

# Front-Line Liminality

Using Identity Transitions to  
Improve Leader Identification  
and Selection at a US Oil Refinery



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*“A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”*

—*Oliver Wendell Holmes*

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## Executive Summary

Sabine Refining (pseudonym), a downstream oil, gas, and logistics company, wants to identify and select the best candidates for Front-Line Leader roles in their principal refinery. As the first organizational layer of management between the Unionized workforce and refinery leadership, Front-Line Leaders play an essential role in the refinery's operational success, efficiency, and safety. Sabine Refining's Learning and Operations team has recognized that the current identification and selection process could be more equitable and realistically reflect how individuals become leaders. Additionally, the Learning & Operations team that shepherds the refinery's Front Line Leader identification and selection process would like for the process to align more closely with how individuals become leaders and wishes to know how to best prepare candidates for these roles. This capstone project seeks to improve Sabine Refining's Front-Line Leader identification and selection process by acquiring and analyzing data from the organization and key stakeholders.

Three frameworks influenced this project's understanding of how the transition to Front-Line Leadership takes place. The work of Snook, Ibarra, and Ramo's (2010) *Identity based leader development* provided the perspective of the individual's transition into becoming a Front-Line Leader. Moreover, Vygotsky's (1980) *Zone of Proximal Development* helped determine the necessary 'more knowledgeable others' and tools that were instrumental in a candidate becoming a leader. Finally, the work of McCall (2010) informed how experience shapes how Front-Line Leaders develop to perform in their new leadership role. These frameworks guided the research questions for this project, which included:

1. How does the identification and selection of Front-Line Leaders take place at the refinery?

2. To what extent does the Front-Line Leader identification and selection process impact the identity transition process?
3. What were the salient experiences, relationships, and tools that contributed to the formation of a Front-Line Leader identity?
4. At what point in the identity transition process did the individuals identify as a Front-Line Leader?

The use of qualitative research methods, which included semi-structured interviews of current Front-Line Leaders and HR staff, as well as content analysis of existing Front-Line Leader selection documents, yielded the following findings:

1. The candidate's current supervisor plays a pivotal role in the identification and selection of Front-Line Leaders.
2. Unfavorable perceptions around decreased take-home pay and job security disinterest potential candidates.
3. Existing tools to transition identity are mostly informal and are left up to the candidate to navigate.
4. Formal identity transition points do not presently exist for Front-Line Leaders.

Based on these findings, I propose four main recommendations:

1. Additional identification and selection sources beyond the current supervisor are needed to create a wider, more diverse candidate pool.
2. The refinery needs to address the real or perceived loss of earnings potential and job security if an individual becomes a Front-Line Leader.

3. More formalized and explicit transition, support, and development structures are needed to bridge the gap between selection and placement in roles.
4. Transition points should be formalized, and transition tools should be codified.

While this project aimed to improve Front-Line Leader identification and selection methods, this capstone's recommendations could support leadership development, technical experiential learning, and the pay practices at the refinery.

*Keywords: leader identity, talent selection, experiential leader development, oil and gas*

## Introduction

Like many organizations, Sabine Refining, a pseudonym for a downstream oil, gas, and logistics company, is concerned with identifying the best individuals for leadership roles. Of particular importance to the refinery is the selection of front-line leadership. Front-Line Leaders are typically the first layer of management between employees without direct reports, and report to a manager of managers. At the refinery, Front-Line Leaders are at the first level of management both on the organizational chart and physically at the refinery complex and play a pivotal role in the day-to-day work life of the employees they manage. The refinery's leaders believe that selecting individuals for Front-Line Leadership who can motivate performance and attain goals is paramount to the organization's success.

The refinery has a production capacity of 630,000 barrels a day with 2,300 employees. With company headquarters in Houston, the refinery is a wholly-owned subsidiary of a national oil company and operates its principal refinery in East Texas. The refinery presently has identification and selection processes in place for appointing Front-Line Leaders. However, much of what makes a Front-Line Leader successful after selection and placement is left up to chance. Candidates must "figure it out" through temporary placement in supervisory positions or through on-the-job experience after being named to the Front-Line Leader role.

Human Resources (HR) leadership wants to better understand the leadership identification process and select Front-Line Leaders in a more insightful and equitable way. By defining what is required of Front-Line Leaders to become successful in these pivotal leadership roles, candidates can be assessed on or intentionally exposed to these tools or experiences early in the identification and selection process.

The purpose of this capstone is to assist the refinery in further defining what Front-Line Leaders must do to be successful in their roles. This capstone aims to allow the refinery to identify and select the best individuals suited for leadership by collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews of present Front-Line Leaders and refinery HR staff, in addition to content analysis of current identification and selection documents. The refinery's Learning & Operations teams intend to use this knowledge to improve the organization's practices of identifying and selecting future Front-Line Leaders. Additionally, knowing what successful leaders do, how they transformed themselves into leaders, the relationships they formed, and the experiences that are required, would aid the refinery in the intentionality of development of incumbents to these positions, and would increase the likelihood of success of those who are stepping into the Front-Line Leader role for the first time. With this knowledge, the refinery could establish wider, more equitable talent pools of Front-Line Leaders.

### **Organizational Context**

The enterprise refines crude into various products such as branded fuels, base oil, and specialty products. The refinery was originally a joint venture between a national oil company and a large multinational supermajor energy company. After the companies ended the joint venture in 2017, the refinery retained ownership and operations of the largest refinery in the United States, located in Port Arthur, Texas. The refinery's headquarters are in downtown Houston, and they employ 2,400 individuals, of which 1,500 are employed at the refinery.

Front-Line Leaders manage the operational fieldwork and staff. The refinery is a union facility, which means most of those in operational and technician roles are members of a labor union. Those wishing to become Front-Line Leaders complete an application called the Declaration of Interest form, which kicks off a review by the current supervisor, HR, and other



refinery leadership. Generally, the candidate should be performing in their current role without issue and meeting safety and other performance standards. If these criteria are met, candidates are allowed to serve in temporary supervisor roles, called step-ups (as in step-up opportunity), to see how they handle the leadership role. These step-up opportunities are usually in place of an existing Front-Line Leader's position when they cannot be on-site. The step-up opportunities are rotated among those in the Front-Line Leader candidate pool, and training is usually 'on-the-job' or on an ad-hoc basis for these step-up roles. Once individuals become Front-Line Leaders, they are considered staff and are required to give up their union membership and the benefits that the union membership provides. At present, training for new Front-Line Leaders is mostly 'on-the-job,' along with various computer-based training (CBT) modules.

Stakeholders for this project include the refinery's Leadership team, staff within HR, existing Front-Line Leaders, Front-Line Leader candidates, and those considering becoming Front-Line Leaders. Refinery leaders are stakeholders to this project, as they are interested in ensuring that there is a candidate pool that is ready to lead the operations of the refinery and can do so in such a way that is safe, effective, and profitable. HR and Talent Development staff are additional stakeholders to this project, as they wish to either confirm or improve their current Front-Line Leadership identification and selection processes and feel that the current process could yield a larger, more equitable pool of candidates. HR and Talent staff also wish to ensure that the criteria and methods by which candidates are identified and selected aligns with what is actually required for these Front-Line Leadership roles. Once candidates are identified or selected to transition to these roles, they wish to provide the salient tools, relationships, and resources required for their success. Finally, this project will positively impact those who are considering becoming Front-Line Leaders by studying the current processes for fairness and

consistency relative to what the job demands. Future Front-Line Leader candidates would be encouraged to apply based on qualifications, experiences, and relationships that align to the needs of the role, as opposed to only their present supervisor's opinion. Those presently being considered for Front-Line Leadership, or those currently transitioning to these roles, are additional stakeholders, as this project could outline a more deliberate development experience that would allow for more successful transitions to these leadership roles.

### **Area of Inquiry**

The refinery wishes to better understand how those responsible for identifying and selecting Front-Line Leaders (e.g., refinery leadership, HR, Talent Development) can better identify and select individuals for Front-Line Leadership roles. The current practice of Front-Line Leader identification and selection leaves much about the process to chance, thereby not attracting a wide net of qualified applicants for Front-Line Leadership in an equitable manner. Presently, there is no evidence that the current means of evaluating performance or attracting candidates is linked to the way that current Front-Line Leaders became leaders, the ways in which they became successful, or how they were effective in making the transition into leadership. Instead of looking for only other individuals with similar backgrounds, those who may be considered the most likable by the crew, or are most knowledgeable in a craft, this project aims to assist those at the refinery who identify and select future Front-Line Leaders so that they may intentionally encourage those who respond favorably to the required experiences, those who can develop the key relationships, or those who might attain the salient knowledge to apply and further prepare those individuals for these roles. This would allow these stakeholders (e.g., HR and Refinery Leadership) who are responsible for selecting the next generation of Front-Line Leaders to make these selections in a more deliberate, intentional, and equitable way.

The current process primarily revolves around the current supervisor's assessment of talent, which leads to multiple selection biases. This capstone project aims to understand more about what is required for individuals to become Front-Line Leaders so that additional candidates may emerge. Relying solely on the current process limits the candidate pool in that certain individuals who are otherwise qualified do not step forward for any number of reasons (e.g., they do not emulate their current leader or maybe from a different background) to be identified and considered for the Front-Line Leader opportunity).

This capstone project intends to use the philosophy that those essential experiences, tools, resources, and relationships that have been the most important in how current leaders have grown and developed into these roles can be used as selection criteria to assess potential in future, new leaders. Those who are exposed would also have a higher chance of success in these roles after being identified, leading to more effective individuals being selected and promoting a virtuous cycle that leaves less to chance.

Like many organizations, the refinery requires recruiting and developing leadership talent to ensure the success of their organization. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) acknowledges the importance of positions of leadership, noting that a "robust leadership pipeline" (p. 1) is a source of competitive advantage and that identifying and selecting leaders are critical elements to sustaining an organization into the future (Scott, Church, & McLellan, 2017). That same report from SHRM cites a study from Hogan, Hogan, and Kaiser (2011) that estimates that up to 70% of leaders fail within their first 18 months of appointment to a leadership position. Thusly, identifying individuals capable of assuming leadership positions is crucial to the success of an organization, especially when the stakes are so high for selecting the correct person for those roles.

Specifically, the refinery has reported low interest from operational and craft staff to step into leadership roles. After an individual is targeted for Front-Line Leadership, the refinery has also had mixed results in convincing individuals to make the transition permanent. Ensuring that Front-Line Leaders are ready to take on the roles exists primarily through on-the-job training, which requires a considerable amount of time to ensure that these individuals are prepared to take on the full-time Front-Line Leadership role. Additionally, those who decide to pursue the leadership roles are challenged to lead the same teams who were formerly their peers, many of whom are from the same community in which the leader lives or grew up. Each of these situations can bias certain reputational judgments about potential candidates. For example, someone's parent may have been a leader at the refinery for 20 years, so that person's child may naturally be seen as also being destined for leadership. On the other hand, because we don't know this candidate and they aren't from around here, they may be seen as less of a known entity and seen as having more to 'prove.' Having more defined criteria to identify and select individuals for these Front-Line Leadership roles would open opportunities to others who may not have otherwise been selected.

This study will contribute to the refinery and the greater oil and gas industry's business success by further informing leader identification and selection practices. When more effective leaders are identified and selected, organizations can expect increased organizational effectiveness and achievement of business goals. Additionally, leadership identification and selection in oil and gas firms has not been extensively researched, so this can provide additional insights to this industry.

Presently, the refinery has concerns about the current identification and selection process. Specifically, the current process, which includes an application and a behavioral rating form,

could allow for those on the committee to potentially make decisions based on any number of rating biases or to make decisions based on selection criteria that may not be directly related to what has contributed Front-Line Leader effectiveness. Additionally, the refinery wants to ensure that ‘like me’ bias is reduced by having criteria based more closely on what successful leaders have reported being most salient.

### **Literature Review**

The problem of practice seeks to improve Front-Line Leader Identification and Selection at this focal organization’s principal refinery. In the following section, I review the literature on leader identity formation and identity transition. This prior research will be helpful for better understanding how these individuals have shed their previous operational roles and formed new identities as leaders. Focusing on leadership identity formation is of particular importance, as this project seeks to explain how successful Front-Line Leaders ‘became’ the types of people who successfully assumed these roles—thereby allowing additional, wider, equitable pools of those who are capable to be identified and selected. Additionally, I review literature explaining the origins of corporate talent management practices, in addition to talent identification and selection, to inform my study.

### **Talent Management**

Ever since the Hawthorne studies at Western Electric in 1924 highlighted that the way workers are treated impacted the way they performed (Franke & Kaul, 1978), laypersons and academics alike have been fascinated and confounded by the effects of management and leadership in organizations.

Management consultants from McKinsey first coined the term “talent management” in an article expressing concern over the availability of human capital and critical staff (Chambers,

Foulon, Handfield-Jones, & Michaels, 1998). Despite the frequency of the occurrence of the term in corporate vernacular and the popularity of the topic (Collings & Mellahi, 2009), little empirical evidence exists to support its existence from a scholarly point of view (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; McDonnell, Collings, & Mellahi, 2017).

There have been many attempts to offer a definition of talent management from practitioners and scholars alike. Collings and Mellahi (2009) provide this version which best frames the challenge posed by the focal organization of this study, which is:

Activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization. (p. 304)

### **Leadership**

As mentioned above, a core function of talent management is filling pivotal roles with high potential and high-performing incumbents. Because of the competitive advantage that leaders bring to groups, as mentioned previously, one can infer that leadership within organizations is a role that must be filled with care. From traits, to behavior, to contingency theories, there are too many definitions and theories of leadership to name, and that is not the aim of this project. For the purposes of this project, the definition provided by House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, Dorfman, and Dickson (1999) will be used. House and his colleagues defined leadership as, “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (p. 13).

### **Leadership Development**

To ensure that there are incumbents to fill these roles, organizations must develop individuals to take on the skills required to lead. Just as there are many different possible definitions of leadership, there are many approaches to leadership development. For the purposes of this study, the definition provided by Lord and Hall (2005) is most appropriate. They define leadership development as “the acquisition of leadership skills by an individual, recognizing that those individual skills may at times include the capacity to elicit leadership from others or to develop effective teams” (p. 593). This definition is particularly useful, as leadership can be exhibited by those who may lack formal titles; thusly, leadership skills can be developed within the organization. They feel that traits and behaviors are not fixed but can take the form of learned skills, which can be developed by forming provisional identities based upon experience and feedback, citing the work of Ibarra (1999). Notably, Lord and Hall’s (1995) model includes implicit leadership theory, which considers how leaders might fit notions of ideal leader characteristics.

### **Talent Identification**

Collings and Mellahi (2009) propose that in a talent management system, those who are being considered for pivotal roles are first identified, then selected, to assume that role. Individuals are identified first through emergence (Fiedler, 1996; Luthans, Yodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1998). Explained simply, emergence is the act of being noticed through interactions with others. In Luthans et al.’s (1998) study, managers who spent more time planning and tending to motivating others were not as effective as those who spent their time networking and communicating with those external to their team, in a situation when success is judged by the speed in which promotions came for those individuals. In order to have the

opportunity to be effective, one must first be noticed and be provided the opportunity (Fiedler, 1996).

### **Talent Selection**

After incumbents are identified, the task of selecting incumbents for these roles follows. To do this, organizations typically look at those who exhibit high performance (HIPER) and high-potential (HIPO) (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Most organizations fall prey to the idea that prior experience or past performance predicts future performance, and thus potential, when it does not (Fiedler, 1996; Cascio & Aguinis 2008; Silzer & Church 2009). Sadly, many organizations tasked with assessing and selecting candidates do so based on bias, gut-feel, and intuition (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017; van Iddekinge et al., 2019). Evidence-based selection methods do exist; however, they are more time-consuming and risk the potential of losing candidates' interest. Schmidt and Hunter (1998) and the updated study conducted by Schmidt, Oh, and Shaffer (2016) with additional data, found that general mental ability was the most valid measure of job performance. Specifically, Schmidt, Oh, and Shaffer (2016) reported that general mental ability tests ( $R=.65$ ), job knowledge tests ( $R=.48$ ), integrity tests ( $R=.46$ ), and job tryout procedures ( $R=.44$ ) showed relatively high predictive validity when compared to job experience ( $R=.16$ ) and other more traditional means of selection. Howard (2007) addresses many of these tactics relative to leader selection.

Still, many individuals rely on implicit leader beliefs: that is, a set of characteristics that make an individual look like a leader (Fiedler 1996; Vardiman et al., 2006). Additionally, Gandz (2007) introduced the concept of "leader breeders." These are individuals who recruit high potential, coach and mentor those under their watch, and provide feedback and stretch assignments (Gandz, 2007). Additionally, Mäkelä, Björkman, and Ehrnrooth (2010) found that



homophily, the similarity between those making talent pool positions and those being chosen, was a salient factor in inclusion to a talent pool.

### **Job Role Transitions**

Those who have been identified and selected for new roles in an organization begin a liminal, transition process in regard to their professional identity changing from that of an individual contributor to a manager. Van Gennep (1960) proposes that there are three phases to rites of passage, which would also apply to career transitions: separation, liminality, and incorporation. Turner (1987) specifically explored liminality, the concept by which someone finds themselves in-between states. Specifically, Turner (1987) proposed that during times of liminality, individuals would go through certain transformative rituals in order to enter their new state. Periods of liminality, Turner (1987) considered, is a time of reflection whereby individuals consider the “values, norms, sentiments, and techniques associated with those positions” (p. 14) as well as the sources and granters of power. Ibarra (2005) notes that as work activities begin to change amidst a work transition, individuals begin to consider who they are now versus who they wish to become. Ashforth (2000) considers this transition of identity a form of “phenomenology of progress” similar to “falling in love” (p.75), with the individual forming a kinship toward the new role in which they identify, becoming excited and encouraged as they attain more skill. While also acknowledging the excitement of liminal periods, Ibarra and Obodaru (2000) note that it can also be a time of great bewilderment. Ibarra and Obodaru (2000) consider that these periods are vital to forge transformation of oneself and to create agency for how they will conduct themselves within their new role. Additionally, Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) consider the act of identicide, whereby the individual completely disconnects with the parts of the old identity that is no longer serviceable.

### **Leader Identity Development**

Individuals becoming leaders will construct their leader identity at various paces through social interactions. Maurer and London (2015) posit that identity shift from individual contributor to leader can happen at different speeds (e.g., incremental or radical) and that understanding this is critical for those grooming individuals identified to become leaders. Time must be granted for the old identity to fade and the new one to take form (Maurer & London, 2015). Indeed, those who entered leadership roles with a strong perceived leader identity quickly backtracked, finding that leader identity to be challenging work, suggesting that leadership identities are formed in a curvilinear manner (Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017). DeRue and Ashford (2010) considered how the leader identity construction process takes place and that leader identities form through social and collective processes of claiming and granting.

The examination of existing literature informed the frameworks used to examine the problem of practice of identifying and selecting Front-Line Leaders for the refinery. To select and identify individuals capable of becoming Front-Line Leaders, understanding commonalities and salient experiences of how these individuals became leaders is essential to expand the opportunity to additional, potential candidates. Additionally, the literature suggests that previous performance is not a reliable predictor of success in a future role. This is somewhat counterintuitive to current thinking relative to Front-Line Leader selection, along with other leadership biases. Instead, the literature suggests that other criteria, such as cognitive ability and job try-outs, are more reliable predictors of future success in roles, and therefore provide better criteria to inform selection. Finally, identifying how successful leaders formed their identities by shedding previous identities and utilizing tools and relationships will be critical to ensuring the success of those identified and selected.

### Framework

I will use three theoretical frameworks will be used to guide this study. First, the work of Snook, Ibarra, and Ramo's (2010) *Identity based leader development* will provide the perspective of the individual's transition into becoming a Front-Line Leader. Snook et al. (2010) posit that leadership development is identity work. To define identity, Snook et al. (2010) cite Gecas (1982) and Gergen (1971) in stating that identity "refers to the various meanings attached to oneself and by others" (p. 659). Snook et al. (2010) go on to cite Ashforth (2001), Gecas (1982), and Gergen (1971) in noting that, "these meanings are based on the social roles and group memberships a person holds (social identities) as well as the personal and character traits they display and that others attribute to them" (p. 659). Concerning the identification and selection of Front-Line Leaders, Snook et al. (2010) cite Cooley (1902) and Goffman (1959) to note that identities take form through a claiming and granting process. Snook et al.'s (2010) model seeks to explain "(1) what changes? (2) how does it change? And (3) what conditions make a difference?" (p. 658) to explain leader development and thusly, how one becomes a leader. Snook et al. (2010) note that identity development, as a process, includes "separation from established identities, transitions, and integrations of new self-conceptions" (p. 665).

The second theoretical framework that this study will use is the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980). Vygotsky (1980) theorizes that each person has two zones of development: one zone of development where people can solve problems and learn new concepts on their own and a second zone where it is possible for an individual to attain with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other or technology and tools. For Front-Line Leaders to assume this new identity, it will be critical to know what social relationships and what technology and tools are needed to transition into leadership successfully.

Finally, the work of McCall (2010), who provides a framework of leverage points of leadership experience, will help determine experiences that were salient in the formation of Front-Line Leadership identity. McCall (2010) cites the work of McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) in providing a table of potential powerful development experiences, which include projects, assignments, hardships, and other events. The leverage points identified by McCall (2010) include “identifying development experiences” (p. 687), “identification of potential” (p. 688), “the right experience at the right time” (p. 692), “increasing the odds that learning will occur” (p. 695), and “a career-long perspective and a focus on transitions” (p. 700). Most important to note is McCall’s explanation that “this approach acknowledges that effective leaders have different personalities and different styles and behave in different ways” (p. 682).



### Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions regarding Front-Line Leadership Identification and Selection at this focal organization’s principal refinery. Knowing that Front-Line Leaders are critical to daily refinery functions, the refinery must take great care to identify and select future Front-Line Leaders. By understanding how individuals who have been successful in these roles have forged their path to become Front-Line Leaders, a wider net can be cast by the refinery so that additional candidates can be considered. This will ensure that the organization provides similar experiences, tools, and resources as those possessed by people

who were successful in making the transition into Front-Line Leadership, thereby having a larger, more equitable pool of candidates to choose from for these Front-Line Leadership roles. By identifying the salient experiences, tools, and resources responsible for forming the identity of successful leaders, the refinery will leave less up to chance when identifying future candidates capable of assuming this new leader identity.

Research Question	Framework Informed By	Research Method
1. How does the identification and selection of Front-Line Leaders take place at the refinery?	<i>Existing phenomena</i>	Content Analysis  Qualitative Analysis of Semi-Structured Case Interviews of HR Business Partners
2. To what extent does the Front-Line Leader identification and selection process impact the identity transition process?	Snook, Ibarra, and Ramo (2010)	Qualitative Analysis of Semi-Structured Case Interviews of Front-Line Leaders  Qualitative Analysis of Semi-Structured Case Interviews of Front-Line Leaders
3. What were the salient experiences, relationships, and tools that contributed to the formation of a Front-Line Leader identity?	Vygotsky (1980) McCall (2010)	Qualitative Analysis of Semi-Structured Case Interviews of Front-Line Leaders
4. At what point in the identity transition process did the individuals identify as a Front-Line Leader?	Snook, Ibarra, and Ramo (2010)	Qualitative Analysis of Semi-Structured Case Interviews of Front-Line Leaders

### Project Design

In the following section, I will describe how I collected and analyzed data from various sources to answer my research questions. I used a qualitative, collective case study approach to understand how a culture-sharing group operates by using multiple sources of data (e.g., multiple interviews and content analysis) (Creswell, 2007). By using a qualitative, collective case research design, multiple individuals were selected to be interviewed, along with the analysis of

existing company documents, to develop an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of those in the current system (Creswell, 2007).

### **Data Collection**

To answer the first question about current processes for Front-Line Leader selection, I collected data through a qualitative case-study method using semi-structured interviews of company HR and Talent professionals and analyzing existing current process and system documentation (Creswell, 2007). This approach assisted in identifying what the refinery HR and Talent staff have observed the selection committee consider in the identification and selection of Front-Line Leaders at the refinery and the actual artifacts used by those who identify and select Front-Line Leaders when making employment decisions. The HR Operations and Learning team in Houston coordinated the selection of these participants with refinery leadership, selecting those they felt were most knowledgeable on the current process. These interviews were approximately 90 minutes in length and were conducted over a web-based video conference system (e.g., Zoom).

To conduct the content analysis, members of the HR Operations and Learning team submitted two documents. The first document analyzed was the Front-Line Leadership Applicant Evaluation form. This document is used by the current supervisor of the applicant, HR staff, and refinery leadership to evaluate the current performance and readiness of the applicant. The second document analyzed was the Declaration of Interest form. This document is used for an individual to notify the current Front-Line Leader selection committee that the individual is interested (or no longer interested) in being considered part of the Front-Line Leader program. In total, these two documents represented five standard letter-size pages. Performing a content analysis of documents used in the field has us consider what really happens within an

organization, as these artifacts codify the culture and other dynamics of the organization (Saldaña, 2014).

For research questions 2 through 4, I collected data using semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007) of present Front-Line Leaders who have been in role for longer than 18 months. Creswell (2007) acknowledges that a set, specific number of cases does not exist but recommends four to five case interviews. The refinery HR and Refinery executives selected six Front-Line Leaders, considered high performing Front-Line Leaders, who have been in the role for more than 18 months. All six leaders who were identified were interviewed (100% participation rate). The organization selected Front-Line Leaders who would meet what Creswell (2007) characterizes as “purposeful maximal sampling” to represent an array of available cases, as determined by the organization (e.g., gender, race, tenure). These interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and were conducted over a web-based video conference system (e.g., Zoom), as social distancing requirements due to COVID-19 would not allow for in-person, on-site interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

The audio from the video conferences was transcribed in a cloud-based transcription service (e.g., Otter.ai) and was analyzed using qualitative data methods in Dedoose and Microsoft Excel. Coding was done in several phases. First, a priori coding based on the theoretical frameworks was performed by reading each interview transcript in Dedoose. A priori coding establishes the codes that align to the theoretical framework and research questions for this project (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2014). A priori coding allows for an initial set of codes to provide an initial means of analyzing the data collected (Miles and Huberman, 1994). For example, the first code, *Current Org Practice: Identification & Selection*, aligned with

research question 1, which sought to understand the organizations' current identification and selection processes. The second code, Identity Transition, aligned with the theoretical framework of the study and research question 2, which sought to understand leader identity transition; specifically, what changes and how a new leader's identity changes when successfully taking on the Front-Line Leadership role (Snook, Ibarra, and Ramo, 2010). A code was designated for Experiences to begin to identify the salient moments for Front-Line Leaders that were impactful to learn, develop, and grow into their new role, which aligns with the portion of the theoretical framework supplied by McCall (2010), who posits that leaders develop through various lived developmental experiences. Finally, codes were assigned for the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980) to begin to identify the "who" of the Front-Line Leadership journey—the access to knowledgeable others that were critical to assuming this new role, and also the "what" to understand which tools were necessary (or missing) to learn this new role.

Codes from the a priori phase can be found in Table 1: *A priori codes*. The 279 excerpts from the a priori coding were exported to Microsoft Excel for open coding, which is best when considering interview transcripts that are open to interpretation (Bailey, 2007; Saldaña, 2014). I analyzed these excerpts, selecting those that were most salient relative to becoming a Front-Line Leader. This yielded 71 codes, as described in Appendix C: *Open Codes*. Finally, focused coding (Bailey, 2007) was completed in Microsoft Excel to group the codes into manageable categories and themes. Using focused coding allowed for collapsing similar codes into categories aligned to the larger, significant themes, moving from literal codes to more conceptual ones (Bailey, 2007). These categories and themes can be found in Table 2 below. Documents from the refinery were collected to understand the current identification and selection criteria and processes. When considering analyzing documents and artifacts, Saldaña (2014) emphasizes that, "the products



we create embody who we are” (p. 61), which makes the content analysis of current Front-Line Leader selection documents necessary to understand the current Front-Line Leader identification and selection process. In discussing materials analysis, Saldaña (2014) posits that “coding is not important, but interpreting and analytic memo writing are critical” (p. 62). To operationalize Saldaña’s (2014) guidance, each document submitted by the refinery was converted into a PDF and was loaded into the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. As I reviewed each document, I wrote analytic memos in the Dedoose platform, following the advice of Saldaña (2014), citing Clarke (2005), who states that “memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data” (p. 202). In total, 16 analytic memos were produced. Those memos were then coded using open coding, as described previously. The codes and the themes generated may be found in Table 3, Content Analysis.

**Table 1.** *Phase 1: A priori Codes*

1 Current Org Practice: Identification & Selection
2 Identity Transition
2 Experiences
3 Zone of Proximal Development & Knowledgeable Others
3.1 Tools
3.2 Knowledgeable Others

**Table 2. Themes & Categories**

<b>IDENTITY TRANSITION THEMES</b>	<b>Snook, Ibarra, and Ramo (2010)</b>
<b><u>THEME 1: Feeling what leaders feel</u></b>	Entrusted & Responsible Forward progress in career and life Concerns around job security, Union membership Relating with employees while representing management
<b><u>THEME 2: Doing what leaders do</u></b>	Communicating with many audiences Gaining and earning respect Working with and through others Developing Awareness Projecting an image that can be respected
<b>ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT THEMES</b>	<b>Vygotsky (1980)</b>
<b><u>THEME 3: Knowledgeable Others</u></b>	Influential leaders Previous Supervisors FLL peers SMEs (technical, business, or historical context) Facilitators Support functions Managers with admirable qualities
<b><u>THEME 4: Tools (existing or needed)</u></b>	More step-up opportunities for those being considered Explaining how to move up in the organization  Off-site learning Previously offered Front-Line Leader classes Quick Reference Guides for commonly used FLL systems and programs Scenarios and role-play Communication toolkits (difficult conversations, presentations, etc.) Brainstorming/idea generation sessions Transition Guides (formal time period, discussion guides)
<b>LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES THEMES</b>	<b>McCall (2010)</b>
<b><u>Theme 5: Experiences</u></b>	Developing technical knowledge in a prior role Scenario-based development Attending off-site training Peer discussion groups Job try-out Decision points (abnormal/stressful situations, discussing becoming a leader)

**Table 3. Content Analysis Themes**

<b><u>Ambiguity in Leadership Attributes and Behaviors</u></b>	
	Leadership attributes
	Safety
	Safety culture
<b><u>Caught in limbo</u></b>	
	Transition ambiguity
	Identity transition
	Emergency response
	Decision to become
<b><u>Current Supervisor’s Role</u></b>	
	Possible roles
	Potential for selection
<b><u>Training Needs &amp; Signaling</u></b>	
	Training as Signal
	Content for experiential learning
	Leadership tools needed
	Link development to post-identification

**Figure 1**

*Analytic Memo Analysis*

Caught in the middle	Content for experiential learning	Decision to Become	Emergency Response	Identity Transition	Leadership Attributes	Leadership Tools Needed	Link Development to Post-identification	Possible Roles	Potential for Selection	Safety	Safety Culture	Training as Signal	Transition Ambiguity	Total
1	1	1	1	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	20

## Findings

In this section, I outline the primary findings that emerged in response to the study questions. Each finding number is aligned to the research question number.

### IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF FRONT-LINE LEADERS

#### **Finding 1: The candidate's current supervisor plays a pivotal role in the identification and selection of Front-Line Leaders**

Beyond serving as a role model of leader behaviors, the candidate's current supervisor serves as a *de facto talent sourcer* by encouraging existing field staff to apply, thereby becoming the de facto selector of who gets into the Front-Line Leader program. Talent *sourcers* are commonplace positions in industry HR and Talent functions. Their primary role is to find suitable candidates for roles and get them to interview for positions. Many times, these *sourcers* recruit passive candidates who are not actively applying elsewhere but are otherwise qualified for the role. Each current Front-Line Leader of the six interviewed mentioned that their previous supervisor was the individual who initially suggested that they apply to the Front-Leader program. Front-Line Leaders frequently shared in the interviews how their previous supervisor mentioned Front-Line Leadership roles to them multiple times. For example, one participant said, *"I've been fortunate that I've had my previous supervisor sit down and talk to me and even double backed and ask me again, like, 'Hey, you know, I think you'd be a good fit for this.'"*

From the interviews with the refinery HR staff and through the Front-Line Leader form, the current supervisor also communicates to the selection committee any existing performance gaps and whether the candidate should be selected for Front-Line Leadership. Their opinion carries a lot of weight in whether or not a candidate will ultimately be chosen. HR staff members explained that the six-month review process includes sending a form, created by HR's learning

department, to supervisors to evaluate the potential Front-Line Leaders. The information is then reviewed with the supervisor's manager, the production manager, the HR manager, and another HR representative. A member of the HR staff described the critical role of the supervisor in this process: *“The supervisor basically comes and walks us through the evaluation form that we use, and it's like a review committee on if we think they're ready to get promoted or not.”*

While there is a formal process and technically, any employee can apply for Front-Line Leadership; ultimately, the current supervisor is the most notable voice in determining whether Front-Line Leader candidates possess the desirable attributes that lead to Front-Line Leadership. The current Front-Line Leader attributes are linked to what themes are noted from the content analysis of the Front-Line Leader evaluation form in the below table.

<b>Current Front-Line Leadership Attributes from Company Form</b>	<b>Equivalent theme from Qualitative Data Analysis</b>
Collaboration	Communicating with many audiences Working with and through others
Authority	Gaining and earning respect Projecting an image that can be respected
Growth	Developmental awareness

## **NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF STEPPING INTO FRONT-LINE LEADERSHIP**

### **ROLES**

#### **Finding 2: Unfavorable perceptions around decreased take-home pay and job security disinterest potential candidates**

Surprisingly, five of the six current Front-Line Leaders interviewed discussed that an unfavorable implication of becoming a Front-Line Leader was the loss of earning potential and

loss of job security by joining the Front-Line Leader ranks outside of the temporary, step-up positions. While no specific question was asked regarding this being a factor to identification or selection, it was mentioned in concert with who is identified and selected for the Front-Line Leader roles. A perceived reduction in pay while attaining leadership duties can be a barrier to identifying, selecting, and ultimately accepting a Front-Line Leader role. Upon further review of the interview transcripts with refinery HR staff involved in the Front-Line Leader program, one HR staff member discussed this perceived reduction in pay, explaining that those who leave the union and go into the Front-Line Leadership ranks permanently lose their ability to earn overtime. The staff member said,

*“I think the driver behind that is the compensation. So there’s a handful of guys that I’m for sure aware of, that do a really good job. And they would make outstanding supervisors. And they do like the job, and they’ll do it, but they’re not willing to take a pay cut to permanently move into one of those roles. So from a business perspective, that’s hard to manage a little bit, so we need people to fill those roles, and sometimes just as bad as anything else.”*

As one existing Front-Line Leader explained,

*“So, I’m not griping, but it really falls back on the on the money, I can make a lot more money as an hourly employee. I really could. And that the hourly employees are making more money than their supervisors are. You know, I could make a lot more money being an operator. But 10 years ago, it wasn’t that way. It was pretty lopsided, you know, where you had the ability to make some really good bonuses, performance ratings, and your raises, and stuff like that. But it’s not that way anymore. Yeah. It’s pretty much evened out.”*

This is compounded by the fact that when an individual leaves the union, they lose their job security. Management cuts or decisions could lead to a Front-Line Leader being terminated for any number of reasons. In contrast, labor union membership leads to job security, and cuts are made based on seniority and other factors represented by the Union rules. One Front-Line Leader talked about the trade-offs between getting out of the union and becoming a salaried employee:

*“So no longer will they have seniority, you know, their job security won’t be seniority-based; it will be performance-based. So, that’s a big factor in this environment. Because, like I said, you’re taking hourly workers out of the Union seniority pool, and you’re putting them into a salary position... So there’s no job security necessarily there. So that’s a big leap of faith.”*

Putting it all together, the perception is that the company is asking the individual to give up earning potential (e.g., overtime pay) to go into a role with leadership responsibilities. In this situation, they are still learning whether they want to perform that role, all while losing protection from being terminated if the individual is a poor fit for the role or if the refinery were to cut back due to an economic downturn.

## TRANSITION TOOLS LACKING

### **Finding 3: Existing tools to transition identity are mostly informal and are left up to the candidate to navigate**

A series of questions in the semi-structured interviews with Front-Line Leaders revolved around the experiences, relationships, and tools required for an individual to become a Front-Line Leader. As one Front-Line Leader noted:

*“...getting information and, and that kind of thing, knowing who to contact, just needs to be made easier. You know, everybody supports each other, but like sometimes, just if who to go to for what could be a little bit easier... even for others that didn’t get to work as long as I did before getting the job. They didn’t get the same chance. I worked the job for 16 months, 17 months, before I was promoted”*

Of note, existing Front-Line Leaders do not feel that many of these tools presently exist, and those that do are hard to find or lack in the frequency of offering. As one Front-Line Leader shared:

*“So it would be good just to have like a type of a quick notes, quick reference guide, on things that pull the supervisors and PTLs, and the items that may be reoccurring, that we experienced as a site commonly, maybe have a little quick reference guide for stuff like that as a new supervisor to know how to deal with and how to handle those things. Or just rehash and stuff like that, especially for a new person, a Front-Line Leadership role, that’s all things that they’ll be faced with immediately even stepping into the role temporarily that will be good for a transition to add, document, and review.”*

The tools, relationships, and experiences required to transition into the Front-Line Leader identity have been left primarily up to chance and trial and error from what has been provided above. Each of the current Front-Line Leaders noted the difficulty they experienced in just finding basic information and how even the inclusion of simple tools would be helpful in these transition periods, such as directories or reference guides on common issues new Front-Line leaders face. A listing of what these tools could include, based upon coding and thematic analysis of the Front-Line Leader interviews, can be found in *Table 2, Theme 4*.



## UNCLEAR IDENTITY TRANSITION

### **Finding 4: Formal identity transition points do not presently exist for Front-Line**

#### **Leaders**

Through the semi-structured interviews of Front-Line Leaders, sets of questions were designed to answer the research question, “At what point in the identity transition process did the individuals identify as a Front-Line Leader?” Current Front-Line Leaders who were interviewed for this project indicated an overall lack of a transition period and that many individuals felt that they are left to ‘figure it out on their own.’ As one Front-Line Leader said,

*“In some type of maybe formal transition time, you should have, a week with this person to transition, or two weeks, and these are the things that you guys should talk about, you know, in meeting with HR, or whoever it may be. We don’t do a good job at that here from the different roles I’ve been in.”*

Another Front-Line Leader shared,

*“...we have no transition documents, you pretty much get just in. I mean, you get into it, and you figure it out, you may have training with somebody for a week or two. But, you know, every job I’ve went into, like, even this role, the guy retired and me and him transitioned for like, a week.”*

This theme was present in each of the six interviews conducted for this project. Front-Line Leader interview subjects noted the variation of transition periods to learn their new role and have any kind of knowledge transfer from the incumbent. The Front-Line Leaders interviewed formed informal informational networks to fill knowledge gaps with technical SMEs, previous peers, their previous supervisor, or other supervisors (see Table 2).

Additionally, no 'rite of passage' (Van Gennep, 1960) currently exists to note the identity transition of the person who is becoming a Front-Line Leader. Interviewees noted that in other areas of leadership or engineering, an e-mail or other formal announcement is made. In many cases, the new leader shows up to the refinery a peer yesterday, today your boss. The most formal mechanism may be that the individual is no longer on the 'worker' side of the schedule but is there on-site that shift, so a process of deduction likely takes place by their former peers. As one Front-Line Leader said, *"It's basically just word of mouth."* And another Front-Line Leader mentioned,

*"Even with me with recently moving into the production supervisor role, I still have people asking me questions pertaining to my previous job. And he's like, 'Oh, I didn't even know that you moved up' So that's something I feel like we can definitely do better communicating those moves."*

The absence of these 'rites of passage' and other signaling mechanisms make it difficult to shed the other, non-leader identity. This is especially salient when many of these individuals were in temporary or step-up roles for an extended period of time and had to navigate moving back and forth in two roles and two identities. Rites of passage could include something small like a plaque or sticker or something more significant, like recognition at an all-hands meeting or other gatherings of the refinery staff by leadership.

While the signaling mechanisms of training and step-up opportunities may indicate your interest to former peers, when I asked specifically about how having a 'ceremony' or communication of some type would help, they mentioned that it might, but quickly shifted the conversation toward the need for practical tools and resources and the need for better training and transition support. One participant shared, *"I wish they'd bring back that outside training."*

And yet another mentioned that [the outside classes]... “*And they were good. They were really good. And there’s a lot there was a lot of them. And that’s all out the window now. We don’t do none of them.*”

### Recommendations

Through the findings above, the following recommendations are suggested to implement for this organization’s Front-Line Leader Identification and Selection process.

#### **Recommendation 1: Additional identification and selection sources beyond the current supervisor are needed to create a wider, more diverse candidate pool.**

My analysis finds that *the candidate’s current supervisor plays a pivotal role in identifying and selecting Front-Line Leaders*. The literature also suggests that those who are promoted are due to emergence, effectiveness, and homophily (Fiedler, 1996; Luthans, Yodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1998; Mäkelä, et al., 2010). In other words, it could be possible, even with the best of intentions, for a candidate’s current supervisor to not notice them due to any number of reasons (e.g., conflicting personal style, homophily, implicit bias). In these instances, becoming a Front-Line Leader will not be suggested to those employees, which is why many considered the Front-Line Leader role in the first place. Intuitively, this limits the pool from which the organization may select. This could lead to other candidates never being seriously considered, as they were never asked, and could have desired elements of Front-Line Leader effectiveness, as identified in company documents, or through what current supervisors anecdotally find to be important.

Other individuals could be involved in nominating individuals (See Table 2, Theme 3). The organization could, for example, have informational fairs and other outreach mechanisms, generally mapped through change management and organizational communication approaches,

that could be employed to increase the number and diversity of potential candidates. While diversity was only mentioned by one interviewee, that was the only interviewee who disclosed their standing in a marginalized group through the course of discussion (e.g., BIPOC, non-heteronormative woman). Additionally, supervisors of non-typical backgrounds (e.g., non-white, heteronormative males) could be specifically asked for Front-Line Leader nominations.

**Recommendation 2: The refinery needs to address the real or perceived loss of earnings potential and job security if an individual becomes a Front-Line Leader.**

Most (5 of the 6 interviewed) of Front-Line Leaders who were interviewed perceive that moving into a Front-Line Leadership role would expose them to a loss of earning potential and loss of job security. When the organization wishes to find qualified, capable leaders, as discussed in the problem statement, this dramatically reduces the organization's pool of those who will be interested. It is considered a matter of general practice in the HR field that taking on additional roles and responsibilities does not typically include a reduction in pay; it usually includes increased pay. While pay may take on different forms (e.g., bonuses, performance incentives), reducing the 'take home' pay of those selected would likely serve as a de-motivator for those who wish to become Front-Line Leaders.

Additionally, the field of personnel economics introduces the idea behind paying a risk premium to individuals who are taking on a risk and that an increase in efforts generally yields an expectation of an increase in pay (Lazear & Gibbs, 2015). In this case, the lack of future job security would not support those weighing the pros and cons of a decision to become a Front-Line Leader. Potential exceptions to this could include if the individual making this decision feels that they have a leader 'calling' as mentioned by one research participant, or as discussed by another, the desire to perform less physically demanding work due to physical well-being or

health issues. Once again, this dramatically reduces the pool of applicants to be identified and selected, as this perception is engrained into the refinery's rhetoric of Front-Line Leader transition.

**Recommendation 3: More formalized and explicit transition, support, and development structures are needed to bridge the gap between selection and placement in roles.**

I found that *training and step-up opportunities are critical identity transition points* and that *existing tools to transition identity are mostly informal and are left up to the candidate to navigate*. Much of the current selection process revolves around the opinion of the current supervisor and assessment of prior performance, which research shows to be poor predictors of future success and assessment of potential (Schmidt, Oh, and Shaffer, 2016). Those wishing to become Front-Line Leaders also are not provided with structured access to the tools and access to knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1980) to navigate the emotionally turbulent, liminal experiences of 'becoming' a new identity (Snook, Ibarra, and Ramo, 2010). Providing such tools and exposing Front-Line Leader candidates to development experiences as part of the 'try-out' period would allow the refinery to assess candidates based on the Front-Line Leader candidate's ability to leverage expert feedback, their ability to learn from experience, and utilize tools and resources as a means to assess future potential and learning ability.

As previously cited research suggests, up to 70% leaders fail in their new role, being demoted, fired, or replaced in 18 months (Hogan, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2011). This research, along with the findings discussed, supports creating a supportive developmental process through the liminal periods new leaders would face, which should include an empathetic approach and support system based on what a new leader goes through in the period of transition to Front-Line Leadership. Specific tactics might include values discovery exercises, leadership assessment to

develop self-awareness (e.g., cognitive ability tests, personality assessment), career development programs, coaching, and other tactics that follow the leadership identity and leadership development literature.

**Recommendation 4: Transition points should be formalized, and transition tools should be codified.**

Finding 4 of my study, *Formal identity transition points do not presently exist for Front-Line Leaders*, in addition to the research cited in periods of liminality and identity transformation, suggest that rites of passage form a critical point in assuming a new identity. Simple tactics could include a simple ceremony upon completion of the Front-Line Leader selection program, a ‘graduation’ or certificate of completion, or the completion of a Front-Line Leader ‘certification.’ Additionally, refinery leadership could send formalized memoranda announcing the individual’s promotion to Front-Line Leadership and a formal transition period where knowledge transfer takes place could also be conducted with the incumbent.

Many research participants considered the formalized, off-site training program (e.g., ‘the sailboat class’), along with being included in the scenario-based leadership development discussion groups, all as key transition points and events that were important in the process of becoming a leader. While sailing may not have explicit leadership development takeaways and may have served as an easy budget cut during a global pandemic that had severe financial ramifications for this organization (Client employee, personal communication, January 3, 2020), it may have served as an important transition milestone for those selected to become Front-Line Leaders. Additional research is needed to determine if that assumption is valid. Refinery Learning & Development staff could conduct a learning needs analysis could also be conducted

to determine if there is or could be experiential learning value woven into the learning experience.

Additionally, there is significant variation in formal knowledge transfer periods due to business need and any number of other factors. The refinery would benefit by standardizing knowledge transfer and job shadowing durations, where possible, for those transitioning into Front-Line Leadership roles. Additionally, formally codifying knowledge transfer tools, as opposed to anecdotal ‘day in the life’ observations that may presently occur, would ensure that Front-Line Leaders experience all that is required before transitioning into their roles. This would increase the likelihood of a new supervisor learning what is required of them in the new role, in addition to starting to make the relationships with those ‘knowledgeable others,’ which will be critical to their success. Such a list could also be used as a realistic job preview mechanism for those who are tentative about becoming or who are actively considering Front-Line Leaders' roles at the organization.

### **Discussion**

Sabine Refining understands that identifying and selecting Front-Line Leaders is vital to ensuring the refinery's safe, effective, and efficient operations. Current identification and selection processes did not reflect how individuals became leaders and did not allow for an equitable talent pool of qualified candidates. This capstone project uses a conceptual framework to explain how identity transitions, and the use of tools, relationships, and experiences help individuals become leaders, aims to provide insights into Sabine Refining’s Front-Line Leader identification and selection process. To investigate this phenomenon, the use of qualitative research methods, which included semi-structured interviews of current Front-Line Leaders and HR staff, and content analysis of existing Front-Line Leader selection documents, led to four

findings. The first finding was that the candidate's current supervisor serves as a de facto talent *sourcer* and screener in the organization's current identification and selection of Front-Line Leaders, which introduces potential unintentional bias to the identification and selection process.

Additionally, this project found that there is a current perception of the field staff around earning decreased take-home pay and losing job security when taking on a Front-Line Leader role, which could disinterest potential candidates in pursuing Front-Line Leadership. Finally, the lack of available tools to assist in a candidate's transition into a new leader identity, in addition to the lack of rites of passage that would help new leaders transition into their new identity, do not presently exist for Front-Line Leaders. I have outlined recommendations that could assist the refinery, or other organizations in similar situations, to improve the Front-Line Leader identification and selection process. Addressing this capstone project's findings will help the refinery improve and support their Front-Line Leader identification and selection processes for incumbents and future candidates.



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## APPENDIX A:

## HR &amp; TALENT PROFESSIONAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Preamble:

- Thank the participant for participating
- Describe the study
- Display the informed consent document
- Do you consent to being recorded? [Start the recording]

- Tell me about your role.
  - How long have you been at the refinery?
  - What is your involvement in Front-Line Leader identification and selection?
- How are Front-Line Leaders identified?
  - Who is doing the identification?
  - What characteristics are they looking for?
  - What experiences are they looking for?
  - Are Front-Line Leaders identified only from the existing employee pool?
- How are Front-Line Leaders recruited?
  - Is recruiting done internally or externally for Front-Line Leaders
  - Who does the recruiting?
  - Are Front-Line Leaders recruited only from the existing employee pool?
- How are Front-Line Leaders selected?
  - Describe the process by which they are selected? For example, is this a meeting, are talent pools used, are there any assessments involved?
  - Who participates in the selection of Front-Line Leaders?
  - What are the typical demographics of individuals selected as Front-Line Leaders?
- How is HR involved?
  - How is HR (along with Talent) consulted during the selection process?
  - Is the experience and opinions of HR respected and relied upon as the selection is made?
- What happens after someone becomes a Front-Line Leader?
  - Are there specific rituals, processes, or ceremonies that take place?
  - Could you describe any training that takes places following their selection?
  - How are the new leaders notified?
  - How are they assigned a team?

- From your perspective having observed Front-Line Leaders at the refinery, what experiences should individuals have prior to becoming a Front-Line Leader?
  - What should they be exposed to prior to becoming a Front-Line Leader?
    - For example, did they have flex, step up, or interim opportunities? Did they have specific training? Were they assigned mentors?
  - How would you consider someone qualified to become a Front-Line Leader?
  - How would you ensure someone is ready to become a Front-Line Leader?
  - How do you feel the organization knows someone is qualified to step into the Front-Line Leader role?
  
- How are individuals developed **after being identified** (but before being selected) as a Front-Line Leader?
  - How might someone know they are being groomed for a Front-Line Leader position?
  - How would someone be “noticed” that they would be a good fit for this role?
  
- How are Front-Line Leaders developed after they are **selected**?
  - What tools are used (e.g., interviews, training)?
  - What relationships are important?
  - Are there certain individuals that serve as coaches or mentors to emerging Front-Line Leaders? If so, is this a formal process? If so, would you explain the function they serve and how they help?
  
- How would someone stay in the Front-Line Leader position?
  - Is Front-Line Leadership a “terminal” position? That is, do individuals generally stay in these roles for a long period or are they promoted to other roles when successful?
  - How would success as a Front-Line Leader be measured?
  - What does “good” look like for these roles?
  - How would you know if someone is doing a good job as a Front-Line Leader?
  
- Are development or experience expectations consistent across candidates?
  - Do you feel that the expectations for candidates for these roles is similar? If so, what are they?
  - Are there certain characteristics that would “fast-track” someone for one of these positions?
  - Are expectations regarding experience (e.g., tenure, exposure) generally consistent or does this vary by candidate or situation?
  
- Is there anything else I should know about how Front-Line Leaders are identified and selected position at the refinery?

## APPENDIX B:

## FRONT LINE LEADER SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Preamble:

- Thank the participant for participating
- Describe the study
- Display the informed consent document
- Do you consent to being recorded? [Start the recording]

## Demographic and General Information Questions

- How long have you been a Front-Line Leader at this organization?
- Were you ever in a position of management or leadership previously?
- Tell me about what you did before.

## Meaning &amp; Identity

- How do people know you are a leader?
- What do you think it means to other people (peers, coworkers, friends) to be a Front-Line Leader?
- What would you hope people say about the way that you lead them?
- Is there a role model leader that you would want to be like? If so, what did they do? How are you like them?

## Learning Experience

- What did you have to learn to become a Front-Line Leader? How did you learn it?
- What was the most useful experience that helped you become a Front-Line Leader?

## Values &amp; Identity

- What is the biggest change you noticed from your previous role to becoming a Front-Line Leader? Who are you now compared to when you started?
- As a Front-Line Leader, do you think the same things are important as they were in your previous role? What were those things?
- What is your purpose as a leader in this organization?

## Zone of Proximal Development &amp; Access to Knowledgeable Others

- What tools were useful for you to make the transition into a leadership role?
- What would make doing this Front-Line Leadership role easier?
- What was the hardest part about taking on the Front-Line Leader role?
- Were there certain people who helped you become a leader? Who were they, what did they do?

## Reflecting / Looking back

- If you could do it all over again, would you become a leader?

- If you were to give advice to your former, non-Front Line Leader self to prepare for this role, what would it be?



APPENDIX C:  
OPEN CODES

<b>RQ2&amp;4: Identity Transitions</b>	<b>RQ3: Experiences</b>	<b>RQ3: Zone of Proximal Development</b>
Being thankful	Importance of Developing Technical Knowledge	<b>(Tools &amp; Access to Knowledgeable Others)</b>
Communicating Expectations	Navigating Relationships	Affinity Groups
Communicating with various audiences	Importance of Training	Business SMEs
Dealing with changes	Importance of Peer Groups	Compensation Concerns
Dealing with employees' views	Scenario-based Development	Current Leaders (e.g. BTL)
Delegating Work	Importance of Successful Performance of Prior Role	Employees who have decided against becoming supervisors
Developed awareness of leadership image: Actions that are consistent with values	Learning to Lead Peers	Exposure to other team leaders throughout the company
Developed awareness of leadership image: Leading by example/ forming consistency	Stretch role	Exposure to other teams and leaders throughout the company
Developed awareness of leadership image: Taking ownership	Need for Panel and Structured Interviews	Exposure to support functions (e.g., HR, Engineers)
Developing awareness of others' styles	Difficulty of attracting good leader candidates	Facilitators
Feeling accountable	Try out the job	Learning from other team leaders in the company
Feeling that moving into leadership was a positive movement	Deciding to become a leader or go back to individual contributor	Long tenured individuals with historical knowledge
Feeling that you are moving forward with your life and career	Discussing becoming a leader	Managers with admirable qualities: Dependability
Gaining respect of hourly staff by respecting current work processes	Abnormal / Stressful Situations	Managers with admirable qualities: Extroversion
Helping people grow and becoming the best they can be	Discovering Fit of Leader Role	Managers with admirable qualities: Fairness
Improved Leader Selection Processes	Learning to Develop Others	Managers with admirable qualities: Handles their responsibilities
Lack of time transitioning roles		Managers with admirable qualities: Listening to Concerns
Leading by example: Putting forth the effort		Managers with admirable qualities: People who really care
Losing job security by becoming a Front Line Leader		Managers with admirable qualities: Providing Direction
Maintaining confidentiality: things you can't tell hourly employees		Managers with admirable qualities: Respect for people
Needing to keep your skillset current		More step-up opportunities for those being considered
Negative image of the refinery		Move to "Saying no the first time"
Pay consequences of becoming a Front-Line Leader		Moving to "Union/risks"
Realizing you are responsible for the work and safety		Opportunity to bounce ideas
Realizing you have to keep your cool		Other leaders as support system
Realizing you want to become a leader		Previous Supervisors
Relating with employees		Sharing the burden of pressure
What followers say about your leadership: I enjoyed working with you		Supervisor Peers
What followers say about your leadership: I learned something from you		Technical SMEs
What followers say about your leadership: They really care		Tool: Crucial Conversations course
Working effectively with others		Tool: Dealing with Union members
		Tool: Developing Employees
		Tool: Explaining how to move up in the organization
		Tool: Formal Transition Time
		Tool: Knowing who to contact for what
		Tool: Offsite Learning
		Tool: Optional, online leadership resources
		Tool: Previous Front-Line Leader Classes
		Tool: Quick Reference Guides for commonly used FLL systems and programs
		Tool: Solicit interest in FLL roles
		Tool: Transition/ discussion guides with key players at the refinery
		Tool: Website with acronyms
		Tool: Working as a Team
		Tool: 1:1 Meetings
		Tool: Computer savvy
		Tool: Development Plans
		Tool: Difficult Conversations
		Tool: Evaluating Employees
		Tool: In-Person classes
		Tool: Management Training
		Tool: More development
		Tool: Online classes
		Tool: Outside training
		Tool: Permit to work books
		Tool: Presentation Skills
		Tool: Providing affordance to potential leaders
		Tool: Public Speaking & Presentations
		Tool: Radical
		Tool: SchedulePro
		Tool: Situational Role Play
		Tool: Speaking up
		Tool: Spreadsheets
		Tool: Timekeeping tools
		Tool: Training for those who are being considered for FLL
		Tool: Training on various technical systems (SchedulePro)
		Tool: Transition documents
		Tool: Transition time
		Tool: Understanding different people
		Tool: Universal Tag Locator
		Tool: Who to Contact for What
		Upper management helping to implement change

