streamlined adaptation of classic grounded theory’s Axial Coding. The goal of this method is to develop categories without distracted attention at this time to their properties and dimensions” (Saldana, 2013, p. 213). To focus more deliberately on developing categories, I reread 15 memos/journal entries created during my initial coding phase. Seven are linked to the coded transcriptions directly in NVivo. Based on the content covered in the entries, I came up with 16 categories to group child codes (see Table 3).

Table 3. Initial Category Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Category Name</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>New Node Location</th>
<th>New Category Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separating Work Life from Personal Life</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Work Life Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Work Behind</td>
<td>Deleted</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Life Balance</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Parent Code</td>
<td>Work Life Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Work</td>
<td>Deleted</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Family</td>
<td>Renamed</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Leading in Personal Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing Space</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Leading in Personal Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving a Legacy</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing One's Value/Worth</td>
<td>Deleted</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Assumptions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing Younger Self to Current Self</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Category Name</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>New Node Location</td>
<td>New Category Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding whom you want to be</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing/Passing on Values</td>
<td>Being a Role Model</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Considering Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing limitations</td>
<td>Acknowledging Limitations</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Knowing Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasing Others</td>
<td>Being a People Pleaser</td>
<td>Child Code</td>
<td>Knowing Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Maturity</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Immaturity</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After additional review, I realized that some of the initial categories were already named as an open code, which I then converted into a category. I would later group the first four categories in this list under a category called Work life Balance. The new categories were moved into a new folder in NVivo under the Nodes area called Categories and were labeled in all capital letters to help me remember which codes were now parent codes. I also realized that the three categories – leaving a legacy, leader maturity and leader immaturity – on my initial list were more theoretical because they were ideas I had noted about the spectrum of actions taken by the study participants, are potential themes. I decided against creating nodes with these concepts as categories at this stage.

**Journaling and Memo Writing**

Over six months beginning in February 2015 to May 2015, and then again from October 2015 through December 2015, I used the journaling process. This reflexive exercise was only paused during the summer months as I participated in a full-time graduate level internship. The writing process included my immediate reflections after performing research interviews and also served as an opportunity to bracket my assumptions.
Journaling was also a very useful way to keep track of my theoretical ideas, and a way of recording my process steps while working through the dissertation. Senior colleagues encouraged this process to trace and audit thinking. Van Manen (1990) supports this process when he asserts “[r]esearchers, too, have found that keeping a journal, diary or log can be very helpful for keeping a record of insights gained, for discerning patterns of the work in progress, for reflecting on previous reflections, for making the activities of research themselves topics for study, and so forth” (p. 73).

According to Charmaz (2006), “[m]emo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers…memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process” (p. 72). Moreover, “memo writing also serves as a code-and-category-generating method” (Saldana, 2013, p. 216). In rereading my journal entries and memos, I noted patterns in the datum that led to initial category development, which was further refined during the second phase of focused coding.

**Data Analysis**

The purpose of this current research was to capture the essence of the lived experience of high-potential employees in an education sector leader development program, to understand leader identity development. A combination of grounded approaches and phenomenological thematic analysis were employed in this study. Charmaz (2006) informs us that “[g]rounded theory methods can complement other approaches to data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them” (p. 9). Later in this chapter I discuss a pilot study conducted in 2013 using grounded theory. “Grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them” (p. 10). Since the purpose of this revised study was to explore the experience of high-potential employees in a leader development program, phenomenology was introduced to the method since “[t]he aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a
comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). A rather important and potentially underemphasized link between grounded theory and phenomenology should be mentioned. According to Moustakas (1994):

[T]he focus initially is on unraveling the elements of experience. From a study of these elements and their interrelationships a theory is developed that enables the researcher to understand the nature of meaning of an experience of a particular group of people in a particular setting. (p. 4)

Phenomenology is foundational to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss assert:

To generate substantive theory, we need many facts for the comparative analysis; ethnographic studies, and direct gathering of data, are immensely useful for this purpose. Ethnographic studies, substantive theories and direct data collection are all, in turn, necessary for building up by comparative analysis to formal theory. (p. 35)

I. Baptiste states one must understand the context in which the above statement was made, and claims in the above quote, ethnographic studies mean the same thing as qualitative studies (personal communication, October 28, 2014). My phenomenological approach to studying leader identity development is a qualitative study, and a key first step is grasping the essence of the lived experience that may one day lead to substantive theories.

Broadly, the methodology entails: (a) preparing to collect data, (b) collecting data, (c) organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data, (d) developing individual textural and structural descriptions, and (e) summarizing implications and outcomes. Using horizontalization, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis are essential to phenomenological thematic analysis and are summarized below based on Baptiste’s Phases of Phenomenological Thematic Analysis (PTA) (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 29, 2014). Grounded theory and phenomenology are not mutually exclusive. A comparison between grounded methods and PTA is also provided in the next sections.
**Horizonalization**

Phase one in PTA is horizonalization. The researcher “provides an exhaustive list of horizon/attributes that constitute the subject’s experience in this particular time and space” (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 29, 2014). From a process standpoint, the researcher must bracket by revealing and scrutinizing their assumptions: List every discernable attribute, treat these attributes with equal value, then sift through them to remove repetitions and extraneous data in a way that preserves the horizon. Horizonalization is comparable to the coding process in grounded theory. Much like line-by-line coding, horizonalization requires considering every statement as relevant. In the initial coding process, “[i]f you ignore, gloss over, or leap beyond participants’ meaning and actions, your grounded theory will likely reflect an outsider’s view” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49). As with focused and axial coding, “meaning units are clustered into common categories or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). However, the purpose of open coding is foundational to theory building while horizonalization seeks to understand the essence and meaning of a phenomenon.

**Phenomenological Reduction**

Phase two of PTA is phenomenological reduction, the goal of which is to “place horizons that bear some relationship to each other into groups or clusters, and to provide a label for each cluster” (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 29, 2014). Strategies for this phase include labeling horizons with words that preserve the participants’ words and using labels that denote actions since experiences involve actions. Charmaz (2006) also encourages the researcher performing grounded theory coding to preserve action in the code name. Finally, framing the labels as responses to the research questions, generating an individual narrative account for each participant, and a composite narrative account from all participants concludes the phase.
Imaginative Variation

The third phase in PTA is imaginative variations that provide structural descriptions of each theme at an individual level, then composite descriptions. This phase depends on the previous phase’s textural descriptions to identify structural elements. As an analytic tool, imaginative variation is used to uncover the essences of a phenomenon. Central to the process is “the focusing on pure possibilities” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98), and considering whether a phenomenon would be the same if we change or delete a specific theme from the phenomenon. “Van Manen recommends the winnowing down of themes to what is ‘essential’ rather than ‘incidental’, the former making the phenomenon ‘what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is’” (Saldana, 2013, p. 176). To accomplish this, after moving from open to focused and axial coding, I employed Saldana’s (2013) “trinity” approach to consider the key aspect of the phenomenon in this study. The process required asking: “What are the three (and only three) major codes, categories, themes, and or concepts generated thus far that strike you, which stand out in your study?” (p. 247). In answering this question, I struggled to limit the categories to three and identified these four categories: Personal Growth, Setting Boundaries, Work-life Balance, and Managing Relationships. Other questions and actions asked in this process of analysis were: “Which of the three items, to you, is the apex or dominant item and why? In what ways does this apex influence and affect or interrelate with the other codes, categories, themes, and/or concepts? Explore other three-way combinations with other major items from the study” (p. 247).

After arranging and rearranging the major categories, and asking how each category might influence another, I determined that the apex category in is this study was Personal Growth, which from an action-oriented standpoint, was the key to the other categories. The three major codes became: Personal Growth, Work-life Balance, and Managing Relationships. After this exercise, the category Setting Boundaries was placed under Managing Relationships.

In both grounded theory and PTA, thematic analysis is an important step in the analytic process. “Themeing the Data is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, and especially for phenomenology
and those exploring a participant’s psychological world of beliefs, constructs, identity development, and emotional experiences (Saldana, 2013, p. 176). Moreover, themes do not simply emerge, but are rather a product of interpretation (Saldana, 2013). I developed a representative data structure in Chapter 4 (see Figure 4), which summarizes the grouping of my datum from initial coding, to categories, and themes.

“The data structure not only allows us to configure our data into a sensible visual aid, it also provides a graphic representation of how we progressed from raw data to terms and themes in conducting the analyses—a key component of demonstrating rigor in qualitative research” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20). A grounded theoretical model of leader identity development is presented in Chapter 4 (see Figure 5). Charmaz (2006) asserts that “[d]iagrams can offer concrete images of our ideas [since] they provide a visual representation of categories and their relationships” (p. 117).

My analytic process involved clustering codes into categories, and then grouping/clustering categories that created sub-categories, and ultimately resulting in categories of categories – meta categories. The majority of my categories were in a superordinate and subordinate arrangement meaning “[c]ategories and their subcategories are arranged in outline format as a form of structural organization, suggesting discrete linearity and classification” (Saldana, 2013, p. 250). This ordering was a byproduct of dragging and dropping groups of the datum in the Nodes folder in NVivo and was useful for creating a hierarchy, and noting some sequential action or perceived domino effect. Sometimes, like first order codes, the category clustering was based on overlap, where “[s]ome categories are share particular features with others while retaining their unique properties” (p. 251).

Synthesis

The fourth and final phase in PTA is synthesis, which is “a composite structural/textural description of the phenomenon” (I. Baptiste, personal communication, May 29, 2014). This process requires the use of all elements in phases two and three. “From the themes and delimited horizons of each
research participant’s experience, a textural description is constructed” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 133). Structural descriptions give “a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, themes and qualities that account for “how” feelings and thoughts connected with [the phenomenon] are aroused, [and] what conditions evoke [the phenomenon]” (p. 135).

**Pilot Study Using Grounded Theory**

During the Fall 2013 semester, a pilot study was conducted as part of a Qualitative Research Methods Course offered by the Smeal College of Business at The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State). At that time, I was working as a Graduate Assistant with the Center for Workplace Learning and Performance (CWLP), in the Office of Human Resources at Penn State. One of my ongoing projects at CWLP involved evaluating and creating programming for the Penn State Emerging Leaders Program (PSEL)—a high-potential leader development program. The PSEL program is a Penn State certificate program “designed for high-performing faculty and staff who demonstrate high leadership potential and do not currently have supervisory or management responsibilities” (Penn State emerging leaders about page, n.d.). Also, I was a participant-observer in the 2013 PSEL training cohort from September 2013 through December 2013. I also designed, developed, and facilitated a pilot training on ethical decision-making, which has been fully implemented in the 2014 PSEL training curriculum. These experiences allowed me to gain a firm understanding of the training experience from two lenses: Participant and observer. Finally, I had full access to participant profiles including application essays, recommendations, and public program-required blog posts.

Although the course for which I conducted the pilot study called for a minimum of three semi-structured interviews, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with graduates from the PSEL program, since performing additional interviews was part of the terms of access to the population. These interviewees volunteered to be interviewed from each of the three cohorts and informed my understanding
of high-potential leadership development practices at the organization. The pilot study began with the first research question as the main area of investigation, and was adapted to the second question after performing initial semi-structured interviews:

1. Can informing a high-potential program participant of the organization's intention for their career increase engagement and retention?

2. What impact do managers of high-potential program participants have on participant work engagement?

My sampling process was opportunistic, given my understanding of and access to the population: It was homogeneous, given those who would be interviewed experienced the same application and training processes; and the sample also had maximum variation because it allowed a representation of different cohorts, career disciplines, and organization seniority. Overall nine interviews were conducted.

I created an interview protocol that sought to both validate and test existing literature assumptions on high-potentials (see Table 4). The interview durations ranged from 45 to 80 minutes. All nine interviews were audio-recorded and literally transcribed. Transcripts of recorded interviews averaged 12.3 single-spaced pages in length and totaled 37 pages.

The pilot study not only allowed me to test and refine the interview protocol but also helped me to realize that my initial research questions regarding the value of transparency on the employee’s engagement were more quantitative in their framing. For my research going forward, which was discussed in the statement of purpose, the pilot study highlighted what I noticed as individual internal negotiations. These guided the employee regarding what they would do, and the limitations they expressed when faced with certain career decisions or obstacles. These individual internal negotiations were partly influential in helping to reshape my research to now focus on the experience of leader identity development for high-potential employees.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Extant Research</th>
<th>Interview Protocol Question to Test Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| High-Potential Trait—Self-Motivation | Feild & Harris (1991); Kovach (1989)                                             | • What are the things that keep you motivated at work?  
  • Tell me about a time that made it challenging to stay motivated? |
| High-Potential Trait—Work Habits          | Harris & Feild (1992)                                                       | • How do you feel about metrics as it relates to goal setting in performance management?       |
| High-Potential Program Support        | Loew & Hill (2012)                                                            | • What impact has your manager had on your motivation?                                                  |
| High-Potential Trait—Work Habits          | Derr et al., (1988); Ready et al., (2010)                                       | • How were you able to complete the requirements [for the training program]?                       |
| Impact of High-Potential Status       | Gritzmacher (1989); Jones (2010); Larsen (1996)                               | • Have you experienced anything that you would describe as negative as a result of your participation in PSEL? |
| High-Potential Program Content        | Groves (2007)                                                                | • Would having an actual project to work on during PSEL be something that you would have been interested in doing? |
| High-Potential Trait—Interest in Development & Learning | Campbell & Smith (2010); Peters & Smith (1996); Viney, Adamson & Doherty (1997) | • Is professional development important to you?                                                        |
| High-Potential Trait—Ambition         | Gritzmacher (1989); Juhdi, Pa’wan, Milah & Hansaram (2012); Kovach (1989); Larsen (1997) | • What expectations do you have about moving into leadership roles after PSEL?  
  [probe: Do you have a specific role in mind? and do you have a timeline?]  
  • What would you do if those expectations were not met? |
Pilot Data Collection and Analysis

Grounded Theory Methodology

The pilot study used the qualitative method *grounded theory*. According to Suddaby (2006), Glaser and Strauss were key to the development of this methodology, and “argued that scientific truth results from both the act of observation and the emerging consensus within a community of observers as they make sense of what they have observed” (p. 633). They state, “Glaser and Strauss offered a compromise between extreme empiricism and complete relativism by articulating a middle ground in which systematic data collection could be used to develop theories that address the interpretive realities of actors in social settings” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634). The authors inform us:

- The method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is built upon two key concepts: “constant comparison,” in which data are collected and analyzed simultaneously, and “theoretical sampling,” in which decisions about which data should be collected next are determined by the theory being constructed. Both concepts violate long-standing positivist assumptions about how the research process should work. Constant comparison contradicts the myth of a clean separation between data collection and analysis. Theoretical sampling violates the ideal of hypothesis testing because the direction of new data collection is determined, not by a priori hypotheses, but by ongoing interpretation of data and emerging conceptual categories. (p. 634)

In summary, the grounded theory methodology offers the researcher both a framework and flexibility to perform inductive research where the codes, categories, constructs, and theories emerge from the data through constant comparison and analysis. Suddaby (2006) affirms:

Grounded theory…is a method that is more appropriate for some questions than others … [and] should also be used in a way logically consistent with key assumptions about social reality and how that reality is ‘known’ … [and] is more appropriate to do so when you want to make knowledge claims about how individuals interpret reality. (p. 634)

After reflecting on the pilot data, particularly the internal negotiation, and reflexively examining my root interests in the topic, the purpose of the study was refined to examine the phenomenon of leader identity development of high-potential employees in an academic institution in Pennsylvania using transcendental phenomenology. This approach may lead to a grounded theory of leader identity development of high-
potential employees but served as the lens through which I sought an answer to the above research questions from the perspective of the employees.

**Interviews**

Nine PSEL graduates volunteered to be interviewed from the three cohorts that existed during the pilot study. The interviews were semi-structured interviews “meaning that [I] asked a priori questions as well as questions that emerged organically as each interview unfolded to allow the interviewer to follow up on interesting comments in greater detail” (Trevino, den Nieuwenboer, Kreiner, & Bishop, in press, p. 10). The analysis of the pilot study focused on three interviews that seemed interesting. When I chose the three interviews to be transcribed and included in the pilot data analysis, I was not aware there was anything in common and chose them simply because I thought they were the most interesting.

I created an interview protocol that sought to both validate and test existing literature assumptions on high-potentials, of which I went through six iterations (see Appendix B for a version of the final pilot study protocol). The interview durations ranged from 45 to 80 minutes. All nine interviews were audio-recorded and literally transcribed. Only three interviews were used in performing the data analysis since the remaining six audio-recordings had not yet been transcribed during the course. However all nine interviews have been transcribed to date. Transcripts for the three interviews initially used in data analysis averaged 12.3 single-spaced pages in length and totaled 37 pages. Table 5 provides a list of all pilot data sources, including the intended audience.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Original Data Source</th>
<th>Original (Intended) Data Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Informants</td>
<td>Analysis for pilot study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSEL Application Materials</td>
<td>3 sets of applicant essays and manager recommendation letters</td>
<td>Informants, Informant Manager</td>
<td>PSEL Selection Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Approximately 16 hours</td>
<td>Principal investigator’s notes from PSEL training at the Penn Stater</td>
<td>Feedback for program improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session Facilitation</td>
<td>1 pilot training on ethical decision-making</td>
<td>Principal investigator’s design, and informants feedback</td>
<td>Feedback to introduce new content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coding**

After verbatim transcriptions had been obtained for the three chosen interviews, I began the first analytic step through the process of qualitative coding. “Coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). In grounded theory, “coding is more than a beginning, it shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis” (p. 45). Furthermore, “[t]he logic of grounded theory coding differs from the qualitative logic that applies preconceived categories or codes to the data…[c]odes emerge as you scrutinize your data and define meaning within it” (p. 46). At a macro level for this work, my initial coding approach was incident by incident. By doing this, “your ideas take hold, compare incidents to your conceptualization of incidents coded earlier. That way you can identify properties of your emerging concept” (p. 53). As a secondary step, I used focused coding which “means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (p. 57).
At a micro level, I initially coded the interviews by hand at which time there were no existing codes, since “coding is an emergent process” (p. 59). The codes emerged and reflected abbreviated summaries of the informant comments (open coding). In coding the remaining interviews, I compared similar texts with each other and coded them in a similar manner. I then grouped similar coded categories and sub-categories together, a process called axial coding (Charmaz, 2006), and “searched for relationships between and among these categories and assembled them into higher-order themes” (Gioia et al., 2010, p. 8), also noting a hierarchy with “parent” codes and “children” codes. I recorded both first order and second order codes on the same page while performing hand based open coding.

After hand coding the data, I then used the NVivo 10 software program—a qualitative data analysis software—to enter the codes and help in tracking any emerging categories, and ease in searching for exemplar statements from those categories. While coding in NVivo, I noted the abbreviated summaries of informants (first order codes) in all lowercase letters to help me better differentiate them from my theoretical themes (second order codes). I then exported the categorized nodes from the NVivo software into Microsoft Excel and added two columns: (a) coding type (this included either parent, child, or theoretical), and (b) code type (noting first order or second order). There were 18 parent codes and 141 child codes. The next step was to sort data by coding type, and then giving the parent codes colors for their rows. The related child codes were also highlighted in the same colors as the parent code. This process again allowed me to check the validity of the axial approach to make edits, and to reclassify as needed. I also checked my first theoretical memo for consistency with initial impressions. These constant comparisons are foundational to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Other Grounded Theory Considerations**

Note two additional and important grounded theory principles: *theoretical sampling* and *theoretical saturation*. The former refers to when “the researcher seeks people, events, or
information to illuminate and define the boundaries and relevance of the categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 189). The latter “refers to the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical category reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights about emerging grounded theory” (p. 189). During and after the Penn State pilot study, I researched emerging concepts (e.g., emotional intelligence, organization culture, and employee engagement), to see how they fit with the data. Resources included journal articles, webinars, and newswires via a Google alert. I performed theoretical sampling. In theoretical saturation, however, the number of interviews was too small to exhaust new properties and other theoretical insights. I do however believe that the intrinsic motivation category from the pilot study was the only one that showed indications of moving towards saturation.

**Trustworthiness of Findings**

In qualitative methods, establishing the trustworthiness of findings is essential. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide often-cited criteria for the qualitative researcher to know of and are summarized by four terms: *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*. “The four terms…are the…equivalents for the conventional terms ‘internal validity’, ‘external validity’, ‘reliability’, and ‘objectivity’” (p. 300).

I will focus on credibility and transferability. Three ways of promoting credibility are through activities called prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and negative case analysis. The former “is an investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture’, testing misinformation …and building trust” (p. 301). This was accomplished in part through several meetings, email exchanges, and facilitation collaborations with the Human Resources team and participant population from Fall 2013 through the present. These interactions helped to improve my understanding of emerging leader development contextualized by organization culture, objectives, processes, and nuances. They also aided
in outlining study feasibility and design while building the relationships that facilitate trust. Since “[p]rolonged engagement also requires that the investigator be involved with a site sufficiently long to detect and take account of distortions that might otherwise creep into the data” (p. 302), I continued these processes as far as reasonably feasible within the organization.

Another consideration is negative case analysis that involves “continuously [refining] a hypothesis until it accounts for all known cases without exception” (p. 309). When I began the pilot study, the primary research question was seeking to understand if a transparent high-potential program would increase engagement and retention, and I refined the question to reflect the emergent theme of the influence of managers of high-potential participants on their engagement. This shift in hypothesis was a demonstration of negative case analysis based on these two informant indications:

But I was very lucky that my director is very supportive of professional growth opportunities, and was a very strong advocate of me taking that time. We tagged up every few weeks to talk about the [PSEL] program, talk about the value that I was getting out of it, to think about it constructively. That was helpful.

Another example of that is the PSEL program. I received a letter from my current boss…who at the time was my boss’s boss. He contacted me and said that the division wanted to “put you forward—nominate you.” I didn’t know what PSEL was. That was the first year. There was a cost attached to participate, and it was more than I would have paid out of pocket to do it. It was $450 or something. So, yeah, they nominated me, and said, “Hey, we think you should apply for this.” I couldn’t not apply; you know, when the boss tells you to do it.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) inform us:

[Transferability] is very different from the establishment of external validity by the conventionalist…[which] expects to make relatively precise statements about external validity (expressed, for example, in the form of statistical confidence limits)...the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. (p. 316)

Although the informant responses from the pilot interviews provided rich descriptions for initial findings, additional interviews in the full dissertation research study and analysis must build even thicker descriptions of leader identity development. Moreover, “[t]he purpose of a case report is not to represent
the world, but to represent the case” (Stake, 2005, p. 460). I cannot determine transferability; it can only be assessed and determined by an external party.

**Member Checking**

Member checking by way of validation of data from the researcher is an important step in accurately representing the experiences of participants. According to van Manen (1990):

The point of phenomenological research is to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to be better able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole human experience. (p. 62)

In this study, member checking was two-fold. First, at the beginning and end of each interview, I would often ask the participant if there was something that he or she wanted to share or clarify, or if there was anything else that he or she wanted to say. Occasionally, some participants clarified a point mentioned in the current or a previous interview. Twice in the study two participants had reflections they wanted to share after the interview was completed. I requested permission to record again and was granted permission to capture these reflections. Given the deeply personal nature of the interview questions, I was not surprised that some participants were more deliberate in taking opportunities to ensure their thoughts were understood. I also received additional information via email. One participant I will call *Ken* sent two separate emails after two interviews. In a communication dated May 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2015 he sent this email with an attachment:

*Marie,*

*Here’s something else that reflects on some of our discussions. Hopefully you’re familiar with Dilbert… this is from one of those one-a-day calendars I have at my desk. You have to be willing to look at yourself if you want to be a real leader, not just one on the org chart.*

*Hope the rest of the day treats you well.*
Due to copyright limitations I’m unable to reproduce the graphic here, however in summary, the cartoon was a humorous take on how some leaders can be entirely too inward focused, and ultimately are unable to see or change their own flaws.

On an earlier occasion, Ken sent me a follow-up email dated April 23rd, 2015 that included a mantra he could not quite recall during our interview:

*Marie,*

*Over lunch, I was reading the book I mentioned [Resilience by Eric Greitens], and thumbed back through the pages to find the humility mantra I mentioned to you.*

‘I begin with humility. I act with humility, I end with humility. Humility leads to clarity. Humility leads to an open mind and a forgiving heart. With an open mind and a forgiving heart, I see every person as superior to me in some way; with every person as my teacher, I grow in wisdom. As I grow in wisdom, humility becomes ever more my guide. I begin with humility, I act with humility, I end with humility’.

The second approach I employed to member checking is described by Moustakas (1994). I sent participants copies of their individual vignettes with textural descriptions, and a group synthesis for feedback. I requested each participant to carefully examine the content and offer any reflections and suggestions on accuracy.

**Interrater Reliability**

After completing the second phase of coding for category development, I tested the fidelity of my categories by following the process used by Butterfield, Trevino, and Ball (1996) and Kreiner et al. (2009), and gave two individuals unfamiliar with the study literature a list of 10 categories from the coding dictionary, and 30 representative quotes from the transcripts. I created a folder for each rater in BOX – an online file sharing and content management service – and uploaded two documents that included the statements to code and the code definitions. Each of the 10 definitions had a corresponding number. The raters were instructed to determine which code number from the coding dictionary best
represented each passage of text, and to write that number next to the passage. After completing the exercise, the raters uploaded the responses to their individual BOX folders. The interrater agreement was then calculated by dividing the number of codes the two raters agreed on by the total number of codes. The resulting number is the overall interrater agreement (Butterfield et al., 1996). The overall percentage of agreement between the two coders was .70; the minimum suggested threshold (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Managing Differences

In this study, the coding process was a solo endeavor. “Coding in most qualitative studies is a solitary act – the ‘lone ethnographer’ intimately at work with her data – but larger fieldwork projects may involve a team” (Saldana, 2013, p. 34). Invariably, there will be differences. For this reason, “[s]ome methodologists question the utility and application of intercoder agreement for qualitative data analysis since the entire process is an interpretive enterprise” (p. 35), and may choose in-depth discussions where consensus, voting, or use of a third party [are ways] to settle differences. Butterfield et al. (1996) used an “ongoing intersubjective process involving checking to insure that the categories corresponded to the data, negotiation, and reformulation” (p. 1484). With solo coders like myself, it is useful to have colleagues or participants validate findings (Saldana, 2013). Gioia et al. (2013) provide insight into some of the common ways that differences in interpretation are managed:

[I]n trying to finalize the analyses of the data, we invariably must deal with the issue of different authors interpreting some informant terms and passages differently. If agreements about some codings are low, we revisit the data, engage in mutual discussions, and develop understandings for arriving at consensual interpretations. We reconcile differing interpretations by developing consensual decision rules about how various terms or phases are to be coded. On a few occasions, we have engaged independent coders who are unfamiliar with the study to code portions of the data and have computed intercoder agreement percentages. We certainly do not consider such a step to be necessary, however, because the data structuring procedures themselves lend the requisite rigor to the analyses. Reporting intercoder agreements also strikes some dyed-in-the-wool interpretive researchers as some sort of back-door positivism sneaking into an interpretive study, and thus view such calculations as a capitulation to traditional research. In fact, when we do it, we do so simply as another way to bolster our own confidence in our assertions and findings. (p. 22)
After coding the 30 passages independently, both external raters expressed an interest in understanding how their coding approach compared to each other and to mine. I uploaded an answer sheet document with the requested information and scheduled individual calls to discuss the differences. One of the raters used Track Changes in Microsoft Word to provide me with insight into her thinking as it related to her difficulties in choosing one code over another. An interesting finding was that both raters coded two passages the very same way, but different from how I coded. In these examples, I coded the passage as Asking for Help. However, both raters coded the passages as Getting Buy-In (see Table 6 for the coding dictionary used of interrater reliability):

My response was, I need to get someone else involved. And I wound up getting my director involved in that situation. He staffs the committee that oversees us, so he was part of the conversations preceding that decision. So I brought him in thinking, #1, I want to make sure that I’m speaking correctly, that I’m in line with his expectations and with the expectations of the committee that made this decision; he can speak to that. So the three of us wound up doing a call where we could talk through it.

One rater in her comments said “I struggled with this one – could also be 5 Asking for Help, but ultimately, I think it speaks more to Getting Buy-In” (A. Shauger, personal communication, December 13, 2015). Since the instructions were to select the best code, the raters were forced to choose one code over another. However, in reality, coding a passage of text is not always limited to one distinct code. It is not unusual to have multiple codes for one passage of text, a process called simultaneous coding.

According to Saldana (2013), “[s]imultaneous [c]oding is the application of two or more different codes to a single qualitative datum, or the overlapped occurrence of two or more codes applied to sequential units of qualitative data” (p. 80). In this instance, I had not considered the codes selected by the raters for this passage of text. However after rereading both coding definitions, I agreed that the passage could also be coded using the code selected by the raters. “Simultaneous coding is appropriate when the data’s content suggests multiple meanings that necessitate and justify more than one code since complex social interaction does not occur in neat, isolated units” (p. 80). This was the case for the passage noted
above. Acknowledging the appropriateness of both codes used in this example further validated my use of simultaneous coding in the data analysis.

From the perspective of another rater, although she recognized there might have been a deeper underlying meaning to a passage, without additional context, she did her best to select the most obvious code based on the information provided (J. Golofski, personal communication, December 30, 2015).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Getting Buy-In</td>
<td>Comments about the steps they took to get stakeholders support, or when they mention the importance of getting/having the support of others.</td>
<td>“It was kind of nice that one, we talked amongst ourselves and with “Mr. X”, but it was nice to see them ... I don't want to say defer, but in a sense kind of promote me as the speaker for the group. Again, it was a position that I have on the org chart, but that doesn't really mean anything if your team doesn't buy into it. That was kind of nice to see the team recognize that, &quot;Hey, Ken is going to talk. He's going to speak for us. We've kind of said our peace, but now he's going to speak for us.&quot; That was kind of neat, but I've been out on other trips where that haven't been the case”</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Being Called a Leader</td>
<td>Comments about being labeled as a leader by others, or by having the responsibility of leading bestowed by others when he or she is asked for recommendations by a group.</td>
<td>“Well, I was still their leader. I wasn’t the strongest, which was weird. I wasn’t the strongest. Um, yeah, they still asked me, “What shall we do today?” So I didn’t feel particularly stronger, or weaker, but they still followed me, so it didn’t affect me negatively. So it was okay”</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Facing Roadblocks</td>
<td>Comments about having a group/person resist, or do nothing with a suggestion, guidance, initiative, or direction proposed.</td>
<td>“Well, why don’t we take some lessons learned from things that we’re doing on this program and apply those to others that are just starting and then when we reach this milestone on those programs it won’t be so hard, it won’t be like pulling teeth. ‘Yeah, that’s a good idea.’ Then nothing, crickets. It’s like, “Ugh!” I’m trying. I’m fighting the good fight. I’m not making any headway, but I’m fighting the good fight. It’s those kinds of things that just ... At some point you can’t ...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Setting Boundaries</td>
<td>Comments about choosing to limit his or her participation in activities, decides not to get involved, or when someone else is mentioned who decided not to get involved.</td>
<td>“...but it's up to me to determine whether or not that's suitable for me. Before, I would just in those positions, and it would be fun for me because it would be something new, but now that I've done it a few times, it's like, &quot;Okay. I understand the responsibility”.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Asking for Help</td>
<td>Mentions situations where they reach out for assistance or support to accomplish something</td>
<td>“If I need help I’m going to ask for it. I mean, I still struggle with delegation. I think the current project I’m on, I’m more aware of the thought that it’s a big project that we’re doing, and I don’t need to do everything myself. I need to reach out to other people with...”</td>
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Table 6. Code Definitions Used for Interrater Reliability
<table>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Defining Leadership</td>
<td>Comments about what they believe leadership is, what it looks like, or how</td>
<td>“Yeah, for me, I struggle in that leadership to me is kind of a by-product of how you live your life. If you live your life the right kind of way, you tend towards being in leadership type positions as opposed to being a leader in other areas. Maybe it's just a perspective thing for me. Yeah. That has been my focus. If I get better in certain areas, that'll make me a better person. It will make me a better leader or make me a better husband. Those will all be by-products of working on myself. I will be a better dad. That's just maybe a different kind of tweak, a different view from the prism”.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the title is assigned.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Deciding Whom You</td>
<td>Moments they are making a conscious decision as to the type of person they</td>
<td>“In that space, I know that I just said I have to carry a certain way of myself that is mostly with the way that I act, with the way I engage, most with the way that I speak”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want to Be</td>
<td>want to be or the ways he or she wants to respond to things, or handle a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>situation. Comments can also reflect what he or she is opposed to being.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Acknowledging</td>
<td>Expressions reflecting something they feel beyond what they believe they</td>
<td>“So that’s been an interesting exercise in thinking about what might we want in two years, or four years. That’s a bit of a challenge for me. I’m not usually that forward-thinking, that visionary”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>can or should do, statements about what they do not do well or when they</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>talk about someone else being better suited to do something. Also applies</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Taking a Break</td>
<td>Comments about what they do or would normally do during a period in the</td>
<td>“I do try to step away for lunch at some point because it’s helpful to me to step out of the building and clear my head. It doesn’t necessarily mean a short lunch or a long lunch; it’s just for me to have a chance to breathe for a minute. I notice that I am happier at the end of the day when I have had a chance to tune out for a second. So I do try to do that”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>workday when they are not working, or when they are</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Example Quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Shaping</td>
<td>make statements about what an ideal break would entail.</td>
<td>“I would say that’s it. “Empowering” is the word I want to use here, because it really feels like I did not realize I had the power, but now I do. And the power is to influence, to have impact, to shape things. Again, I do realize I cannot do it alone, so that is why I use the word “shape.” It will grow on its own. It has its own path of development, but we can help shaping it”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Comments on the feelings that emerge from playing a role in developing someone, or statements around wanting to have an influence in changing the way someone thinks or behaves, which can either be collaborative or imposed.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
With the understanding that datum can have multiple meanings, and can be coded in multiple ways, not surprisingly, the interrater calculation would be on the lower end of the threshold. If the codes shared with the raters were more discrete, there might have been a higher percentage of agreement between the two coders. Also, it is my assertion that one of the coders may have been drawn to some keywords in the first few lines of a passage, and coded based on those keywords.

In these examples, I coded the passage as **Defining Leadership**. However one rater selected the code **Shaping Others**: 

*I think the value of leadership is helping others achieve their best, and to stretch themselves in ways that is uncomfortable (sic), but doing so for the right reasons. And it’s certainly a challenge. It’s a challenge to hold people accountable for their own personal professional growth, especially if they’re not necessarily there.*

After rereading the coding definitions, I still believe **Defining Leadership** was a better code. One important aspect of the distinction between the external raters and myself is my connection to and understanding of the participants and their datum. The context of these statements offers important clues to understanding and coding the passages. Taken on its own, a passage could be construed differently by those unfamiliar with the broader context. However, obtaining feedback from external raters on my categories was a valuable exercise that helped to evaluate the fidelity of my categories, and how well I articulated content in the dictionary.

### Assumptions

Based on my experience and background in Global Human Resources and work with CWLP, three primary assumptions are made. First, I assume that participants in high-potential programs have an interest in becoming a leader in their current organization. This assumption is based on the fact that at the research site, participants in the program must self-nominate. Second, I assume that the content provided by participants in high-potential development programs was honest and forthcoming. The level of candor and deeply personal issues shared with me during the pilot and this study guides this assumption. Third
and finally, I assume that leadership in the organization had an interest in bridging current development initiatives with a future succession plan. This assumption is based on communications within the organization about an ongoing transformation initiative in the Human Resources function, with succession planning as a major focus of talent management.

**Limitations**

The proposed study had limitations. First, the program for which I planned to perform the research is not a typical high-potential program. It is a transparent program that allows the candidates to self-nominate. Most programs for high-potential employees are veiled in secrecy with little to no input from the incumbent. This presents a very different context of leader identity within the organization. Second, there is no organization-wide succession plan for any employee in the organization. Most high-potential programs have a development track for those identified as an emerging leader. This lack of succession may present a challenge to the concept of aspiration for high-potential employees in the organization, who may not see a clear path to senior positions. Another limitation is that the sector in which the study takes place is higher education, which has specific nuances regarding leadership, tenure, and success. These nuances must be highlighted, as they are pivotal to understand the lived experiences of those participating in the emerging leader development program. Given the peculiarities of the sector, the experience of leader identity development may vary in other settings. The perspectives of participants in this study might also vary if the context of his or her development changed.

Another limitation is that the chosen qualitative approach has positivist underpinnings as it seeks to provide a way in which the researcher can distance his or her influence and biases from the research process. Overreliance on this idea may cause me to miss insights that could emerge based on hunches, which undoubtedly are influenced by my experiences. Further, using grounded and phenomenological approaches for data collection and analysis permitted the use of the researcher as the primary analytic
instrument, despite efforts to expose and manage bias by way of bracketing in journals, and memos, and use of member checking and external raters to check the fidelity of code development, inevitably, there is always a chance of bias in interpretations. However, by providing an audit trail that documented the development of my interpretations, I aimed to facilitate qualitative rigor.

This study’s heavy reliance on the memories and reflections of participants was a limitation. Key aspects of those reflections might have been lost to time, and therefore may not paint the full picture of the experience. The open-ended questions used in this study were challenging for participants. With a genuine interest in giving “the right answer”, participants would sometimes question their responses, and often wonder if they provided what I was looking for. This interest in pleasing the researcher could have influenced the stories shared.

By using phenomenology, the study focus was on the experiences of the participant rather than on theory development. Findings from this study could be the basis for additional studies with a goal of theory development.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND SYNTHESIS

This chapter reports the findings of qualitative analysis conducted, followed by a synthesis. The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of high-potential employees in a leader development program to understand leader identity development. I used Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series approach to phenomenological interviewing. A combination of phenomenological thematic analysis and grounded approaches were used to analyze 15 in-depth interviews with five emerging leader certificate program graduates.

The qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10.2.2 for Mac was used during most of the analysis process. Some initial open coding of two interview transcriptions, and journaling and memo writing—from February 2015 through May 2015, and again from October 2015 to early November 2015—were recorded in Microsoft Word. This process was used before attending two online trainings from QSR International. The first training course was entitled Fundamentals of NVivo for Mac and, the second training course was Moving on with NVivo for Mac. After the first training course, the two open-coded transcriptions were coded a second time directly in NVivo for Mac. All subsequent analysis was re-coded in NVivo for Mac. The software program served as a repository for information related to the study.

This chapter is organized in four sections. The first section presents the context of the case study. The second section will provide brief descriptions using pseudonyms noted in the previous chapter. These participant portraits are based on interviews and individual content from the emerging leader certificate program. The third section identifies key findings summarized by themes and a synthesis that delves into the lived experience of a high-potential employees’ leader identity development. These high-level themes
include: 1) Individual Maturity, and 2) Social Interactions. The fourth section presents a theoretical model of leader identity development. The chapter concludes with a summary.

**Case Context**

The Pennsylvania State University is a public institution of higher education founded in 1855 as the state’s only land-grant institution focused on agricultural science. “[I]n the 1930s … Penn State established a series of undergraduate branch campuses, primarily to meet the needs of students who were location-bound during the Great Depression. Those campuses were predecessors of today's system of 24 Penn State campuses located throughout the Commonwealth” (http://www.psu.edu/this-is-penn-state/our-history).

The mission of the organization broadly stated is to facilitate various levels of higher and continuing education, research, and creative activities that promote human and economic development, for global understanding and a better society (http://www.psu.edu/this-is-penn-state/leadership-and-mission/mission-and-character).

In recent months after evaluating results of a Values and Culture Survey in September 2014, the University developed a statement of core values based on feedback from faculty, students and staff across all campuses. The six values articulated are integrity, respect, responsibility, discovery, excellence, and community.

The University is predominantly Caucasian, with 69.9% of the 2014-2015 undergraduate enrollment racially identified as White; 6.0% African American; 5.9% Asian American; 5.9% Hispanic/Latino; less than 0.1% Native American/Alaskan Native; less than 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander’ and 2.3% Multiple Races (http://admissions.psu.edu/apply/statistics/). Penn State has tried to foster diversity and inclusion, such as a 2010-2015 framework to foster diversity through the Office of Educational Equity. However, racial tensions occasionally have emerged. In 2014,
several primarily African-American students participated in non-violent “die-in” protests to support the Black Lives Matter movement. However, social media comments about the protests from fellow Penn State students were laden with hate speech and prompted a message from University leaders on the importance of civility.

In wake of Joe Paterno’s death (former head football coach) and the arrest of Jerry Sandusky (plaintiff in a child abuse scandal), the University hired a new president, Eric. J. Barron, former president of Florida State University. A homecoming of sorts, Barron spent 20 years at Penn State as a faculty member in higher education, and dean in the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences. In a 2014 message from the leadership at Penn State that included Barron highlighting the administration’s commitment to fostering a community that values civility and differences of opinion as the institution moves ahead:

Unfortunately, there are many examples in every university where differences of opinion lead to incivility. For Penn State, one issue is of particular concern. There are honest disagreements on fundamental issues related to whether our institution acted appropriately, how our institution handled a crisis, and whether the sanctions that resulted are appropriate…Debate and disagreement are critical constructs in the role of universities in testing ideas and promoting progress on complex issues. But, the leaders of your University at every level, from the administration, faculty, staff and students, are unanimous in deploring the erosion of civility associated with our discourse…Today, civility is an issue that arises in many areas of campus debate. Some may argue that the lack of civility is a national issue, promoted by a growing community involved in posting anonymous comments on blogs or by acrimonious national politics. We cannot afford to follow their lead, not if we are to serve our students as role models, not if we expect to continue to attract the outstanding volunteers who serve our University in so many ways, and not if we wish to have Penn Staters take our University to new levels of excellence. Respect is a core value at Penn State University. We ask you to consciously choose civility and to support those whose words and actions serve to promote respectful disagreement and thereby strengthen our community.

(https://news.psu.edu/story/325057/2014/09/05/message-leadership-penn-state)

On January 18th, 2016, President Barron unveiled Penn State’s Values Statement that launched a campaign to encourage University stakeholders to incorporate these values into daily activities. A toolkit was also developed to aid in ethical decision-making, and outlined aspects of an ethical culture. The six Penn State values are integrity, respect, responsibility, discovery, excellence, and community (http://universityethics.psu.edu/penn-state-values). These values were derived from feedback from staff,
faculty and students that completed the Penn State Values and Culture survey launched in September 2014. These efforts reflect the commitment of the new president in not only identifying key issues across the University, but to also propagate a message around a desired culture and expected behaviors of all Penn State stakeholders.
Participant Portraits

The five participants in this study shared a common experience of completing and graduating from the Penn State Emerging Leader (PSEL) Certificate Program. At the time of application to the program, none of the participants held a formal leadership, management, or supervisory role with positional authority. By the time this study was conducted, most had formal supervisory responsibility, and all held some level of responsibility in directing the work of others. As staff members of the Pennsylvania State University, each participant has held various roles (same position with different responsibilities) or positions (formal title change) within the organization. Another important common characteristic was that no participant was from the immediate area. Each had relocated to State College from other cities and states and held an average employment tenure of 7.5 years. All five participants, Emily, Renee, Ken, Steve, and Alex, shared experiences that played a role in their development as leaders. These rich descriptions helped to shed light on the interconnections of salient moments in their early life, and careers in shaping their leader identity. Their individual stories hold both remarkable similarities and stark differences, which they were confronted with in PSEL.

I was privileged to spend time with Emily, Renee, Ken, Steve, and Alex, who offered tremendous insight from their memories and personal reflections to aid in understanding leader identity experiences in an education sector leader development program. To retain participant anonymity, I have not disclosed information regarding the location of their hometowns.

Emily

Emily is a detail-oriented analytical thinker that focuses on the big picture and the work required to get there. She is more task- than people-oriented, gets invigorated by problem solving, and has little
interest in managing others. Raised in an organized and supportive home, she tries to emulate those characteristics, as exemplified by her mother:

I think, just growing up with her. She planned for everything. I think that just sort of rubbed off on me. And she was always one to over-prepare. So always—she always had in her car, or in her purse, she always had Kleenex, and napkins—you know, any situation we might encounter, we were covered! I’m not sure my husband is real fond of that trait right now, but I’m the same way. When we’re going somewhere, I’ve got everything that I think we might need for any circumstance. And I’m certain that that came from my mother. And I think that relates to leadership and what I do on a daily basis, because I’m still thinking that way. So in the project—or whatever work—we have everything we need? Is everyone accounted for? Is everyone aware of what they need to do to get us to the final goal?

Emily was an active young person involved in several extracurricular activities. Much of her focus in discussing her childhood and young adulthood was centered on her supporting the needs of others and reluctance in voicing her opinions. She was mostly a follower, but over time shared her thoughts:

...the friendships that I had in elementary, middle, and high school, more in elementary and middle school, I think I tended to be a follower. I think I had more—I had friends with stronger personalities, and I was, I think, more easygoing. And so when they said, “Oh, let’s go over here and do this,” I said, “Sure! Why not?” I wasn’t necessarily the one saying, “Let’s go do this.” Or play on this playground equipment, or go to the movies or whatever...

I’m definitely a people-pleaser. So growing up and going through school, I always wanted to do well, and academically I did pretty well. And I was always looking to please people....I think in high school it was a little different. I don’t know that I would go so far as to say I started leading people in high school, or swapped roles. I don’t think that’s the case. I just think I made more of my own decisions rather than just following when so-and-so said, “Oh, let’s go here.” Maybe I would, and maybe I wouldn’t, instead of always going along.

Based on her descriptions, Emily’s experiences as a follower foreshadows her style of leadership. By ensuring that everyone on the team has what is needed to complete a project or reach a goal, Emily can avoid conflict and maintain collaboration by being a supportive resource provider:

I have been a supervisor in the past, so for those periods of time I did have positional leadership. That wasn’t my favorite, I think more because of some of those confrontations that you need to have as a supervisor aren’t my forte. I don’t have a lot of experience with them, I’m not very good at them. When it comes to managing people by being more authoritative, I’m not as good at that. But when it comes to sort of rallying people and working toward a common goal, I think I do a little better with that.
Emily understands her strengths, but occasionally grapples with her disinterest in positional leadership and societal expectations regarding career advancement:

When I was sort of young and looking at my parents and trying to figure out what does success mean? I always thought that that meant a career. And I always wanted to progress through and get to the next thing, and do the next thing, and keep going up that ladder...I think in the next couple of years that’s something I am going to have to really look at, and evaluate for myself. Because I think that if I want to move in my career at all, I may need to become a manager.

She has often led out of necessity or by default when others are reluctant to do so. Over many years Emily has tried to balance being a supervisor, peer/friend, while delivering on organization expectations:

Again, I had a small team, but I wasn’t necessarily the best supervisor. At that time in my career I was trying to be more of a friend than a supervisor, and certainly had trouble with any sorts of conflict, and avoided conflict more than anything. So certainly on one hand there was a lot of relief for me, because I find that part of supervision to be very challenging. I don’t like conflict. I avoid it. I don’t like the—I shouldn’t say I don’t like it—sort of the “people management” part of it is not necessarily my interest. I like being a leader. I like leading projects; I’m very interested in project management. But I don’t know that I’m really cut out to be a people manager.

Emily sometimes struggles with delegation, and prefers to be behind the scenes, building consensus, keeping others on track, and setting an example.

Renee

Renee is a go-getter interested in continuous improvement and is not shy about sharing feedback or ideas. She is focused on building and managing relationships to aid in providing support to her customers and from a young age, has been active and vocal in various activities:

So when you ask about childhood experiences I’m trying to think back to middle school and high school. I have always been involved. I was in student government when I was in high school...I [had a] loud voice...

Renee spent little time discussing her upbringing, but focused more on experiences related to projects she has been involved with, and a few current interactions with her extended family; interactions that again highlight her commitment to managing relationships:
Family wants to come, and family wants to stay. I come from a very loud family that will just show up! So I think, again, being able to respectfully rein them in is a leadership skill. It’s a silly example, but it has to do with understanding personal relationships and dynamics, and saying, “We’d love to see you. Here are some times that we’d love for you to come.” As opposed to letting them show up whenever they want. That’s a way of managing expectations, managing relationships.

Influencing others is something that Renee expressed time and again. She is very interested in leading people and shaping their development. Using both informal and formal one-on-one meetings, group discussions, or training tools, Renee proactively seeks opportunities to gain the support of those she works with, and inevitably struggles to manage the interpersonal dynamics between members of her team:

Unfortunately, we have some interpersonal conflicts that we’re trying to get over. Even though we’re doing great work, and it’s not visible to external finances, I worry about the dynamics of my team. We have one person who is very shy and introverted, and we have another person that’s not. And I think that’s great, and a lot of times they balance each other. But I also think we can easily fall into ruts. One person can take the back seat because that’s her quiet demeanor. Where someone else might take the floor because she’s more outspoken. So I worry about the first person being overshadowed. There’s a lot more to that scenario... We need to sort through it.

When faced with challenges, Renee reaches out for guidance or help. Also, she is very much aware of her propensities as it relates to how she responds to various situations. With this awareness, she tries to control her reactions:

I’m the kind of person that has very specific reactions to certain things. But I don’t know if they necessarily always work in my favor. It’s easy to read them from me, so that’s something that I’ve been conscious of and I try to work on. I have a terrible poker face—terrible! So just trying to be conscious of that and to keep it under wraps so that I can process things and make decisions from a level place was really helpful.

She also tries to limit her involvement in the affairs of others and often asks herself:

Is this something that I want to be involved with? Is this something that I need to be involved in?

This self-awareness was encouraged through PSEL. As our conversations developed, it became clear that having control was a strong aspect of Renee’s leader identity; particularly, controlling how she is perceived. One comment highlighted this concern when she reflected on our first interview:
I didn’t like the feeling that I walked away with. For me, with my self-judgment—it had nothing to do with you or the questions that were being asked. I felt like I came off as someone who is self-righteous, and I hope that’s not how I am.

Ken

Ken has the demeanor of an easygoing laid back individual. He has a high ethical stance, a strong commitment to high-quality work and continuous improvement. Ken also does not give up easily, and wants to see things through to completion. In recent years, Ken has noted the impact and influence his family has had on his approach to life, and believes he is becoming more like his parents. His father is said to value different perspectives, and his mother is typically very good with people:

_Dad is a people’s person, that’s the biggest thing. Dad is a people’s person and I would say most of my life at this point would not classify myself as that. I’m still not the social butterfly that he is. There is a lot of people... I have a degree of shyness that he doesn’t suffer from, but I’m definitely trending in his direction where you get somebody that walks into your office and they have something they want to talk about. I find myself spending more time talking to them now than I would have five years ago or 10 years ago. I don’t know if it’s accumulation of life experiences where maybe now I have more to actually talk about, maybe have a little more to contribute..._

_I remember one time this lady came up and she was furious, just started off screaming. Mom talked to her for a little while. I don’t remember all of the details, but when she was done, that lady was crying and apologizing to my mom. I was like, "How did that happen?" Those are the skills._

In our meetings, Ken often expressed the ways he has changed over time, primarily through decisions he made based on whom he wants to be, and the legacy he’d like to leave for his children:

_That’s another time when you figure out what kind of person you’re going to be, and leadership is a part of that. What kind of person am I going to be? Am I going to be a fraudulent version for my kids where I pretend everything is perfect all the time? No. I'm not going to do that. I'm going to be honest with them. I'm going to be up front about my own feelings as a person because I have them just like everybody does, but try to model, "Here's now we're going to work through it. Here's how we're going to get better."

Spending time with family is very important to Ken. Time and again he shared details of moments he collaborated with his father, experiences with his sibling or special times he shared with his children. Not
only does he want to make sure that they know that he cares about them, but he also wants to impart a positive influence:

"You’ve got to spend that quality time with your kids when they’re little because I’m acutely aware that my oldest is going to kindergarten next year. She lost her first tooth, lost the little bottom tooth, so yeah, it’s like wow, she’s looking like a big girl more so everyday. It’s like I’m aware that my time is kind of limited with her."

As a child, Ken was highly competitive in sports and other activities. He often set his sights on those who were the best and tried to keep up with them. As a young professional, this pattern continued, and Ken often wanted to keep up with whoever was on top. His communication style was aggressive, and he preferred working alone. In recent years, his priorities and preferences have changed to a non-competitive collaborative approach, and having a strong interest in balancing his time at home:

"That's one of the things that's kind of changed in my life, but you're young, first job, of that mentality, "Where is the guy at the top because I'm going to keep up with that guy." I mean, I was working crazy hours. I was working sixty-five hours a week working at this place. I knew that radio, and when he made that statement, that just made my blood boil. Like, you've got to be kidding me, dude. You want to throw down here? Because I know what I'm talking about. A couple of things. I've really, really super-mellowed out since then, which is good. And your life creeps in in other areas, so I'm not spending sixty-five hours working anymore. I've got other things to do."

Ken is committed to self-improvement. He is constantly reading books or gathering quotes from the lives of leaders, and often considers how to make practical application of his research:

"If you're a person that believes in getting better day after day, being a better person today than I was yesterday, being a better person tomorrow than I am today. The things you have the most control over are you and your behaviors. You don’t become a better person by changing your environment or your surroundings. It's all kind of between your ears and within your grasp. What are your day-to-day activities."

Ken’s leader identity is rooted in a commitment to personal growth, and responsibility for setting the best example possible for everyone within his sphere of influence.
Steve

Steve is highly analytical, collaborative and reflective. He has a strong commitment to excellence and a positive disposition that makes him very personable. Steve grew up in a home where his parents encouraged collaboration and creativity:

Taking the initiative in things was something in my family. I remember I came up with an idea that was new for my family—probably not new elsewhere—of keeping a notebook where people can exchange thoughts. Although we see each other, we live in the same household. But it’s fun. Sometimes we put down jokes. Sometimes we put down thanks. Sometimes we draw silly pictures, diagrams for each other, just to share. And it turned out to be a great idea. They loved it. And it inspired other new thoughts the family would start to have. We started to see new things in the house. Things would be rearranged. My mom came up with the idea of where to put the flowers, sometimes in a surprising place. It sets the tone of things.

As a child, Steve took unpopular stances with his friends but did not lose their good graces. In one situation while visiting a different city with a group of friends, tensions arose between his friends and some children in the community they visited:

So I stopped the fight. I told my guy not to. He was so mad. He was so mad—mad at the boy who kicked him back. He was so mad, and I really, really talked him out of it. The whole group was excited to see it at the beginning, and they were not happy about my decision. Because, well, boys, they want to fight it out. It’s part of the thing. But it’s just not very wise. We were outnumbered, too. It’s just not very wise. So I talked them out of it. Nobody said “sorry” or anything, they just said, “We don’t want to fight.” Well, we came home safely. And my brother told me that he didn’t know how I did it. My brother was following me around at the time...And that made me realize, “Oh, I did something really hard.” Like when people are losing the sight, I kind of feel responsible to make sure that we as a group don’t get into trouble.

In his professional life, Steve continues to take uncommon stances, and goes against the grain when his work is not in line with his personal values:

Well, there are some projects, you know, that I know are high-profile, it’s got a lot of attention. But in essence, I think it’s consuming too much resources, it’s not helping people correctly. I don’t believe in their vision, from my perspective. And I try not to be part of it, with my power...It’s high-profile, so whoever hops on that gets a lot of attention, gets a lot of grants, gets promoted. But it doesn’t really fulfill my goal of ultimately helping people learn and teach better...
As a thoughtful decision maker, Steve often takes the time to consider a course of action before reacting.

Over time, he built and retained the respect of his family members as an advisor with respect and influence:

...I do feel that my family looks to me for—comments. They ask me what I think about this, even though it’s not my business. My parents would ask my brothers to talk to me, about some decisions, thinking, “Oh, your brother listens to you. He doesn’t listen to us anymore.”

In our meetings Steve shared his thoughts on the importance of humility, community, and doing what’s best for others:

If someday I can help somebody grow, outgrow, I want to be that person. Because that’s so meaningful. And it’s really good for the organization, actually. We need to have more of that.

I’m the one, or I aspire to be the one who helps people grow. To help people realize their dreams. To help people feel better about themselves, and at the same time to help them feel good about working together.

Steve is also a self-described workaholic who can become obsessed with finishing things. He struggles to leave work in the office, and repeatedly expressed a desire for balance with his work and personal life:

I do like to separate my personal life from my business life. Again, that is something that I am trying to work on. I hope that when I am physically, or when the time is not work time, to be really working on that. It’s hard.

Important aspects of Steve’s leader identity are based on his interest in supporting the greater good, and feeling responsible for helping others to do better:

I did not know that being responsible for people is going to be something on my mind all the time. I did not realize that. I mean, it has something to do with my personality. It’s people, it’s a person, it’s not a case, it’s not a ticket. So you kind of feel like, Okay, why can’t I just put it down?

Alex

Alex is an outgoing and analytical thinker who relishes opportunities to do things differently. As a keen observer, he often adapts his approach based on the needs of those with whom he is working. Alex
shared little about his childhood or family influence on his leader identity and was frequently brief in his discussions about relatives. However, these descriptions about his relationship with his family indicated that Alex prefers a certain distance from people, and needs the people in his life to share that value:

My family's used to me. If I don't call my mom, she'll text message me. Then she'll call me, text message me, leave me message, and I'll call her back. Usually, I've gotten good if she messages me or contacts me twice, I usually can get it before twice. If she hits me up, it might be a day or two before I get back to her, but I know if I wait too much longer she'll contact me again...My father's the same way. I don't talk a lot to my family. My sister and I get along real well, now. But we don't have to talk a lot, we might catch up on the phone maybe 4 times a year. When we hang when I go home and we're in the same spot, we'll hang out all the time. We'll go drinking together or we'll go to the movies together or we'll hang out at home. We don't need to have that communication like that. My father and I are the same way. My mom, I'm sure she'd love to talk to me every day. I think she'd even get annoyed about that. There's a certain amount in the family that, "I need my space. Give me my space".

This family dynamic led me to consider an intriguing aspect about Alex because he chooses to be very deliberate in performing public and private acts of service. He also takes the time to do thoughtful things for others without an interest in developing a depth-based connection. Based on the experiences shared in our meetings, Alex isn't motivated to do what is typically expected in cultivating friendships:

I'm not the type of person that's going to call you frequently. I'm not the type of person that will even call you to go out a bunch of times. If you call me to go out, I probably will join you. The people who recognize that are the people I usually hang out with. There are a few folks who... Some of my best friends act the same exact way. They don't need a lot of attention from me. I don't need a lot of attention from them.

In limiting the time he spends with others, Alex can put his energy towards other things. He lives by his calendar and seems to occupy almost every waking hour with some activity; and even scheduled downtime:

So me sticking to the schedule makes me feel really good about all the things that I'm doing, but there's very little social element involved in this. The more that I am actually social, the less that I can actually feel like I'm accomplishing stuff... I haven't figured out a way to rectify this. Being social obviously, there's emotional responses to doing that, and there's emotional responses to being successful. I don't know where the balance is yet. I shift one way or I shift the other, and I keep shifting back and forth. I try to take little bits of pieces and put them in here and little bits of pieces in them in here. That middle ground, I haven't found yet...
Alex often expressed the importance of maintaining control of his emotions and remaining consistent as others look to him for guidance. These values may be tied to Alex’s identity as a leader, and what appears to be his pursuit of leaving a legacy mirrored to his grandfather:

...the biggest figure in my life that I felt that way was my grandfather. Like he was a stable in a small community...He was my grandfather all the time. Granted he treated me different than he treated other people, but you could tell when someone walks up to him. "Good Morning, Mr. ‘X’." There was certain level of... I get chills just thinking about it. There's a certain level of respect that you can only get from carrying yourself a certain way for a long period of time to a certain level and standard. When I begin thinking about other people who I respected in those space. The people who were most respected were people who do have that consistency over time. Sometimes that goes further than some of the actions that people take.

Alex is confident and recognizes his strengths. Over time he has earned the respect and interest of colleagues. He has also gained the interest of external organizations, which has made it challenging to remain engaged in the monotony of his day-to-day work. Once Alex finds a rhythm in his activities, he is less likely to spend as much time in preparation:

Now that I'm getting comfortable doing it now, it's a little bit easier for me to be like, I can walk in those meeting half prepared and still knock out a solid plan for the day.

As a point of clarification, Alex noted his reflections on his relationships and said:

I do find them important and when the dynamic in the relationship is respectful of my daily desires, I appreciate those relationships even more.

In summary, the five participant profiles shared in this section are an integral part of understanding the experience of leader identity development. Their individual perceptions and reflections on salient moments in childhood, work, and personal lives are foundational to recognize the themes embedded in their stories. The next section will discuss the themes that emerged in this study to help understand the phenomenon of leader identity development in an education sector leader development program.
The Lived Experience of Leader Identity Development

In this section, I discuss the patterns that emerged from my data analysis to understand the experience of leader identity development of high-potential employees in an education sector leader development program. Based on the rich descriptions provided by the study participants, two broad themes emerged: 1) individual maturity, and 2) social interaction. Out of these themes, several sub-themes are important to describe the phenomenon. The sub-themes for theme 1 (individual maturity) include: a) using emotional intelligence; and (b) valuing professional development. The sub-themes for theme 2 (social interaction) include: a) managing relationships, and b) work-life balance.

Theme One: Individual Maturity

This first theme was highlighted in the choices and behaviors mentioned by every participant in the study. Individual maturity denotes aspects of knowledge of self, areas of growth, points of stagnation, manners of working, interest in recognition, and ways of coping. Comments about individual maturity were grouped in two sub-themes: using emotional intelligence, and valuing professional development.

Using Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence in this study was demonstrated through knowledge of self as it relates to strengths and weaknesses, and using that knowledge in deciding what to do, and also included whom he or she would like to be. Most common among participants was the importance of acknowledging his or her limitations, that is to say, knowing where he or she has a particular development need, or where he or she does not possess the skills required to perform a task. As Alex describes turning down a job opportunity, it is clear he has assessed his skills against the requirements:

Obviously I'm not a teacher, but it would be interesting to have started something like a school ... Started an entity which then helps kids and students of all races and economic backgrounds to succeed in life. Being part of that would be really awesome. It took me a while to give them a final answer. Eventually I pretty much said, "I'm not going to take
this job, because my efforts and my strengths would be better served elsewhere. I think that someone else who eats, lives this every single day and has been dying to build this from the ground up will serve you as a better leader in this situation ... Serve you as a better partner in this situation than I would.

Emily like Alex came to terms with her strengths and recognized that she too would be better suited for some work circumstances over others:

I’m sort of having a revelation right now. Because there was still a part of me that was saying, “Maybe I want to go back. Maybe I want to be a supervisor one day.” In my [x] years at Penn State, I haven’t had any interest in supervision. I’ve made that clear. That’s something that I’ve known. I want to lead projects; I don’t want to lead people. That was coming to me this morning: No, really don’t want to be a people manager.

For Steve, understanding his limitations has led to raising his consciousness before meeting with others to ensure that he can understand their views and perspectives:

That mentality of realizing that my perspective is my perspective—I have to learn to listen. I am not you. There is no way I can understand your perspective. I guess it really opens up my humble channel of communication. So when I listen, I have the assumption that, “Okay, this is something new. I really have to learn it. I cannot assume.” Because from my experience, the assumption cannot be right. It makes me more humble, when I think I know, then I tend to ask. I would say listening is the result coming out of that mentality.

Like Steve, Ken’s self-evaluation recognizes that his knowledge is limited. With this understanding he can be more open to learning:

It gets back to how we talked about humility to understand I’m just this little speck here and yeah, I think I’m pretty smart, but holy man, there is so much out there that I don’t know. There is so much that I haven’t seen and experienced.

Renee considers the external world and behaviors of others, and then reflects on how those behaviors might be displayed in her:

It’s a unique challenge to me, because a lot of times I see my strengths and my weaknesses in a person who has a very dominant personality. I have to come to terms with “what did I have to do?” or “what do I still struggle with?”

As part of their emotional intelligence, all five participants considered and reflected on their limitations before taking a course of action. As the interviews progressed, many participants also took
strong stances regarding whom they what to be. This included how they responded to situations or people, doing the unexpected, or exemplifying particular character traits consistently.

Alex uses his self-awareness to maintain a particular posture when leading. It is very much about creating an atmosphere rooted in the presence he brings to a situation:

When people are looking up to me, I try to be calm, I try to be patient, I try to be happy, I try to be calming, I try to be ... What's the word I'm looking for ... Confident. That begins to paint the picture.

Like Alex, Renee is very cognizant of how her presence affects others, and she tries to use that awareness in both what she says and how she physically responds:

I think that I have started to filter myself more, in terms of being conscious of my reaction, verbal and nonverbal. I've tried to read my team a little bit more.

Sometimes, experiencing negative circumstances can have a strong influence on chosen behaviors. In Ken’s case, he is clear on what he will not do:

I had been the target of prolonged fear motivation tactics. As a result, I'm saying I'm not doing that to anybody. Forget about that. That's not how I'm going to try to help get results. It's just because I got totally burned out on that. That's something where an experience played a large role. There was a lot of things that I learned that were negative examples. Here's some behaviors that I want to avoid. That's every bit as valuable.

Alex has also determined in himself how to address negative feelings that sometimes affect his mood. It starts with acknowledging what he is feeling and then assessing how those feelings will affect what he needs to do. Once that is established, he consciously tries to maintain composure and complete what needs to be done. This process is illustrated in an example he shared:

Today, I really didn't feel like being at work. I was tired. It was beautiful outside, I should've just taken a sick day like I thought I was going to, but I decided to go to work. I was still a productive member of the team. We still addressed a bunch of concerns we needed to address. I just wasn't at the same level I normally am. Today I kept thinking, "[Alex], how can you switch this around? What can you do to get to the place that you think is more appropriate?" I was trying to find, I was thinking about, thinking about it. I was like, "You know what, I'm going to accept that fact that I'm a low key day. I'm just going to accept this and feel okay with this." I still contribute. I still make sure people understand my point-of-view. I'm still being emotionally intelligent and respective how other people feel.

Steve seeks to maintain a balanced point of view by choosing to use an unassuming approach:
I know myself. By being humble (I think that’s important), that allows me to be objective…

For Emily, doing the unexpected has been part of her life since she was a young adult. Most people do not seek to do more than the minimum. Emily has sought opportunities to lead:

I think much of my leadership style comes from experience. Throughout my high school / college career, and then getting into my work career, I was always looking for those situations where I could step up and do something, whether that would have been more extracurricular activities, or more academically, in either case, I would look for those opportunities.

Steve, like Emily, has also taken initiative in seeking opportunities to lead outside of his regular job duties:

So I started a lot of projects, even higher scale; started to collaborate with people outside, or even people in the same department but different units. So I collaborated with them.

Although a useful skill, use of emotional intelligence can be taxing. Alex articulates this point well when he shares his reflections on leading in his personal life:

I don’t feel the need to be a leadership, leader, in every position that I’m ever in. It’s draining and exhausting and I can’t do it all. Sometimes I over … I do too much.

Valuing Professional Development. All participants in this study shared an appreciation for professional development, namely formal leader development training. The yearlong PSEL leader development program was an experience shared by all five participants and has positively influenced both their professional and personal lives. As a new supervisor in another organization, Emily reflects on the eye-opening nature of a formal training program that sought to teach the basics of supervision:

At my first job—it may have been at the time they made us Group Leaders, or it may have been when they made us Supervisors, I don’t remember—they sent us to some formal training, and it was management training through a local organization, and that was very eye-opening for me, because it was a more formal learning opportunity for management and leadership. I can’t tell you exactly what I learned, because it was so many years ago. But I remember going to those classes and I remember having some awareness of the basics of supervisory principles, “This is how you treat your employees. This is how you talk to employees.” Different things like that. Although I can’t tell you what those lessons were right now, I think that I did learn many lessons from that course.
Ken, like Emily, also acknowledged the revelations he received while attending leader training and the influence that training has had on his personal life:

*I think through the training associated with becoming a leader I’ve had my eyes open to the spectrum of the human condition. I have a much greater appreciation now for everything that I had before. I hope that makes me a better leader. I think it will. Certainly it’s making me a better person which is making my probably a worthy goal.*

For Steve, PSEL helped him appreciate the variety of leader approaches and skills that exist. Often considering how his approach contrasts with those around him, Steve could see that his perceived shortcomings did not disqualify him from holding the title of leader:

*I guess one thing that I realized, that PSEL taught me, is to actually know by heart that there are different types of leaders. And that’s a very powerful fact. Because a lot of time I think we try to decide, “Ok, I’m not a leader, because I don’t behave like a person that I know is a leader.” Like the President, he is very articulate. I’m not as articulate, so I cannot be a leader.*

On the rare occasion that Renee experiences conflict with her significant other, she leans on lessons and techniques learned from the PSEL program:

*But I think that’s maybe a good sign of the program. We found things from PSEL that we’re able to put into our personal lives, that manage our personal styles and personalities, and to be effective.*

When considering who he has become and what he does, Alex acknowledges the importance of PSEL in the person he is today:

*It's hard for me to take PSEL out of the equation of the maturity of myself...*

Renee summarized it best when she outlined the value of professional development:

*Understanding the concept of professional development as being an ongoing and critical quality.*

Professional development for these participants, particularly with the PSEL program, was eye-opening. The professional development in PSEL exposed participants to the concept of emotional intelligence. It facilitated an assessment of who they are and provided tools to help them decide whom they would like to be. The PSEL program also and broadened their thinking on leadership profiles. By understanding their strengths and weaknesses, participants learned to navigate situations based on that
understanding. An unusual finding came from Steve, who is not motivated by workplace rewards or validation. This unique finding is an aspect of what I deem to be a high level of personal maturity:

For me personally, I don’t need that much external acknowledgment for me as a person, because I know I am doing good job. Usually, I know the best how good a job I do. Sometimes it’s good, sometimes it’s not good. I know very clearly...I have to say that truthfully, not necessary —I’m not motivated by those [performance evaluations]...People who recognize it or not, that’s really secondary to me...And a lot of time, the acknowledgement is very superficial.

**Theme Two: Social Interaction**

This second theme was highlighted in the choices and behaviors mentioned by every participant in the study. In this study, social interaction is the interplay between how tasks are accomplished within the context of an organization culture and the people factor. Comments about social interaction were grouped in two sub-themes: managing relationships, and work-life balance.

**Managing Relationships.** This concept of managing relationships was robust in this study, and had a few push-pull dynamics such as: a) giving and getting help, or b) setting boundaries and building rapport. Managing relationships also involved influencing the culture and people within the organization. Interpersonal dynamics is an integral part of managing relationships. Often there is a quid pro quo embedded in choosing to help others, yet some activities are performed without an interest in receiving something in return. Occasionally, helping others requires putting aside personal considerations. Ken has frequently chosen to stop his daily work to be an ear to his colleagues:

Two of the people that I think very highly of right now, both of them their wives are going through cancer treatments and that stuff, as much as you can try to put it out of your mind and show up and do your job, be I’m staying inside this box all day today, I’m not going to focus on anything but work, you can’t do that. You can’t do that when your wife is going through chemo. You can’t do that and sometimes you need an outlet.

Alex, like Ken, has also put aside his feelings to maintain certain relationships:

Before, I would kind of do it without thinking. Now, sometimes, I’d think about those interactions, and so I make the effort to keep certain relationships strong, even if I don’t feel like it that day, which can be distracting.
Helping others is not always about putting aside personal interests or feelings, but also involves sharing information and resources as Emily explains:

*I enjoy sharing information and helping people learn something, to acquire that kind of knowledge.*

These participants were also on the receiving end of support. Asking for help from friends, colleagues, managers and mentors was common. Renee reached out for support from her manager in a way that not only helped to resolve her issue, but created an opportunity to collaborate with others:

*My response was, I need to get someone else involved. And I wound up getting my director involved in that situation. He staffs the committee that oversees us, so he was part of the conversations preceding that decision. So I brought him in thinking, #1, I want to make sure that I’m speaking correctly, that I’m in line with his expectations and with the expectations of the committee that made this decision; he can speak to that. So the three of us wound up doing a call where we could talk through it. In the end, we had to be okay with her stepping away and being unhappy. And that’s a hard thing to do. it’s a hard thing to admit that you can’t solve all the problems, and to know that someone had given all that time and was just walking away with ill feelings.*

Although requesting support was sometimes necessary, it was not always easy, as many participants are tempted to complete work on their own. However, that is not always possible as Emily describes coming to terms with sharing the workload:

*If I need help I’m going to ask for it. I mean, I still struggle with delegation. I think the current project I’m on, I’m more aware of the thought that it’s a big project that we’re doing, and I don’t need to do everything myself. I need to reach out to other people with different skill sets, and get their help or their feedback. They’re doing some things for me that I don’t have to do alone, or I don’t have to do at all, I just kind of have to ask them to do it.*

In the context of interpersonal dynamics, sometimes participants were explicit in delineating boundaries. These expressed limitations outline what would be done, and how and why that approach was taken. Setting boundaries included holding back information, talents, or ideas, and pushing back with refusals to do something. For Ken, holding back was often a result of his assessment of what was needed, and if he was the right person to engage in an activity:

*If I am lacking in either understanding or context I will typically hold my tongue. That's an area where certainly with my job now I'm getting more exposure. I'm holding my*
tongue less now that I was say a year ago when I first started. I was more differential. Interestingly enough, it kind of goes against the stereotypical leadership thing.

To Ken, holding back is an atypical leadership characteristic; however, in actuality may be a leadership strength. Renee, whose natural inclination is to jump in and help, is deliberate in considering when to get involved:

And I’m okay with that, but it is a conscious process for me, sometimes. Especially when I jump into a situation where I don’t feel like things are functioning the way that they should; then it’s something that I struggle with. As I brought up in an earlier interview, I think that’s part of who I am, I want to jump in and try to help. So I’ve talked about that filter, and this is it. Understanding when I need to sit down and keep my thoughts to myself. Sometimes I’ll find a way to contribute to a conversation that isn’t in a public setting, because I want to feel like I’m serving my audiences.

Holding back can also be based on fear. With Steve, without an understanding of the organization norms and culture, he exercised caution with his interactions:

However, in coming to Penn State, my first instinct for some reason was to hide all that. I didn’t quite understand the politics here, and I didn’t want to step onto other people’s toes. I heard what a hierarchical place this was, so sometimes I am afraid I might offend somebody. So for some reason I was hiding all those in the beginning.

Steve’s caution may at first glance seem too passive. However, I would argue this to be a wise choice. Managing relationships requires building rapport. Building rapport and gather consensus requires more deliberate efforts to include and consult with others. Ken in this example garnered the consensus of his team and was selected as their leader:

It was kind of nice that one, we talked amongst ourselves and with [x], but it was nice to see them ... I don’t want to say defer, but in a sense kind of promote me as the speaker for the group. Again, it was a position that I have on the org chart, but that doesn't really mean anything if your team doesn't buy into it. That was kind of nice to see the team recognize that, "Hey, [Ken] is going to talk. He's going to speak for us. We've kind of said our peace, but now he's going to speak for us." That was kind of neat, but I've been out on other trips where that haven't been the case.

Ken’s example is a good lead into the power of influence. For Renee, obtaining buy-in is something that should not be ignored. For Ken, being confirmed as a leader by peers was a demonstration of buy-in.

Renee reiterates this point in making people feel at ease:
I mentioned last week the idea of social engineering, trying to understand relationships, and if there is anything we can do to get buy-in on a different level, to make someone feel more comfortable, and this, I think, was another example of that, of encouraging conversations to happen in a roundabout way.

**Work-life Balance.** The work-life balance concept blurs lines between personal and professional time and space. If not deliberately scheduled, personal needs are often neglected, forgotten, or inadequately addressed. In an extreme case, Alex describes an incident where he forgot to eat:

*The other day, Monday. I didn't eat all day until 3 PM. I was getting crabby. I was getting annoyed by everybody. I was like, "Why don't I feel?" You didn't eat. I was like, "I just need to eat something." I got some two crappy hotdogs from Sheetz and I was better. I was listening better and I was more jovial, but I knew that right away of what that issue was. Stuff like that. More self-awareness.*

Lack of balance between work and personal life can lead to a cyclical pattern of non-stop connection to the work, which was frequently mentioned in my meetings with Steve:

*Well, the cost, there is one thing. . . . My job is always on my mind. And there is a very big difference. And I don’t know why. I haven’t figured out a way to re-separate that. I don’t know how with that kind of job. I feel that I am not only responsible for a task, I am responsible for a group of people that are always there. There is no ending.*

While it could be argued in some circles that having a strong connecting to the workplace demonstrates commitment. When done in an extreme manner, this unbalance can be detrimental to the individual.

Renee outlines the push and pull dynamics of achieving balance when she expressed guilt in mingling her work and home life:

*But now, having a family, I see that. There are times when I’m answering an email, or I’m thinking about something, and I’m not being in that moment with my young son, or with my husband. I find myself on autopilot in my family life because I’m thinking about my workplace. And I hate that. I hate that I’m saying it. But it’s honest and it’s real. I think I have to assume that there are some days that I’m on autopilot at work, because I’m thinking about life, I’m thinking about my family. Hopefully it all balances out in the end! But I think that is a very real cost.*

**Synthesis**

The experience of leader identity development is both enlightening and challenging.
It is cultivated by a heightened awareness of choices regarding what to do and how to do it. There are constant internal and external negotiations grounded in the knowledge and understanding of self. The experience of leader identity development is navigated through interpersonal dynamics and borrowed from lessons and observations long forgotten.

At various points of development, all study participants experienced a sense of awakening or increased awareness of his or her strengths and value. With this understanding, each person was then empowered with a key that could allow him or her to make decisions grounded in an understanding of self. Leader identity development facilitates the use of various tools, such as self-awareness to help manage challenges. Every study participant was made to confront his or her habits through self-assessments and multi-rater feedback, and to make the first crucial decision in the leader development experience, acknowledgment and acceptance of who they are. Feelings of self-contempt were not uncommon. Inevitably, participants came to terms with who they are and use this knowledge when considering opportunities that required his or her involvement.

During leader identity experiences, participants became more aware of the needs of others and often used this information to determine how to engage others based on those needs. The experience evoked feelings of humility and often required putting aside personal interests for the interests of others. This awareness translated into a sense of responsibility for others. Some individuals associated a certain level of pressure and anxiety with this aspect of the experience. Leader identity experiences can occasionally feel painful. There was a duality of personality at play, particularly in the workplace. Maintaining a particular posture can be draining, and often pushes the individual to hold himself or herself back from what are natural inclinations. Therefore, many participants expressed a disinterest in leading in his or her personal life. However, some participants maintained the unified approach to work and personal interactions, not having to turn on or turn off aspects of who they are.
Knowing who you are is closely tied to whom you want to become, namely the character traits an individual decides that he or she wants to consistently express. For some participants, these decisions about whom to become were made during moments of interpersonal conflict while others made that decision based on feelings, some moral or ethical foundation, or from qualities displayed by someone admired. These decisions were not always well received, and for some individuals might be considered career-limiting moves, depending on an individual’s level of maturity.

Leader identity experiences sometimes felt robotic. For some participants, at times, the experience felt prescriptive, and there was little personal engagement in doing what he or she felt was supposed to be done. It was also frustrating for many participants to put forth efforts or initiatives learned in formal training, only to have little to no response, and occasionally a negative response.

Leader identity development experiences require a long-term investment. It necessitates commitment, consistency, evaluating and reevaluating actions and also requires some level of risk in experimentation. Over time, the participant matures and settles into a self-concept that when internalized, becomes the compass used to manage social interactions.
Figure 4. Data Structure
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sub-theme and Definition</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Maturity</td>
<td>Denotes aspects knowledge of self, areas of growth, points of stagnation, manners of working, interest in recognition, and ways of coping.</td>
<td>Using Emotional Intelligence – a knowledge of self as it relates to strengths and weaknesses, and using that knowledge in deciding what to do, and whom he or she would like to be.</td>
<td>“I think sometimes I struggle in the workplace, again because I’ve got that controlling nature, I tend to do things myself. Sometimes someone will say, “Oh, this needs to be done.” So I’ll just do it. It’s easier for me just to do it myself, rather than to ask someone or to explain how to do it, and so on and so forth. Something that I’m sort of weak on, and that I try to work on is delegation” (Renee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Valuing Professional Development – appreciating formal leader development training.</td>
<td>“So after PSEL (I already talked about after PSEL) a lot of new projects I felt empowered to do that. I felt empowered to initiate a lot of pilot projects” (Steve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>The interplay between how tasks are accomplished within the context of an organization culture, and the people factor.</td>
<td>Managing Relationships – a push-pull dynamics between such concepts as: a) giving and getting help, b) setting boundaries and building rapport. Also influencing the culture and people in an organization.</td>
<td>“After a while, I was like, &quot;I don't need to do this. He's taking the reins. He's got it. He's handling this stuff over here. I'll handle this part over here, and I'm comfortable with that. Hey guys, if you need me, let me know. Just taking a step back.&quot; (Alex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work-life Balance – blurs lines between personal and professional time and space. If not deliberately scheduled, personal needs are often neglected, forgotten, or inadequately addressed.</td>
<td>“Sometimes I take a lunch break. I would say that happens a few times a month, not even every week. You know, I eat lunch every day, but I tend to work while I’m eating” (Emily)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theoretical Model of Leader Identity Development

In Figure 5, I present a model that outlines a series of theoretical linkages between the eight key categories highlighted in the data structure, and the interplay between aspects of the two main themes in the study: individual maturity and social interactions (on the far left of Figure 5). This model is based on leader development experiences. Beginning from the bottom left side of the model, social interactions are comprised of three categories: belonging, managing relationships, and work-life balance. Belonging in this model represents an individual’s feelings of value and significance. Feelings of belonging are sometimes dependent on the perceptions and actions of others. On the one hand, an individual’s behavior in managing relationships (by giving help) might influence how he or she is perceived, help to building rapport, and facilitate a sense of belonging. This is a cyclical process. Managing relationships in this model requires not only building rapport, but also setting boundaries. If the individual succeeds in managing relationships, he or she can achieve work-life balance. Work-life balance aids in facilitating personal growth through emotional intelligence, and by deciding whom he or she would like to become.

Individual maturity comprises five categories: being prepared, facing difficult circumstances, personal growth, leader attributes, and doing meaningful work. To achieve personal growth, an individual will navigate difficult circumstances that are also a part of managing relationships. Success in facing difficult circumstance is predicated on preparation, namely gathering information, and seeking the guidance of role models or mentors. Personal growth achieved through experiences such as difficult circumstances, provide insight to understanding attributes of leaders. Personal growth can also be a catalyst to determine and define the work that is meaningful to an individual. Performing meaningful work can also result from well-managed relationships, by setting boundaries and being selective about project involvement.
Chapter Summary

This chapter described the phenomenon of the lived experience of leader identity development in an education sector leader development program from the perspective of study participants. The first section presented the context of the case study. The second section provided brief descriptions of the participants using pseudonyms noted in the previous chapter. The third section identified key findings summarized by themes and a synthesis of the lived experience of a high-potential employees’ leader
identity development. Using the method described in Chapter 3, I highlighted two major themes: 1) Individual Maturity, and 2) Social Interactions. The fourth section presented a grounded theoretical model of leader identity development. The chapter concludes with a summary. Out of these themes, several sub-themes are important to describe the phenomenon. The sub-themes for theme 1 (individual maturity) include: a) using emotional intelligence; and (b) valuing professional development. The sub-themes for theme 2 (social interaction) include: a) managing relationships, and b) work-life balance. Chapter 5 presents conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study on the experience of leader identity development for high-potential employees in an education sector leader development program concludes with this chapter by (a) summarizing the research process, (b) discussing the findings and limitations, and then (c) suggesting recommendations for practice and future research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to grasp the essence of leader identity development through the lived experiences of high-potential employees, and dealt with these sub-questions:

(a) How did the leader development program affect leader identity?
(b) What were the circumstances that brought about recognition of a leader identity?
(c) What feelings were generated by the experience? How did those feelings relate to thoughts about leader identity?
(d) How did the experience affect significant others?

This study first reviewed relevant literature to understand the interrelated concepts and constructs of high-potential development approaches and challenges, self-identified leaders, social and organizational identity construction, and leader identity construction, which resulted in a conceptual framework. Then, using grounded and phenomenological approaches in an education sector leader development program, I interviewed five emerging leader certificate program graduates who were all staff members of The Pennsylvania State University. These participants were also previous participants in the 2013 pilot study mentioned in Chapter 3. The primary source of data collection was in person interviews. Secondary data came from documents and websites related to the PSEL program and the University.
Using Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series as the framework to conduct in-depth phenomenological interviewing, I gathered information on the phenomenon from the participant’s life history, current experiences, and reflections on the meaning these experiences held for them. Fifteen interviews were conducted, literally transcribed, and coded in two phases to identify themes and generate rich textural descriptions about the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Moustakas, 1996; Saldana, 2013). Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and identifiable information such as names, cities, departments, and other identifiable information was omitted.

Through member checking, participants were invited to provide feedback on their respective participant portraits and the themed descriptions and synthesis. Participants were also provided with electronic copies of all three of their respective interviews in the series. Interrater reliability was calculated based on independent assessments of two external raters who evaluated the fidelity of the coding process. The interrater score was .70, the minimum threshold for this exercise. Throughout the research process, I used journaling to keep track of my immediate reflections and to bracket my assumptions (van Manen, 1990). I also drafted memos to record my theoretical ideas – a crucial step in helping to move through the phases of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The datum for this study was uploaded and analyzed and stored in the qualitative software program NVivo 10.2.2 for Mac.

Using the method described in Chapter 3, two themes emerged: 1) Individual Maturity, and 2) Social Interactions. Out of these themes, several important sub-themes describe the phenomenon. The sub-themes for theme 1 (individual maturity) included: a) using emotional intelligence, and (b) valuing professional development. The sub-themes for theme 2 (social interaction) included: a) managing relationships, and b) work-life balance. Exemplar passages were highlighted for each theme based on verbatim comments from participants.
Conclusions

The conceptual framework that guided this study outlined a theoretical approach to what takes place during a leader development program and was based on the assertion that the organization culture, as demonstrated through the behaviors of managers and leaders in the organization, shape the high-potential employee’s leader emulation. These implicit behavioral expectations are demonstrated and rewarded by other organization leaders. As noted in Chapter 2, the individual compares himself or herself to other leaders within the organization, then adapts a role or the characteristics of the organization leadership that do not offend his or her personal identity, which results in a personalized version of an organization identity.

Four participants in this study mentioned looking to his or her direct manager as a comparison. Emily, Steve, and Renee shared experiences that expressed a level of admiration from a manager. However Ken shared an experience that was a negative assessment of his manager. Participants in this study also focused on how his or her behavior compared to the expectations outlined from what he or she believed was good leadership traits. Sources for these comparisons included materials from the PSEL program, books, and individuals connected to the participant. Occasionally participants would refer to mentors within and outside of the organization for guidance.

The conceptual framework mentioned in Chapter 2, also noted important aspects of leader self-verification as it related to acceptance of his or her complete emulation of a current leaders’ identity, and then being granted access to the in-group, further leading to an interest in seeking more leadership opportunities (Day et al., 2009). All five study participants continually sought opportunities to lead at various stages of their leader identity development. However in adulthood, there was a decrease in non-work-related opportunities to lead sought by participants with children.

The framework also put forward that an organization’s rejection of a personalized emulation would lead to a process of exclusion resulting in constructive dismissal where the individual leaves the
unit or the organization. The context of the organization where this study took place—in that culture—dismissals are infrequent. Movements from one unit to another by participants Renee and Alex in this study were due primarily to opportunities for career advancement.

Leader identity development experiences in this study are in line with approaches to leadership development that strategically leverages knowledge of self and interpersonal relationships in building consensus to achieve organizational imperatives (Day, 2001). According to Petriglieri and Stein (2012):

[T]wo central features of leaders’ development are the internalization of a leader identity within the individual’s self-concept and the validation of that identity in social interactions. The intrapersonal portion of the process involves achieving congruence between the individual’s view of himself or herself and his or her view of what leadership is. (p. 1220).

All study participants had or are developing a leader identity that has been tested often in the organization. Most are not averse to taking leadership roles with positional authority, but, at least, one participant, Emily has internalized that she prefers to lead projects and not people. Alex has become very involved in several high-visibility projects outside of the workplace and has expressed feeling pressure in carrying leader responsibilities. His feelings are in line with the literature that states “the more visible and demanding the leadership role, the more pressure there will be from the self, followers, and the public for the person holding the role to embody views of what the leader should be like in representing the group or organization” (Petriglieri & Stein, 2012, p. 1220).

One of the goals of this research was to possibly shed light on solutions to issues of derailment with high-potential leader transitions. Given that participants in this study all relocated to central Pennsylvania to work for the University, they already demonstrated some level of commitment to the organization. Most of the study participants now have positional authority, and to a large extent, are content in leading others. Based on the study findings, derailment for this population would be based on two things: blatant opposition to personal values, and lack of opportunities to do meaningful work. In the
recommendations section, I share considerations for practitioners that may help aligning candidate and business values. I also share suggestions for managers to create better development plans.

**Personal Impressions**

My study of the experience of high-potential leader identity development in an education sector leader development program comes to a close with a personal conclusion. I reviewed what was known in the literature about: (a) high-potential development approaches and challenges, (b) self-identified leaders, (c) social and organizational identity construction, and (d) leader identity construction. As a result of this review and the study, I believe the textural synthesis describing leader identity development adds a unique understanding from the perspective of those being developed. Dries and De Gieter (2014) expressed a need for future research in this area, and I believe this study adds to the body of knowledge. The grounded theoretical model of leader identity development supports the textural synthesis, and highlights the nuanced interplay between key elements of social interactions and individual maturity.

Specifically, this study differs in the methods used and allowed me to gain insight into the essences that describe leader identity development in an education sector context. This study leveraged the personal reflections of participants through a series of interviews that probed multiple time periods to help develop a holistic picture of the experience. Few studies or conceptual approaches give voice to the experience of those being developed, and no studies have examined the influence high-potential development programs have on the incumbent’s identification with the organization as a leader.

My research presents qualitative descriptions that shed light on the essence of the lived experience of leader identity development, highlighting the interplay between individual maturity and social interactions, and the resulting choices. My personal reflections on the findings were recorded in journal entries and memos. One consistent consideration was the levels of leader maturity expressed through the actions and reactions of the study participants. Based on the descriptions provided by the
participants that contrasted current behaviors to behaviors before participating in the PSEL program, I created a five-level leader maturity development process captured in Figure 6. The figure describes a progressive development of maturity as expressed through four considerations: Problem Solving, Project Preference, Work-life Balance, and Validation. Each level in the figure expresses these considerations differently. Level One is what I refer to as Self-Sufficient, and corresponding behaviors reflect over-reliance on self, extreme independence, and a tendency to work alone. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Level Five is what I refer to as a Curtailer, with behaviors that reflect deliberate consideration of strengths, collaboration with others, and having little need of external validation. These reflections are lessons I have learned in this process, and have helped me consider my development as a leader.

Figure 6. Leader Maturity Development Process
The findings of this study revealed that leader identity development experiences require commitment, and consistency from the employee to reap the benefits that will only yield benefits over time to aid in managing social interactions. There is no definitive timeframe to indicate if, when, or how development efforts will yield fruit. Therefore, organization investments in this area will continue to be a risk. However, understanding what an experience of development is like can provide crucial information to those designing leader development programs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study I offer recommendations for practitioners and scholars, including suggestions for future research.

Recommendations for Practice

Talent Management Professionals

Talent management comprises three elements, namely attracting, developing, and keeping the best people (Rothwell, 2010c). Professionals in this specialist area of Human Resources shape talent acquisition, employee development, and retention strategies. Two major themes that emerged in this study were individual maturity and social interactions. These findings challenge Talent Management Professionals to consider revising the use of resources related to how organizations identify and develop high-potential talent. The next sections discuss how recruitment and professional development practices might change.
Talent Acquisition /Recruitment

Talent acquisition efforts are often the gateway for high-potential candidates into the leader development pipeline. Competency-based and behavior-based interviews are typically used to determine how a candidate might perform in a role. Recruitment and selection in organizations may consider adding a organization values-based aspect to the interview process to gain insight into the strength of culture fit and probability of loss. These questions or senarios need not be based on previous work experience, but rather should be closely related to an individual’s demonstrated personal commitments. For example, an organization may have an expressed value of integrity. The recruiting professional may design a time-bound senario either with a single candidate or a group of candidates that provides an opportunity to observe attributes related to fairness and honestly. The same could be achieved with other organization values such as quality. Here, the process of developing a specific output could be observed and the level of excellence evaluated.

Professional Development/ Training and Development

The research process used in this study brought to the surface some important aspects of leader identity development. Professional development practitioners may consider the development and implementation of self-nomination, and new modules or assessments for leader development akin to the protocol used in this study to encourage personal reflections specifically related to experiences that shaped beliefs about leadership.

Training and development professionals should begin by revisiting internal and external training content used for high-potential leaders. A consistant finding in this study among all participants was the importance of acknowledging their limitations. Without an adequate understanding of his or her development needs, high-potential employees may not adequately navigate involvement in specific tasks.
Therefore, training for high-potential employees should contain self-reflection focused on emotional intelligence (EI) that will bring to light areas of development. EI modules should be introduced to high-potential employees in a professional development setting sooner rather than later. The sooner an individual can recognize his or her development needs, the better he or she can determine what to be involved with. These efforts may serve as a foundation to the fourth high-potential employee X factor, dynamic sensors, investigated by Ready et al. (2010) and mentioned in Chapter 2. Using EI modules to identify development needs might help the high-potential leader improve their judgment and ability to discern the right professional opportunities.

Identifying development needs early in the high-potential leader development process through EI modules may also aid in preventing an overreliance on strengths and potential elevation of weaknesses. In his book *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*, Goldsmith (2007) refers to this bad habit as an excessive need to be “me” where faults are exalted as virtues because they are part of who we are.

Therefore, any strengths-based training must be balanced with an introduction to and understanding of individual development needs. Along this vein, I recall one of the three main reasons for high-potential executive derailment noted by McCall and Lombardo (1990) were personal qualities such as insensitivity. Many participants in this study practiced the opposite, as noted in the subtheme managing relationships. There was an acknowledgement from participants that occasionally, the support he or she provides to colleagues requires putting aside personal considerations. Therefore, leader development involves not only obtaining information and resources from others, but also providing support, guidance, and help from the incumbent to others in the organization. Professional development practitioners should emphasize in trainings the importance of occasionally putting aside personal interests and considering the needs of others.

EI content should also integrate aspects that draw out an individual’s style of social interaction, a key theme that emerged from this study. Every participant highlighted both choices and behaviors
involving the interplay between how tasks are accomplished and how they interacted with others. Since all participants in this study referenced using tools presented in their leader development training, once personal approaches to social interaction are revealed, additional content should then be provided as practical tools to manage social interactions after the program is completed.

Although high-potential development programs aim to facilitate training that emphasize desired behaviors in an employee, narratives from participants in this study revealed that their identity as leaders, including how they choose to behave, had to a large extent been formed before entering the organization. Prior to this study, most participants had not reflected on his or her leader identity development. The study protocol asked participants to reflect on their development as leaders over a lifetime. What was revealed in the three series interviews allowed the participants to further consider how they came to believe and behave the way they do as leaders. It is then recommended that Training and Development professionals create modules or assessments in leader development programs that aim to cover various stages of life including but not limited to childhood, adolescence, and early career. These assessments could be in the form on a one-on-one interview, reflexive journal or scaled instrument, and can help the incumbent gain a deeper understanding of his or her values.

Providing a snapshot of personality tendencies should remain a staple in leader development initiatives. Since the use of self-assessments like the MBTI, and multi-rater instruments such as 360-degree feedback provided useful insight to participants in this study, their use should continue.

Not all development programs have check-points to evaluate effectiveness. Therefore, it is recommended that Professional Development practitioners conduct ongoing assessments of leader development program content by incorporating follow-up discussions, at least one year after completing a formal leader development training program. These meetings should be structured to encourage reflection on leadership beliefs and should also stimulate thoughts on how the individual has changed. Taking this approach would help Talent Managers consider how various strategies and protocols are experienced and
responded to at various stages of development to influence identity work (Tansley & Tietze, 2013). These follow-up discussions may also provide insight or potential warning signs before derailment, and may reveal if the development program is achieving intended outcomes.

**Managers of High-Potential Talent**

All participants in this study expressed an appreciation for leader development training, and the value such training has had on their professional and personal lives. Given that the research site context allowed participants in the program to self-nominate, it is a reasonable assumption these individuals possessed an interest in and commitment to personal development. Therefore, applying to the leader development program might be an expressed interest in or commitment to professional development.

Although some managers may identify training and development courses for employees as a part of an employee’s development plan, these efforts should not be forced. With the understanding that high-potential individuals have the ability, engagement, and aspiration to take on more critical senior positions (Tansley, 2011), their aspiration might also be reflected in their interest in professional development. Therefore managers of high-potential employees should consider waiting to receive an expressed interest from an individual they deem as high-potential, rather than suggesting a need for training. This potential self-nomination for professional development may lead to greater commitment to the leader development process. However, emerging leaders might not realize their development needs and may require guidance to specific content. Finally, a high-potential employee’s development plan should contain opportunities that afford the individual the freedom to both ask for and provide help. Participants in this study highlighted circumstances where they could seek and provide guidance. Therefore, future rotations or assignments should allow the employee to learn the negotiation that comes from the push-pull dynamic of managing relationships through giving and getting help. Managers may find it useful to gauge the maturity level of employees. Understanding the Leader Maturity Development Process could also aid in
facilitating careful preparation of development plans that would help bridge the gaps in learning and behavior.

Work-life balance was a sub-theme mentioned by all participants in this study. Findings indicated that achieving balance with work and personal consideration was challenging for some who were least likely to set definitive boundaries. Practical time and project management tools may provide some foundational aspects to work-life balance; however, the behaviors of leadership may be a greater tool. Since varying approaches to work-life balance were based on a participant’s internal drivers, and personal commitments, organizations that desire a culture where work-life balance is valued should emphasize actions and consistent messaging through current managers. By expressing an interest in and valuing activities outside of the office, employees would be encouraged to achieve balance.

**Applied Behavior Practitioners**

Consultants in the fields of Organization Development, who specialize in applied behavioral sciences and individual interventions, should explore the experiences of high-potential employees in a leader development program as a way to help clients process critical incidents that may be root causes to derailing behaviors. Critical incidents from development experiences could guide the practitioner in identifying mentors, learning strategies, and coaching opportunities to strengthen the employee’s self-concept, manage development areas, and leverage strengths. Like Talent Management professionals, Applied Behavior practitioners could also develop assessment and evaluation tools built on the life experiences of participants. If used in combination with other personality assessments, these resources could serve as a foundation discussion point for individual-based interventions.
Policy Makers

Policy makers in the both education and employee benefits might consider changes in their respective fields. Given that findings from this study supports the idea that leader identity development occurs at various stages of development, from childhood through college, curriculum development at the elementary, secondary (high school), and postsecondary (college/university) levels should include opportunities for young people to begin critical thinking about the person they want to become. This could be accomplished through reflective exercises such as journaling, but also through activities that facilitate opportunities to make decisions, have a leadership role, and to work with a diverse group of other students. These activities could also allow the students to alternate between working alone and in a group. Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) could also facilitate workshops that help parents understand the implications various development experiences can have on their child’s future development as a leader.

In like manner, employee benefits professionals should carry the torch in partnership with managers to emphasize an organization culture that values work-life balance. By providing benefits to employees such as wellness related discounts, tickets to performing arts, and sports events. The organization could send a message of its interest in work-life balance. Taking extreme measures such as having a forced shut-down of an office and or computer access to servers at a certain time, would set the stage in making it impossible for employees to work beyond a point that the employer deems as reasonable to achieve work-life balance.

Recommendations for Future Research

Before this study, there were no phenomenological studies examining the lived experience of high-potential leaders as it relates to their leader identity development. This study used semi-structured
interviews as the primary source of data collection, meeting the suggested research approach by Luhrman and Eberl (2007) who felt that further information was needed in the form of narratives of leaders and using subtle and indirect interview questions. This study shed light on the experiences that shaped leader identity of high-potential employees in an education sector leader development program where two major themes emerged—individual maturity and social interaction—both of which warrant further examination. This study should be replicated in a different context, namely a non-education sector location. Studies in both corporate and nonprofit settings would add value to the nuanced expectations of the cultural context their development programs occur.

Based on the research findings, further research might be conducted that examines the relationship between leader identity and the selection of an organization as a place to work. Such a study could look at how individual values influence employer attractiveness, if at all. Another interesting study could investigate the relationship between boundary setting and promotions. How might work-life balance impact one’s ability to be promoted? And is there a difference between these opportunities for men and women?

Further studies should be conducted using grounded theory, or phenomenology with multiple researchers and a larger population sample. In having more than one researcher, multiple perspectives on the phenomenon could be noted, and could facilitate even richer findings. By increasing the sample size, we might cast a wider net of experiences that may result in broader categories and different themes for possible theory development.
References


Butler, J. (1897). The analogy of religion: Natural and revealed, to the constitution and course of nature to which are added two brief dissertations on personal identity, and on the nature of virtue and fifteen sermons. London, England: George Bell & Sons.


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doi:10.1177/1741143209356358


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Vicere, A. A., & Fulmer, R. M. (1996). *Crafting competitiveness: Developing leaders in the*


Appendix A

Proposal for Use of Human Research Subjects

1. * Title of study:
Examining Employee Career Development and Motivation

2. * Short title:
Examining Employee Career Development and Motivation

3. * Brief description:
For several years, corporate high-potential leadership development programs have used similar approaches in identifying and training individuals for future senior roles, often without formally informing or gaining insight from participants. Organizations are challenged to consider the effectiveness of their approaches for high-potential development to ensure that they attract and retain top talent from the next generation entering the workforce. I am interested in examining if informing an employee of how the organization views them would have affect their engagement. I am also interested in knowing how involving them in their development would impact retention.

4. * Principal investigator:
Marie Saul

5. * Does the investigator have a financial interest related to this research?
☐ Yes  ☐ No

6. * Will an external IRB act as the IRB of record for this study?
☐ Yes  ☐ No

7. * Attach the protocol: (include the investigator protocol and full sponsor protocol)

Use one of these templates:
- Protocol Templates
- PRAMS Legacy Documents

View: SF: Funding Sources (not integrated with Grants)

Funding Sources

1. Identify each organization supplying funding for the study:
Funding Source  Sponsor's Funding ID  Grants Office ID  Attachments
View: SF: Study Team Members _ PSU

**Study Team Members**

1. **Identify each additional person involved in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research:**
   - Name
   - Roles
   - Financial Interest
   - Involved in Consent
   - E-mail
   - Phone

   There are no items to display

2. **Study Team Qualifications:** (additional information regarding each Study Team Member’s Qualification (including the PI) is required)
   - Name
   - Description
   - Sample Member Qualification

   Refer to the following template

   - HRP-509 - Study Team Member Qualification Template

View: SF: Study Scope

**Study Scope**

1. **Are there external sites where the investigator will conduct or oversee the research?**
   - Yes
   - No

2. **Does the study do any of the following:**
   - Specify the use of an approved drug or biologic?
   - Use an unapproved drug or biologic?
   - Use a food or dietary supplement to diagnose, cure, treat, or mitigate a disease or condition?

   Yes
   - No

3. **Does the study do any of the following:**

   - Evaluate the safety or effectiveness of a device?
   - Use a humanitarian use device (HUD)?

   Yes
   - No

View: SF: External Sites

**External Sites**

1. **Identify each external site where the investigator will conduct or oversee the research:**
   - Site
   - Contact
   - Phone
   - E-mail
   - External IRB Review
   - Rely on This IRB

   TBC
   - TBC
   - TBC@TBC.com
   - no
   - no
Appendix B

Pilot Study Interview Protocol Version Six

INTRODUCTION

“Thanks for agreeing to meet with me today. My name is Marie Saul and I am a Ph.D. student in Workforce Education and Development at Penn State. I am doing some research for a class to understand some of the things that influence employee engagement at work, and I appreciate your willingness to participate. We have one hour to talk today, so I’d like to start with some general questions on motivation, then I have a few questions about your views on the PSEL training program and we will wrap up with some career related questions. I would really like to record our session today because it helps me really represent your perspectives in a more thorough way. Without a recording I have to rely on my notes. Would it be okay if I recorded this? No identifiable information will be shared, and you don’t have to answer any questions that you don’t want. The information will be stored on password protected computers with access limited to my professor, myself and ___, who may use your insights to make the PSEL program better”.

Mention to interviewee: “OK, I have a couple of background questions to start off with then we’ll move into questions about motivation”.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. How long have you been in your current role?
2. How long have you been with this organization?
3. When did you complete PSEL?

MOTIVATION

4. What are the things that keep you motivated at work?
5. Tell me about a time that made it challenging to stay motivated?
6. Have you received much one on one feedback about your potential career in this organization?
7. How was it delivered?
8. How did you respond to that feedback when it was given?
9. How do you think about that feedback now, looking back at it?
10. Do you think that feedback changed how you saw yourself or your work?
11. Can you describe how you would know if the organization values your contributions?
12. What does an above average employee look like?
   [Probe: Has the organization or your managers described you this way?]
13. How do you feel about metrics as it relates to goal setting in performance management?
14. Tell me about a time that you received a clear indication that the organization valued your contributions?
15. What impact has your manager had on your motivation?
16. Can you share what influence your gut has in your decision making?
   [Probe: Does it have anything to do with your motivation?]

Mention to interviewee: “So far we’ve been discussing some aspects of motivation. I’d like to now hear your thoughts on the PSEL training program”.

TRAINING

17. Why do you think the organization created the PSEL program?
18. How did you find out about the PSEL?
19. Why did you apply to PSEL?
20. What was your thinking at the time about the way your management would respond to you applying?
21. How did your management respond?
22. What was your thinking at the time about the way your peers would respond?
23. How did your peers respond to your participation in PSEL?
24. What did it mean to you to be accepted in the PSEL program?
25. How were you able to complete the requirements?
26. What did you enjoy most about PSEL?
27. What were some things you expected from the PSEL program that you did not see?
28. Describe how you feel a program like PSEL should work.
   [Probe: What would prevent this?]
29. What impact has PSEL had on your overall motivation at work?
30. Have you experienced anything that you would describe as negative as a result of your participation in PSEL?
   [If so, please give me an example]
31. Do you think that all employees should have an opportunity to be a part of PSEL?
   [Probe: Why? Or why not?]
32. What are your thoughts on having an experience level requirement to participate in PSEL?
33. Would having an actual project to work on during PSEL be something that you would have been interested in doing?
34. What did you think about delivery?
35. Was it worth your time?
36. Is professional development important to you?
Mention to interviewee: “We have a few more questions that will focus on your career overall, and your career in organization”.

**CAREER**

37. How has your leadership footprint changed as a result of participating in PSEL?
38. What expectations do you have about moving into leadership roles after PSEL?
   [probe: Do you have specific role in mind? and do you a timeline?]
39. What would you do if those expectations were not met?
40. Do you think it’s important to have some say in your career development?
   [why? Or why not?]
41. Has PSEL provided such an opportunity?
42. Is it important for you to know how the organization views your potential?
43. What are your thoughts on career advancement in the organization?
44. Can you share your impressions of gender and racial diversity in the organization?
45. If the organization communicated that they valued your potential and then asked you to keep it confidential what would you think?
46. What do you think about the organization deciding what jobs you take next without input from you?
47. Describe what you’d like your career to look like with regards to work-life balance.
   [Probe: Are you experiencing this now?, if not, what is preventing this?] 

**IF TIME PERMITS:**

“If I really want to know about [emerging leadership development] What should I have asked you but I didn’t?”

Mention to interviewee:

“That was the last question. Thank you. I appreciate you sharing your thoughts”.
Appendix C

IRB e-Submission for Pilot Study

Submitted by: Marie Saul
Date Submitted: September 26, 2013 9:59:50 PM
IRB#: 44302
PI: Marie L Saul
Review Type: Exemption
Protocol Subclass: Social Science
Approval Expiration: -pending-
Class Project: Yes

Study Title

1>Study Title
Examining Employee Career Development and Motivation

2>Type of eSubmission
New

Home Department for Study

3>Department where research is being conducted or if a student study, the department overseeing this
research study.
Management and Organization (UNIVERSITY PARK)

Review Level

4>What level of review do you expect this research to need? NOTE: The final determination of the
review level will be determined by the IRB Administrative Office.
Choose from one of the following:
Exemption

5>Exempt Review Categories:

Choose one or more of the following categories that apply to your research. You may choose more
than one category but your research must meet one of the following categories to be considered
for exempt review.

Information about the review categories can also be found in the Code of Federal Regulations
Title 45 Part 46 Subpart A Section 101: http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/
45cfr46.html#46.101. Information that is bolded below is additional clarification provided by
Penn State, as allowed by federal law.

[X] Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude,
achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior unless:
[X] Category 4: Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records,
pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants.

**Basic Information: Association with Other Studies**

6> Is this research study associated with other IRB-approved studies, e.g., this study is an extension study of an ongoing study or this study will use data or tissue from another ongoing study?
   No

7> Where will this research study take place? Choose all that apply.
   [X] University Park

8> Specify the building, and room at University Park where this research study will take place. If not yet known, indicate as such.
   Not yet known.

9> Does this research study involve any of the following Penn State Research Centers?
   [X] None of these centers are involved in this study

10> Describe the facilities available to conduct the research for the duration of the study.
    Meeting room with internet access at the PSU University Park library.
    Office or meeting room of participant at University Park with door for private discussions.
    Personal residence of investigator by way of remote internet or telephone meeting.

11> Is this study being conducted as part of a class requirement? For additional information regarding the difference between a research study and a class requirement, see IRB Policy 1 – “Student Class Assignments/Projects” located at http://www.research.psu.edu/policies/research-protections/irb/irb-policy-1.
    Yes

You have indicated that the study is being conducted as part of a class assignment.

12> Provide the following information:
   Instructor’s Name:
   Glen Kreiner

   Course Title and Number:
   Qualitative Research Methods - MGMT 592

   Semester course is being offered:
   Fall 2013

   Semester the project is due:
   Fall 2013

**Personnel**

13> Personnel List
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSU User ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department Affiliation</th>
<th>Role in this study</th>
<th>Added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mls582</td>
<td>Saul, Marie L</td>
<td>Learning and Performance Systems (UNIVERSITY PARK)</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>121667 09/26/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gek12</td>
<td>KREINER, GLEN</td>
<td>MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>121667 09/26/2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Saul, Marie L (Principal Investigator)**
- PSU User ID: mls582
- Email: mls582@psu.edu
- Email Notifications: Yes
- PSU Person Type: Graduate Student
- Dept: Learning and Performance Systems (UNIVERSITY PARK)
- Address 1: No address provided
- Address 2:
- Mail Stop:
- City, State, Zip:
- Procedures: Administer the study
- Experience: Novice, first time conducting interviews for an academic institution.

**KREINER, GLEN (Advisor)**
- PSU User ID: gek12
- Email: gek12@psu.edu
- Email Notifications: Yes
- PSU Person Type: Faculty
- Dept: MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION
- Address 1: 0443 BUSINESS BUILDING
- Address 2: UNIVERSITY PARK
- Mail Stop:
- City, State, Zip: UNIVERSITY PARK, PA 16802
- Procedures: Overview of the process.
- Experience: Advanced, experienced in performing both qualitative and quantitative research.

**Funding Source**

14> Is this research study funded? Funding could include the sponsor providing drugs or devices for the study.
   - No

   NOTE: If the study is funded or funding is pending, submit a copy of the grant proposal or statement of work for review.

15> Does this research study involve prospectively providing treatment or therapy to participants?
Conflict of Interest

16> Do any of the investigator(s), key personnel, and/or their spouses or dependent children have a financial or business interest(s) as defined by PSU Policy RA20, “Individual Conflict of Interest,” associated with this research? NOTE: There is no de minimus in human participant research studies (i.e., all amount must be reported).
No

Exemption Prescreening Questions (Prisoners)

17> Does this research study involve prisoners?
No

18> Does this research study involve the use of deception?
No

19> Does this research study involve any FDA regulated drug, biologic or medical device?
No

20> Does this research study involve the use of protected health information covered under the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA)?
No

21> Does this study involve any foreseeable risks and/or discomforts (i.e., physical, psychological, social, legal or other) to participants?
No

22> Will information collected from participants during the research study be recorded in such a manner that participants can be identified directly or indirectly through identifiers linked to the participants?
No

Exemption Questions: Objectives

23> Summarize the research study's key objectives, aims or goals.
The purpose of this research is to understand some of the factors that influence employee motivation and development at work.

24> Provide the background information and rationale for performing the research study.
For several years, corporate high-potential leadership development programs have used similar approaches in identifying and training individuals for future senior roles, often without formally informing or gaining insight from participants. Organizations are challenged to consider the effectiveness of their approaches for high-potential development to ensure that they attract and retain top talent from the next generation entering the workforce. I am interested in examining if informing an employee of how the organization views them would have affect their engagement. I am also interested in knowing how involving them in their development would impact retention.
25>Summarize the research study's procedures by providing a step-by-step process of what each group of participants will be asked to do after informed consent has been obtained.
After informed consent, the participants will be informed of the three categories of questions (motivation, training and career development, and career). They will then be asked two background questions related to their organization and role seniority. After those background questions they will be asked six motivation questions. Then they will be told that the next set of questions will seek their thoughts on training and career development experiences in the organization. They will then be asked three training and career development questions. Then they will be told that they have a few more questions that will focus on your career overall, and their career in organization. They will then be asked four career related questions. After the last question they will be thanked for their time with additional expressions of appreciation in sharing their thoughts.

26>List the data collection measures/instruments that will be used in this study. Upload all instruments, measures, interview questions, and/or focus group topics/questions for review. Data collection instruments are a required element of the review process.
Interview Questions will be used.

27>Provide the age range of the research participants. Check all that apply.
[X] 18 - 25 years
[X] 26 - 40 years
[X] 41 - 65 years
[X] 65 + years

28>Provide a brief description of the participant population.
Employees in an organization that are in a leadership development program.

29>Does this research exclude any particular gender, ethnic or racial group, and/or a person based on sexual identity?
No

30>Describe the steps that will be used to identify and/or contact prospective participants. If applicable, explain how you have access to lists or records of potential participants. During this process, participants must be informed of the following information:
• The researcher identifies him/herself as a Penn State researcher; and
• The study is being conducted for research purposes.
The decision maker will provide a list of potential participants. Initial contact will be made with a decision maker within the university/organization to obtain initial interest in employee participation. The decision maker will obtain any necessary clearance from within the university/organization and may contact the potential participants first before the investigator contacts the potential participants.

PLEASE NOTE: Submission of recruitment materials is not required for review, but may be requested on a case-by-case basis.

31>Explain how permission to take part in this research study will be obtained from potential participants (and parents, if minors are participants). During the consent process, participants must be informed of the following basic ethical principles of human participant research:
• The researcher identifies him/herself as a Penn State researcher;
• The study is being conducted for research;
• A description of the procedures that the participant will undergo as part of the study;
• The individual’s participation is voluntary;
• They may end their participation at any time; and
• Participants may choose not to answer specific questions.

PLEASE NOTE: Submission of consent/assent forms is not required for review, but may be requested on a case-by-case basis.

Initial interest in participation will be tested by the organization decision maker who will obtain internal approvals and then inform the investigator of those individuals who have agreed to participate. Informed consent will then be provided in print via face to face meeting.

32>Will any type of recordings (e.g., audio, video, digital or photographs) be made during the conduct of this research study?
Yes

PLEASE NOTE: If audio or video recordings with audio are made, Pennsylvania state law requires agreement from all parties.

33>Describe how recordings will be utilized in your research study (e.g., what parts of the study will be recorded/photographed, etc.).
Opening remarks, interview questions, transitional remarks, and closing remarks will be recorded then transcribed verbatim. The interview answers will then be analyzed in a qualitative software for further analysis.

34>Is compensation being offered (e.g., money, extra/course credit, gift certificates, etc.)?
No

35>Are student records (e.g., coursework, grades, test scores, etc.) being collected as part of this research study?
No

36>Please check the "I Agree" box below to confirm that all data (and recordings if applicable) are stored securely (e.g., locked cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only to the research personnel listed on this application.
[X]  I agree

37>Please describe how data confidentiality (including recordings/photographs, if applicable) will be maintained AND how data will be reported when writing the results (use of code numbers, pseudonyms, without names attached, etc.). All data is to be stored in a confidential manner (even if identifiers are not connected to the responses), in locked locations, on password protected computers.
Confidentiality will be maintained in the following ways:
The names and position titles of the participant will be excluded from recordings and write-ups.
The data will be stored in password protected computers and password protected databases.

Document Upload

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS
Document 1001 Received 09/26/2013 21:37:26 - Interview Protocal_Questions_Marie Saul
Appendix D

IRB Exemption Notice for Pilot Study

Marie Saul,

The Office for Research Protections (ORP) has received and reviewed the above referenced eSubmission application. It has been determined that your research is exempt from IRB initial and ongoing review, as currently described in the application. You may begin your research. Your study’s Exemption Determination letter has been uploaded into PRAMS.

To access your letter:

- Log into PRAMS (http://www.prams.psu.edu)
- In the blue, left-hand menu, expand the “Human” link (click on the +)
- Click on “Protocol Folder Active”
- Select your “Protocol ID” (IRB number)
- Select the “Documents” tab
- The letter is located in the “Approval Letter” folder

If a funding source requires a signature on the Exemption Determination letter, please do not hesitate to contact me. The above-referenced IRB # MUST be included in any correspondence sent to this office regarding this study.

Thank you,

Stephanie L. Krout
Compliance Specialist
The Pennsylvania State University | Office for Research Protections | The 330 Building, Suite 205 | University Park, PA 16802
Direct Line: (814) 865-2015 | Main Line: (814) 865-1775 | Fax: (814) 865-8899 | www.research.psu.edu/orp

Modification Requests for Exemption Determinations: The policy for Exempt level studies has recently changed in which only certain revisions need to be reported as a modification request to an Exempt study. (The policy can be located on our website at http://www.research.psu.edu/policies/research-protections/irb/irb-policy-3). Changes that affect the Exemption Determination status will require a new eSubmission to be submitted so that an IRB review can occur at the Expedited or Full Review level. When these types of changes are made to research that was previously determined to be Exempt, researchers must consult with the designated staff of the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) within the ORP to discuss. Additionally, substantial changes that do not affect the Exemption status may need to be submitted as a new Exemption study, depending on the changes that are being made.

Important Links Regarding Conducting Human Participant Research

Guidelines on Exempt Informed Consent Forms can be located at: http://www.research.psu.edu/hources/conducting-study/preparing-quat/;
application/informed-consent/forms-templates/sample-icfs

Policy RA14 – “The Use of Human Participants in Research” can be located at: http://psu.psu.edu/policies/RA14.html

IRB Guideline V – “Research Using Penn State Students as Research Participants” can be located at: http://www.research.psu.edu/policies/research-protections/irb/guideline-

According to IRB Policy III (http://www.research.psu.edu/policies/research-protections/irb/policy-3), principal investigators are expected to ensure that all individuals performing the research have successfully completed the IRB training.
APPENDIX E

Revised Phenomenological Interview Protocol Based on Seidman (2013)

PRE-INTRODUCTION

NOTE: Begin with social conversation to create relaxed environment.

“Good to see you again” | “How are you doing today?” | “Did you have a nice weekend?” etc.

INTRODUCTION

“Thanks for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, my name is Marie Saul and I am a Ph.D. student in Workforce Education and Development at Penn State and I am a Penn State Researcher. I am doing research to understand leader identity experiences. I appreciate your willingness to participate. We have about an hour to an hour-and-a-half to talk today. I would really like to record our session today because it helps me represent your perspectives in a more thorough way. Without a recording I have to rely on my notes. Would it be okay if I recorded this? No identifiable information will be shared, and you don’t have to answer any questions that you don’t want to. Again, as discussed before, participation is voluntary and you can end participation at any time. The information you share will be stored on password-protected computers with access limited to me. This is the first of three interviews. We’ll start with a few short questions about your general background, then on to questions about you as a leader.”

GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. How long have you been in your current role?
2. How long have you been with this organization?
3. When did you complete PSEL?

Suggestion to interviewee:

“For this interview, would like you to share as many stories or experiences related to who you are as a leader that you can remember. Don’t worry about tangents. Just talk as much about salient experiences you had or moments of particular awareness and impact, and then try to describe the experience fully.

It might be helpful if you take a few moments to focus on the experiences you had related to who you are as a leader up until becoming a formal participant of the emerging leader program. That can range from childhood through you graduating from PSEL”

Interview Questions

1. Can you remember a time when you felt you were a leader? Describe what that is like?
   a. Prompts
      i. What were the circumstances? When? Where? and What happened?
ii. What was the experience like?
   1. How did you feel?
   2. How did it affect you?
   3. What changes do you associate with the experience?
   4. What thoughts stood out to you?
   5. What values did you place on it?
   6. What did you feel in you body at the time?

2. Describe who you are as a leader before becoming a formal participant of the emerging leader program.

3. **Who are you as a leader?**
   i. Related to Parents/family thoughts on leadership
      1. What other experiences can you describe related to family and your development as a leader?
   ii. Related Childhood experiences
   iii. Related to Significant relationships in your life
   iv. Related to spirituality / ethics
   v. Related to popular culture
   vi. Related to society

4. Describe other moments of particular awareness for you as a leader?

5. What else would you like to share about who you are as a leader?

**SECOND INTERVIEW: DETAILS OF PRESENT LIVED EXPERIENCE**

**INTRODUCTION**

“Nice to see you”.

“How are you doing today?”

“Again, we have about an hour to an hour-and-a-half to talk today”. “So, let’s get started”.

**Second Interview Questions**

1. In as much detail as possible, please you describe what you workday is like (from dawn to dusk ) I’d like to hear about the kinds of things you do, and people you interact with and
groups you support. I don’t assume your day is the same. Please don’t summarize, give me the details.

a. Prompts
   i. Talk about relationships and interactions with co-workers, administrators, and the community you support.
   ii. Tell me about your experience at work
   iii. Think of specific incidents at work
   iv. How does your day affect significant others in your life?
   v. What feelings were generated by the experience? (Bodily states)

2. Do you take a break in the day? Or When do you take a break?
   a. If so, what do you do?
   b. Why?

3. What aspects of PSEL do you use during your day?

4. What parts of your day do you enjoy?

5. What part of your day don’t you enjoy?

6. What is your day like for getting to the office?

7. What is your day life after leaving the office?

8. How do you feel at the (beginning, middle, end of day)?

9. Is there anything else you want to share about your day?

THIRD INTERVIEW: REFLECTION ON THE MEANING

INTRODUCTION

“Good to see you”.

“How are things?”

“This is our last interview…”

“Once again, we have about an hour to an hour-and-a-half to talk today”.

“Are you ready to get started?”

Transition
“We covered quite a lot in the last two interviews. Have you given it much thought?”

“What I’d like to focus on during our time together today are your reflections”.

Third Interview Questions

1. Given what you’ve shared about your life before graduating from the emerging leader program, and how you’ve described your work now, how do you understand your experiences as a leader in your life?
   a. What do these experiences mean to you?
   b. How do they make you feel?
   c. What influence do these experiences have on your significant others? family? Co-workers? Community etc.
2. How have you changed?
3. What have you done differently as a result of who you are as a leader?
4. What is the significance of your identity as a leader?
5. Is it worth it?
   a. What is the cost of being a leader?
6. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your reflections on your experiences as a leader?

IF TIME PERMITS:

“If I really want to know about leader identity development experiences, what should I have asked you that I didn’t?”

Mention to interviewee:

“That was the last question. Thank you. I appreciate you sharing your thoughts with me”.

VITA

Marie L. Saul

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, Learning and Performance Systems, University Park, PA
Ph.D., Workforce Education and Development, May 2016
Scholar-Practitioner Track: Human Resource Development and Organization Development

CUNY-Brooklyn College, Department of Psychology, Brooklyn, NY
M.A., Industrial-Organizational Psychology, February 2009
Thesis: Impact of Inter-group Conflict on Transactive Memory Systems in Cross-Functional Teams

The New School, Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy, New York, NY
M.S., Nonprofit Management, May 2006
Thesis: Impact of Economic Development Initiatives in Urban Communities

CUNY-Brooklyn College, Department of Psychology, Brooklyn, NY
B.A., Psychology, September 2003

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Manager, Talent Development, Employee Engagement, and Diversity, Bell Helicopter, Fort Worth, TX 2015 – 2016
Senior Associate, Leadership & Management Development (GA), Penn State, University Park, PA 2013 – 2015
Senior Human Resources Business Partner, Schlumberger Ltd., Sugar Land, TX and United Kingdom 2009 – 2012
Principal Consultant & Owner, Logique Business Solutions, New York, NY 2006 – 2009

RESEARCH INTERESTS

My research interests are focused on leader development, the individual in the organization, identity and belonging. I am also interested in psychological contracts, ethical decision-making, career choice and change.

PUBLICATIONS


TEACHING & COURSE DEVELOPMENT

The Pennsylvania State University, College of Engineering, Engineering Leadership Development Minor
ENGR 409, Leadership in Organizations, Section 001, Fall 2014

The Pennsylvania State University, World Campus, M.P.S. in Organization Development and Change (OD&C)
Online Version of Introduction to Organization Development Course (OD for Industrial Trainers), Spring 2013
Developed Appreciative Inquiry (A.I.) exercise to improve student understanding of A.I. as an intervention.