An Exploration of Leaders’ Experience with the Informal Learning Process during Role Transition at a K-12 Private, Non-profit, Co-educational, Bilingual School in Jordan

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Abstract

The 21st Century workforce must be flexible, adaptable, and innovative to stay competitive in today’s fast-paced, ever-changing job market. Organizations play an important role in supporting the professional growth of its employees by offering various kinds of formal and informal professional development opportunities. While formal learning may be beneficial to individual employees, the learning that takes place within these structured training programs is not always disseminated to other members within the organization. If organizations create more informal adult learning opportunities, with an emphasis on workplace learning, then the transfer of knowledge between individuals within the organization might increase thus broadening employees’ knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding in the workplace context.

Therefore, the purpose of this doctoral thesis was to explore informal adult learning in the workplace as a potentially untapped mode of professional development in organizations. Using the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and zone of proximal development (ZPD) from Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory as the theoretical framework, this Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study sought out to answer the following research question: “What are the experiences of newly, internally-promoted leaders of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan; and how do they make sense of their firsthand experience with informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace?” The study provided a platform for five participants to share their reflections from their learning experiences during a critical transition time in their professional careers. Their personal recounts with regard to seeking support from colleagues, as well as them assuming the role as supporters for their colleagues identified that an individual’s attitude towards learning determines if, when, how frequently, with whom and to what extent she
engages in learning. A positive, harmoniously ethos where individuals demonstrate mutual respect, trustworthiness, and intercultural understanding creates a workplace conducive for learning to take place.

*Keywords:* informal learning, intentional incidental learning, workplace learning, more knowledgeable other, zone of proximal development
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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

No longer are the days where experts rarely deviate their focused energies from their highly trained for and skilled work areas. Today’s workforce is being challenged to specialize in areas in which they are knowledgeable and passionate. However, they are also encouraged to be self-motivated, proactive, independent, and open-minded; willing to venture out of their comfort zone and ready to work collaboratively with a team (Kivunja, 2015). The demand of the 21st Century workplace is putting pressure on both the professionals already employed, as well as students currently studying in university preparing to start their careers. Today’s workforce must be flexible, adaptable, and innovative to stay competitive in today’s fast-paced, ever-changing job market (Fenwick, 2008; Challenger, 2009; Värlander, 2012; Carliner, 2013; Kivunja, 2015).

In 2009, Challenger predicted that over the next couple of decades employers would have a vast array of premium candidates from which to choose from due to immigration, outsourcing, and globalization. With technological advancements in mind, McLuhan (1962) coined the term the “Global Village” to signify how individuals can be connected instantaneously; giving access to each other’s sociocultural ways, a multitude of languages, and ways of knowing and understanding. It is up to the individuals within any particular organization to use and leverage this information to the group’s advantage. Fenwick (2008) addressed how “new work arrangements such as virtual organizations and transnational work sites, space and time have become a critical influence on work learning” (p. 24). This asynchronous environment has evolved into a workplace pedagogy in and of itself, which when taken advantage of can be used to enhance adult learning. Fenwick (2008) defined workplace learning “as expanding human possibilities for flexible and creative action in the context of work” (p. 19). Kivunja (2015) encouraged individuals to embrace this concept, as empowering the diversity amongst team...
members brings a variety of perspectives and ideas to the group dynamics that can positively link back to organizational performance and productivity.

In setting the tone for this study’s focus, there are two additional definitions to go along with Fenwick’s (2008) definition of workplace learning that this study’s work will revolve around:

Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization, or it can take place despite an environment not being highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 12).

Intentional, incidental learning describes the learning process which individuals undergo as they have “developed an appreciation of the need to learn as much and as often as possible, so that their incidental learning became intentional” (Hunter, 2014, p. 50).

**Topic**

The K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan in which this study was conducted allocates a substantial amount of annual funds to the professional development budget as the Board of Trustees and Leadership Team strive to support the academic and support staff in their journey to be lifelong learners. Each academic year, a large
number of staff members are sent to participate in local, regional and international conferences, workshops, and training courses. The school also arranges for local, regional, and international trainers and workshop leaders to conduct workshops and training sessions on campus. Also, the Leadership Team regularly schedules for experienced, specialized staff onsite to lead committee meetings and deliver sharing sessions for the school community (staff, students, and/or parents). The main goal of providing all of these structured learning opportunities for the staff is so that the learning experiences they take part in directly and positively feed back into the staff members’ performance with regard to the area in which they contribute to school life whether it is in the classroom, gymnasium, cafeteria, security patrol areas, media centers, administrative offices, etc. This particular educational institution is renowned for being a pioneering school, both locally and globally and aspires to hire qualified, diversified personnel. It goes without saying that among the three hundred plus staff members, there is a cumulative wealth of knowledge and experience on campus; whereas some individuals naturally and willingly share their know-how with their colleagues, while others’ potential may not be brought to light if gone undiscovered. This particular research focus was to understand if and how informal adult learning in the workplace can be used as a form of professional development.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this doctoral study was to explore the experiences of participants in the informal learning process as a potentially untapped mode of professional development in the organization. A component of this study was to discuss how a combination of formal and informal learning opportunities, with an emphasis on informal adult learning, can be used to enhance individuals’ knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding to broaden the employees’ repertoire in the workplace context.
Problem Statement

Although informal adult learning may be the most prevalent way in which know-how is passed from one individual to the next (Conlon, 2004), such learning sometimes is dismissed or not given the focus it should due to its casual nature (Schultz & Stamos Roßnagel, 2010). With the ever-changing demands of the workforce, employees are constantly required to learn new things to stay relevant. In addition, it is crucial that individuals pass on institutional knowledge to their colleagues in an efficient manner so that growth, productivity, and momentum are optimized. Individual learning contributes to organizational learning. This study gained insight from the participants as they described their transition experiences as newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan; and how they made sense of their firsthand experiences with informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development to aid in their changeover from their previous roles to their new ones. Internally-promoted participants were selected for this study as they were already familiar with the school’s strategic plan, guiding statements, academic and co-curricular programs on offer, school culture and dynamics, as well as the country and Middle East region. By only focusing on internally-promoted participants, their shared experience allowed them to focus on transitioning within a familiar organization as opposed to newly hired participants having a settling in phase to the country, region, and school climate while transitioning into their leadership roles.

Justification for the Research Problem

Individuals generally apply to positions where they feel they are qualified and have earned tertiary degrees or been trained to carry out such responsibilities; however, most newly-hired or promoted employees soon realize that there is a lot more to learn after being appointed
to their positions. The dilemma for those individuals in that position is two-fold. First, who should they reach out to for support? Second, once they determine that and approach those more knowledgeable others, do they consider these cordial, informal interactions as learning moments that actually scaffold their learning or just brief inquiry encounters?

It is understood that when members of staff at such a dynamic educational institution, like the one where the study was conducted, are promoted to the Extended Management or Leadership Team levels, they have demonstrated their ability to adapt and build their capacities. As with any promotion, these individuals are expected to go above and beyond to hone their leadership skills while role modeling for their department teams, as well as carrying out a multitude of high level responsibilities in the spotlight for all their colleagues to witness. Such expectations can be a heavy burden if individuals try to manage this feat on their own or attempt to maintain the façade that they know it all given the hierarchal positions they hold in the organization.

**Significance Statement**

Employees are being stretched to reinvent themselves to keep up with the expectations in the workforce of today and the future. As Eraut (2004) claimed, “from a learning viewpoint, competence is a moving target” (p. 264). Employees must strive to keep current with changing times by adding to their credentials, professional portfolios, and know-how knowledge and skills. Individuals are no longer restricted or constrained by the majors typed onto their tertiary degree certificates or the specific roles and responsibilities listed in their job descriptions. To thrive and survive in today’s job market, individuals need to be nimble, flexible, and willing and ready to tackle steep learning curves posed to them in the most skillful and resourceful way they know. “Although the labor of men and women to improve their world is rooted in the material
conditions of their era, it is also affected by their capacity to learn from the past, to imagine, and to plan for the future” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 129).

The 21st Century workplace environment has taken on a whole new dynamic where marketable individuals must demonstrate their ability and willingness to be lifelong learners and organizations can support this through offering both formal and informal learning opportunities. Eraut (2004) described learning as a continuum where formal learning and informal learning are at opposite ends of the spectrum with mentoring and coaching placed somewhere along the continuum. The more knowledgeable other (MKO) can assume the role of coach or mentor to scaffold the individual’s learning to stretch her step-by-step beyond her zone of proximal development (ZPD) to a higher skill level. The ZPD “is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Gaining insight into how best to engage in and promote workplace learning is a pressing issue given the evolving nature of one’s roles and responsibilities (Billett, 2002). Many researchers emphasize the importance of ensuring that the work environment is conducive for informal learning to take place; whereas the cultural norm allows for both individual and group reflection with regard to learning, growth, and development (Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Conlon, 2004; Warhurst, 2006; Hunter, 2014; Deakin Crick, Haigney, Huang, Coburn, & Goldspink, 2013; Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013). Workplace culture where open dialogue and healthy interactions about authentic onsite learning play a fundamental role in shaping individuals and group dynamics which will lead to an increase in overall organizational performance (Eraut, 2004; Deakin Crick, 2007, 2009).
Leaders are responsible to create learning cultures in organizations and, in turn, learning cultures in organizations have been found to positively impact informal learning in the workplace (Frochlich, Segers, & Van den Bossche, 2014). This researcher specifically targeted newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members as participants as they were experiencing a critical turning point in their professional careers at the time of the study. This researcher anticipated that such participants were actively seeking and engaged in frequent informal learning experiences as they were settling into their new leadership roles. Obtaining a firsthand perspective from the participants on how they made sense of their professional growth from such interactions gave insight into how much they valued informal adult learning in the workplace context. Top-down leadership initiatives are not the way to go if an organization is trying to promote workplace learning (Billett & Somerville, 2004); however, leaders who value informal learning nurture these types of interactions amongst their employees in their organizations (English, 1999). If a cultural change about informal adult learning is the goal, then individuals at the grass roots level in such organizations should be empowered as the change agents, as they are the ones to benefit most from these endeavors (Billett & Somerville, 2004). The “emotional dimension of professional work is much more significant than normally recognized” (Eraut, 2004, p. 255) and therefore should be given due attention. Individuals need to be attuned with their interpersonal communication skills and need to incorporate a high level of emotional intelligence into their interactions with others. Leaders must tailor the support they give to cater to each of their team member’s learning needs and styles to optimize the benefits for the individual, team, and organization (Frochlich, Segers, & Van de Bossche, 2014). Each person is unique and should be approached and dealt with accordingly. Investing quality time in
establishing and maintaining trusting relationships will lead to creating a culture in the organization where workplace learning is a norm.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Although the literature review for this study with regard to informal adult learning spans the breadth and depth of previous quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies from a variety of workplace and personal settings, few of them did so from the participants’ viewpoint as an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. This study about leaders’ firsthand experience with accessing informal adult learning to scaffold their own knowledge during a crucial transition period in their professional career will contribute to the scholarly text in the field of education. This focus will fill the gap in literature in the context of informal adult learning in a K-12 educational setting as the majority of the previous studies conducted in educational settings focus on professional learning communities or collaborative professional development. Another key area of deficiency in evidence is whether leaders at an educational institution assume the role as MKO more readily than supervisors in other workplace settings. It has been noted that although line managers play a positive role in setting targets and assigning tasks for their employees to grow and develop, employees do not necessarily seek guidance and support from their direct line managers in the form of informal adult learning; however, they prefer to engage in these interactions with their fellow colleagues (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Hughes, 2004). It was interesting to note that all five participants in this particular study identified their direct line managers as well as their colleagues as their confidantes they felt most comfortable with reaching out to as their MKO, so this aspect will also add to the current literature.

Relating the Discussion to Audiences
Given the leadership roles of the study participants and their firsthand experiences with participating in this study, the results of this study provided them with a bird’s eye view of their lived experiences with informal adult learning in the workplace and raise awareness as to how such opportunities can be highlighted and a culture created and nurtured so that their department team members and potentially the whole school community can take advantage of such interactions.

This researcher, as Assistant Principal (Development), will incorporate this study’s findings into the existing Whole School Performance Management Policy and Procedures, as well as work with the Vice Principal in charge of Professional Development to offer a combination of formal and informal learning opportunities, with an emphasis on informal adult learning, to enhance the academic and support staff’s knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding all whilst stretching the educational institution’s professional development budget.

**Positionality Statement**

**Lifelong learner.** Throughout my entire life, whether I was aware of it or not, I have taken advantage of learning opportunities that have naturally presented themselves or I sought out on my own so that I could enhance my overall abilities and skillset. At a very young age, I realized that it was up to me to fight for my rights, get the most out of each situation, rise to challenges, and to not hold anyone accountable other than myself for not achieving the goals I set for myself. My awareness, acceptance, and embracement of being a lifelong learner with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) has grown stronger and stronger with each passing year and only now after deep reflection, I value the learning journey I have been on for almost five decades.

I am cognizant that I tend to gravitate toward individuals who project positive energy and embrace an open-minded approach when presented with new challenges or a change to their
work routine. I understand that my colleagues have their particular safe haven groups with whom they tend to work well with, so I need to be more aware of what other characteristics or work ethics my colleagues’ possess or demonstrate that attract others to work with them and vice versa.

At the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year, in my new role as K-12 Assistant Principal (Development), the Vice Principal in charge of Professional Development and I led a Performance Management (PM) Sharing Session with sixty-seven PM Reviewers, which included all of the study participants. The PM Reviewers are responsible for implementing the PM Process each academic year with the entire 300 plus member staff. Throughout the academic year, each PM Reviewer works with and supports anywhere from two to twenty of their colleagues to reach their mutually-agreed upon, personalized objectives. During the sharing session, we introduced the Multipliers Effect (Wiseman, 2010) as well as the Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006) coupled with coaching (Eaton & Johnson, 2001; Flaherty, 2011). The feedback from the sharing session was positive, and as a researcher I looked forward to noting if any signs of implementation from such training surfaced during this field study’s interviews with participants. During the interview process, I was an attentive listener throughout the implementation of my field study to ensure that I gave participants ample time to reflect during the interviews to share their perspectives given their unique circumstances. I kept in mind that although we work at the same organization, we each have our career trajectories that we pursue in the special way that we see fit and that some embrace, nurture and demonstrate lifelong learning in different ways than others.

**Formal education and interactions.** I was born and raised in a small, southern town in the United States of America that was predominately populated by Caucasians. I was an only
child raised by a single, white mother from a low socioeconomic status (SES) background. I now realize that my mother did everything in her power to ensure that I regularly attended and took advantage of the educational opportunities that were on offer in our local public schools from pre-school to high school, and she did her best to balance my formal education with equally impactful interactions at home. As soon as I was old enough, my mother spent endless hours of quality time playing board games like Scrabble®, Boggle®, Scattergories®, Monopoly®, and Clue® with me. In retrospect, I recognize that my mother was not only playing games with me, but she was creating informal learning opportunities for me while implicitly building my literacy, mathematics, critical-thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills via incidental teaching and learning interactions. She was my more knowledgeable other (MKO) who role modeled good practice, scaffolded my learning, and stretched me beyond my zone of proximal development (ZPD). My mother was an avid reader who inspired me to read any and everything. Whenever we did not have a novel or magazine in our hands, we were working brainteaser puzzles to pass the time. The majority of our TV time was spent watching Jeopardy®, Family Feud®, or Wheel of Fortune®, all of which are trivia-based and competitive game shows. To this day, games play a pivotal role in my personal and professional life because I believe that the players of such games can learn from one another through their casual interactions all while enjoying the overall experience.

Before I honed my research focus to study informal learning, I had no idea how valuable this form of informal learning is in both our personal and professional lives. As an insider scholar practitioner, I have been investigating informal learning for well over two years and am now fully aware and appreciative of when I am personally engaged in informal learning experiences. I even acknowledge and verbalize when such learning experiences are taking place.
with my colleagues, so they too become aware of the potential of the interactions. The challenge for me as a researcher was to train myself to be able to identify the participants’ nuanced references to workplace learning during the interviews, as it was apparent from previous studies that it is difficult to pinpoint such learning and measure the value added to one’s growth. Schulz & Stamov Roßnagel (2010) reported that due to its informal nature, employees might not even recognize it as training or learning. Although informal learning is popular, it is hard to measure (Lai, Wu, & Li, 2011). I worded my research questions, sub-questions, prompts, and probes carefully to ensure they did not include trigger words that would influence the participants’ reflections.

**My history—my future.** I am a firm believer that one’s past does not predict one’s future, but one’s unique history provides one with a plethora of experiences that factor into how one approaches each situation in the future. As an individual’s history starts with family, I will give personal insight into why I stated the claim above and how it relates to my research focus. In sum and with complete respect, my grandparents did not earn high school diplomas and my mother, maternal uncle, and maternal aunt did not earn higher education degrees. These five individuals raised me; they were my entire world. I am honored and proud of each and every one of my dear family members as they have been my role models throughout my life demonstrating how to make the most out of every given situation to make a positive difference in their lives as well as the lives with whom they interacted. Given my family’s formal educational background, I never would have dreamed of being the first member of my immediate family to be a college graduate; eventually earning two undergraduate degrees, one graduate degree, and my doctorate.
From firsthand experience, formal education was not the only way one could build knowledge, understanding, or skillset; however, I recognize the value of a formal education. At this stage in my professional and personal life, informal learning has gained my full attention as it has played a major role in providing me with authentic learning opportunities each and every day that have enabled me to reflect, question, grow, and develop myself as an individual. My constant interactions with others provide the opportunity to be on an endless discovery and learning cycle where I apply and hone my skills. I aspire to pay it forward in tribute to my family by role modeling the same with those whom I interact with on a daily basis. I acknowledge that not all value the potential learning present in causal interactions, so I need to respect their views while respecting my own. In this study, I concentrated my exploration on the participants’ informal learning experiences in the workplace so as not to deviate off track with non-work-related interactions.

**International-mindedness.** During my first year in university, I married my husband. We have been together for 30 years. He is the eldest male in a traditional Muslim family of nine. Before marriage, I lived a typical small town USA life. I never had a passport, nor ever fathomed of traveling overseas. I had limited exposure to any languages other than English. When my husband, two daughters, and I moved to Jordan over 25 years ago, I soon realized that for me to be able to communicate with my mother-in-law, she and I would need to learn the other’s language. Neither one of us took formal lessons; however, we worked our way through the transition time using a lot of body language as well as phrasing and re-phrasing what we wanted to say until our messages were understood. Our animated interactions were charged with language, culture, tradition, and beliefs. Being immersed in the Arabic-speaking community forced me to pick up and use the functional day-to-day language in the local market and shops.
Teaching and working in private, bilingual K-12 educational institutions in Jordan enabled me to enhance my proficiency in Arabic while I scaffolded the English language learning of the students I taught and anyone else in need with whom I interacted. Although I never took any formal training or lessons, I am proud to say that my Arabic has improved over the years thanks to interactions with others.

I acknowledge that each interaction between two or more individuals could potentially be emotionally-charged with each person’s cultural and traditional beliefs. Sometimes words may be misinterpreted or lost in translation. Glazier (2004) found that such tense exchanges can be used to empower the oppressed and enlighten the privileged. During this study, I ensured that I gave participants opportunities to share their thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives, and allowed them to replay those interactions in their minds so that they could make sense of what they had experienced. Once they shared and relived the experience with me as a researcher, I did everything in my power to make sense of how they deconstructed the moments in time.

My vow. I embrace the fact that I am unique and assume many roles in my personal and professional life. At all times, I assume the responsibility to lead by example, to be a positive role model, and to invest quality time to teach and learn.

I believe that everyone has the right to a high-quality education and that the privileged must go out of our way to pay it forward to those less fortunate. My vision for the future is for everyone to be lifelong learners working together to make the world a better place for the current and future generations. As a lifelong learner, I strive to make as many relevant connections between as many learning experiences as possible for me to comprehend and make sense of the world. I aspire to instill this skill in the people with whom I interact. I believe there are golden
opportunities in incidental teaching and learning moments that we must take full advantage of and recognize the value they hold.

The core sentiments below reflect me as an individual, whether they pertain to research or teaching and learning. They are the essence of my epistemological orientation.

As a scholar-practitioner/educational leader, I battled through the internal turmoil of beliefs, biases, and opinions about my research interest and openly confronted those biases prior to starting the research process to present an unbiased conclusion (Machi and McEvoy, 2012).

As a scholar-practitioner/educational leader, I promised to safeguard my participants’ rights and privileges (Beranek and French, 2011; hooks, 1994). As the K-12 Assistant Principal (Development), I dedicated quality time to building a rapport with the members of my school community. I have an open door policy that is frequently used. While conducting my study, I continued to nurture a mutually-respectful relationship with the participants in my study and reminded them they can approach me at any time to ask for clarification, voice their concerns, and/or ask to pull out of the study.

As a scholar-practitioner/educational leader, I supported and collaborated with my fellow scholar-practitioners/educational leaders on our transformative learning journey through new discoveries and findings (Franklin, 2014), and naturally connected classroom practice and research findings to enhance teaching and learning (Jenlink, 2005; Labaree, 2003; Nganga, 2011; Schein, 2009). I aspired that my study will add value to the existing work similar to my topic in the field of education. Since this is my second year as an Executive Leadership Team Member, I value this opportunity I have been given to conduct this study with regard to workplace learning during this crucial transition time at my organization. The school where I am currently working recently restructured the Executive Leadership, Leadership, and Extended Management Teams.
Several individuals were promoted, including myself, and we all experienced a steep learning curve to meet the expectations of our new roles and responsibilities.

As a scholar-practitioner and educational leader, I was consciously aware when my role between insider and outsider began to merge and ensured that my moral integrity, ethics, values, and virtues guided me throughout the process (McGinn & Bosacki, 2004). I have over a quarter century teaching experience and living in the Middle East; both of which equipped me to have a better cultural-historical domain understanding (Carlton Parsons, 2008) and appreciation of the culture, traditions, and beliefs in the region. I have worked at my current school over sixteen years. I worked my way up the organizational structure from Homeroom Teacher to an Executive Leadership Team Member as K-12 Assistant Principal (Development). I am well known and respected in the school community. Although I am not the direct line manager for any of the participants nor am I responsible for their performance management evaluation, I ensured that my status did not intimidate my study participants or affect my study findings in any way.

As a scholar-practitioner and educational leader, I empower others, so that we unite as a team in order to succeed (Dubois, 1903; hooks, 1994). We are fortunate to have leaders with a wide range of expertise and abilities. By focusing on how each of these leaders perceive the use of workplace learning in assisting them in transitioning from one role and responsibility to another, it gave me as a researcher insight into how prevalent informal learning opportunities were recognized and valued and that they were viewed as an untapped mode of professional development.

In sum, I conducted my study with the utmost integrity as a scholar-practitioner ensuring that all participants’ rights and privileges were honored. As an insider scholar-practitioner, I
bracketed off my biases by keeping reflective memos ensuring that my thoughts and beliefs did not feed into the dialogue between the participants and me. I assumed the role as a listener giving the participants ample time to share their reflections and accounts. I am confident that the study’s findings will add value to similar topics in the field of education because knowledge and understanding are gained through exploration and discovery. With each study conducted, scholar-practitioners are bridging the gap between theory and practice.

**Research Question**

The research question guiding this inquiry is: What are the experiences of newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan; and how do they make sense of informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace to enhance learning?

**Theoretical Framework**

For this study, this researcher chose to use Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory as the theoretical framework. Its sociocultural perspective emphasizes the importance of social interactions in promoting cognitive development where the more knowledgeable other (MKO) scaffolds the learner’s knowledge or skills that span the individual’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Although Vygotsky’s early work revolved around the study of infants and children’s cognitive development through social interaction, “he emphasized the study of development because he believed it to be the primary theoretical and methodological means necessary to unravel complex human processes” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 128). This researcher believed that the MKO and ZPD principles offered the best fit for the problem of practice with the adults that were involved in the study. During the study, the targeted participants were going
through a steep learning curve in their professional career as leaders at the educational institution chosen as the study site. The Sociocultural Theory links what individuals are thinking and feeling and how they go about acting on such stimulation.

Lev Vygotsky was a pioneering psychologist in the 1920’s and 30’s. He was on a self-proclaimed mission during the “crisis in psychology” to create “a comprehensive approach that would make possible description and explanation of higher psychological functions in terms acceptable to natural science” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 8) which would include a balance of natural science and mental science. During the peak of his prime, his work was suppressed and did not get the proper recognition it deserved during his lifetime due to it being considered controversial in the Soviet Union. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory can best be described as “a psychologically relevant application of dialectical and historical materialism” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 6). Although he published six books and developed several theories and concepts, much of his work was considered incomplete due to his untimely death from tuberculosis at the age of 37. Shortly after his death, he was named one of the leading psychologists in the Soviet Union and is now one of the most cited psychologists.

After Vygotsky’s death, his colleagues and students, for example, Alexandr Luria and Alexie Leont’ev continued to develop and translate his work to give insight as to how Vygotsky’s theories, concepts, and ideas are relevant in educational settings. Over the past two decades, Vygotsky’s work has gained more and more recognition and acceptance all around the world (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003).

Counterarguments. According to Cornejo (2015), Vygotskyan specialists have pointed out that possibly due to Soviet authorities’ interference, Vygotsky’s work with holism may have been inaccurately translated which could have led to misinterpretation and inaccuracies. The fact
that his work was incomplete at the time of his death also leaves room for speculation. Cornejo (2015) systematically unraveled the historical trajectory of Vygotsky’s work which revealed several contradictions along the way. Although Vygotsky (1978) stated that his work was based on a Marxist theory, Cornejo (2015) counter-argued that “his revival of the term relates his approach to coetaneous varieties of German holism rather than to Marxist theories” (p. 73). Even Vygotsky’s students challenged his work and ideas; however, the fact remains his work is still considered “a living part of Soviet psychological thought” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 10) and is viewed as a positive contribution to the field of education regardless of the controversy it may have caused.

Although Cornejo (2015) shed light on possible inaccurate translations and contradictions in Vygotsky’s work, this researcher believes Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory as the framework for this intended study is viable. Vygotsky’s philosophy and main components resonate with this researcher’s own philosophy and beliefs where social interactions involve cooperative and collaborative dialogue to foster cognitive development.

**Two main principles and key beliefs.** Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory focuses on the fact that all development derives from individuals’ interactions with their social environments. It has two main principles: the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2014). The MKO could be an adult, a more able-peer, or even a software program that interacts with the learner to scaffold his/her learning experiences to reach a higher ability. The MKO is intertwined with the ZPD concept, whereas the ZPD refers to what a learner can do independently without support and where scaffolding and support are needed for a learner to progress and gain more skills, knowledge, and conceptual understanding.
Vygotsky (1978) believed that the early childhood years are critical and play is the ideal teaching and learning methodology to use for child development. He also believed a child’s development depends on him being progressively exposed to more complex mental activities that are assisted by more advanced individuals. The Sociocultural Theory revolves around the fact that complex mental activities begin as social activities, so when a child demonstrates her actual ability, a more knowledgeable other then can assist the child to perform a more challenging task which, in turn, promotes cognitive development.

Limitations. After reading extensively about Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, this researcher cannot think of any limitations of using this theory. The principles of the more knowledgeable other (MKO) scaffolding the learning of another individual to stretch to the outskirts of her actual learning ability to allow her to reach above and beyond her zone of proximal development (ZPD) are completely aligned with the identified problem of practice inquiring into the informal learning process and experiences of newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members at a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan in which this study was conducted. The research question with regard to “What are the experiences of newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan; and how do they make sense of informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace?” was developed and defined based on the key assumptions of the sociocultural theory whilst using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach where the participants were given ample opportunity during the interview process so that each individual’s voice could be heard through her unique perspective based on reflection and talking through her lived experiences. Billett (2002) acknowledged that there had
been a wider acceptance of learning through interactions; however, he prompted researchers not to limit the focus of such learning to intimate close personal interactions as Vygotsky suggested, but broaden the focus to the wider social world. Taking Billett’s (2002) point into consider, this researcher broadened the scope of the literature review included in this study by not only concentrating on informal learning experiences in educational institutions in the Middle East, but included a vast array of studies where informal learning was activated and engaged in to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand in a variety of settings, cultures, and situations at the individual, group, and organizational levels.

**Organization of this Study**

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the introduction where the research topic, problem of practice, significance of the problem, research question and theoretical framework were mapped out, and this researcher shared her positionality statement. An in-depth literature review is featured in chapter two. The third chapter will describe the details of the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis methodology used in this study. The data collected and results will be reported in chapter four. The fifth chapter will sum up the findings, discussion, and implications.
Chapter II: Literature Review

It is estimated that employees learn 10-20% through formal training while the remaining 80-90% comes from informal learning in the workplace (Conlon, 2004). The likelihood that individuals realize they are actually learning more on the job than they do during formal training is improbable, as informal learning is not as tangible as structured coursework. Due to its causal nature, employees might not recognize informal learning as training or actual value added learning (Schultz & Stamov Roßnagel, 2010). Informal learning has been identified as an untapped professional development opportunity in the workplace (de Laat & Schreurs, 2013). It is pertinent that organizations acknowledge the potential that informal and incidental adult learning has for individuals and promote a culture to take full advantage of it (Marsick & Watkins; 2001 Conlon, 2004; Warhurst, 2006; Hunter, 2014; Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013).

Informal adult learning will be the focus of this literature review. The body of literature included in this review spans the breadth and depth of informal, incidental, and intentionally-incidental teaching and learning opportunities that take place in a vast array of adult learning settings. After reviewing a multitude of sources, this researcher identified three main themes that repeatedly gleaned through the studies. The first theme addressed the fact that informal or incidental learning provides a plethora of learning opportunities that can be coupled with formal training and factored into an organization’s professional development plan. The second theme highlighted that individuals are in control of if, how, and to what extent they engage and/or participate in informal or incidental learning. It also recognized that individuals might choose to glide back and forth on the engagement continuum depending on a variety of circumstances. The third theme acknowledged that informal or incidental learning is taking place all the time and if individuals mutually nurture these interactions there will be value added; however, quality
control measures may not always be in place to document efficiency and effectiveness of such value added at the individual, group, and/or organization levels.

**Origins of Informal and Incidental Learning**

Regardless of informal and incidental learning being defined or recognized as a venue for learning, it is traced back to ancient times when apprentices shadowed master artisans where they learned the tricks of the trade (Marsick, 2009; Carliner, 2013). Even the offhand comments of one advising another to work with a particular person pay tribute to the importance of quality interactions and working with others to enhance one’s skills. Most individuals go through an orientation session, tour of the venue, along with formal and casual introductions to members of that community when joining a group, club, or organization, so this too would be considered an informal learning experience to acquaint the new members to their surroundings and basic expectations. Repeated quality interactions over an extended period of time expose individuals to potential learning moments.

Marsick & Watkins (1990) and Garrick (1998) reviewed the origins of informal and incidental learning and linked it back to many related concepts, for example: self-directed learning (Knowles, 1950), social modeling (Bandura, 1986), situated cognition (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). After their extensive review, Marsick & Watkins (1990) aspired to define informal and incidental learning in a more concrete way in which to frame their work around. They defined it as:

> Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment,
interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization, or it can take place despite an environment not being highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 12).

Another key term that will be referred to throughout this literature review is a term coined in Hunter’s 2010 study, “intentional incidental learning”. The term succinctly describes the learning process in which individuals undergo as they have “developed an appreciation of the need to learn as much and as often as possible, so that their incidental learning became intentional” (Hunter, 2014, p. 50).

When reflecting and deeply analyzing learning with regard to the workplace, the concept became more complex which required one to zoom out to gain a broader perspective. Fenwick (2008) did just that with her definition of workplace learning where she described it as “expanding human possibilities for flexible and creative action in contexts of work” (p. 19).

Although there are a variety of definitions in the field of research concerning informal, incidental, intentionally incidental, and workplace learning, the ones aforementioned in both Chapter I and above will constitute the boundaries in which this researcher addresses such learning in the following literature review and the actual study itself.

**Formal and Informal Learning Opportunities**

Today’s workplace demands require individuals to function at a much higher cognition and skillset level as global citizens on a vast range of levels (Conlon, 2004; Hunter, 2014). These expectations pressure people to evolve continually, adapt, and learn new things to keep
themselves marketable. All of these factors have drawn more attention to workplace learning, so that employees learn new ways to cope and thrive in the work environment.

**Authentic learning.** Informal and incidental learning opportunities allow individuals to learn in an authentic setting where they can approach such interactions at the pace and vigor they so desire, which is not always the case in formal learning or training circumstances. Through their work, researchers acknowledge that informal learning plays a vital role in a variety of workplace situations (English, 1999; Keeping & English, 2001; Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Carliner, 2004; Conlon, 2004; Hughes, 2004). Informal learning not only can be used to learn new knowledge and skills; however, it can also be used to unlearn bad habits or practices (Conlon, 2004).

In an attempt to shed light from a global perspective on the need and potential of informal and incidental learning, this researcher purposefully reviewed studies from around the world (e.g. Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Taiwan, etc.) in a variety of venues (e.g. in schools, at church, on construction sites, in offices, etc.). Informal and incidental learning is “relevant to practice in many cultures and contexts” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 26). Studies included in this literature review featured participants from educational settings (Glazier, 2004; Green, 2009; Warhurst, 2006; Warhurst 2008), Roman Catholic parishes (English, 1999), construction worksites (Ley, Cook, Dennerlein, Kravcik, Kunzmann, Pata, Purma, Sandars, Santos, Schmidt, Al-Smadi, & Trattner, 2014), as well as participants who were health care patients in dire need of educating themselves regarding their health situations (Keeping & English, 2001; Papen, 2012). In these studies, the researchers captured the essence of participants’ informal and incidental learning, which in turn gave weight to their claim that this form of authentic learning is relevant in all settings (English, 1999; Keeping & English, 2001;
Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Conlon, 2004). This researcher was unable to find existing studies focused on informal adult learning in a workplace similar to the setting of this study at a K-12, private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan or even in the Middle East. This study will aid in filling the gap in the literature where there is a lack of studies in an educational context where so many newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members shared their firsthand experiences with the informal adult learning process from an Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) perspective and how they made sense of such interactions with regard to their professional growth and development during their role transition.

**Enhanced opportunities.** Informal learning is being recognized as a valuable, standard form of professional development in companies (Schulz & Stamov Roßnagel, 2010; de Laat & Schreurs, 2013); however, similar studies in the field of educational institutions were not as prevalent. Although individuals learn new knowledge, skills, and concepts during their daily interactions with their colleagues in the workplace, due to the informal nature, they might not recognize it as training or learning (Schulz & Stamov Roßnagel, 2010). There is potential to draw more attention to this way of learning and possibly design educational interventions into professional development programs that will enhance and take full advantage of informal and incidental learning engagements (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). The results of this study confirm that it is feasible and advantageous to design such interventions into the professional development program at the educational institutions in which this study was conducted, as well as similar local, regional, and international schools.

If leveraged strategically, organizations have the potential to reap the benefits on the individual, team, and organization levels from their employees participating in ongoing, effective intentional incidental learning by creatively promoting it and setting up formalized professional
development programs to make the most of it (Hunter, 2014). The human resource department can take a leading role in identifying and using key informal learning techniques as intervention strategies in the workplace setting (Conlon, 2004). For example, organizations can establish more opportunities such as coaching and mentorship programs, as well as networking and social events for individuals to naturally interact (Conlon, 2004). Learning among and between employees is apparent at varying degrees; however, it is noted that people in supervisory roles are not always the ones providing the guidance or mentoring to their subordinates (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Hughes, 2004). Leaders play a key role in setting targets for their team and specific individuals; however, may not necessarily assume the role as the more knowledgeable other for the individuals they line manage (Hughes, 2004). Leaders who value informal learning nurture these kinds of interactions and engagement in their presence (English, 1999), but it is up to the individuals to make decisions as to who they seek the support from whether it be their supervisor, a fellow colleague in the same department or someone else they feel most comfortable with.

Warhurst (2006) confirmed that properly structured and tracked mentoring plays a relevant role in informal learning opportunities and newcomers need to take the time to get acquainted with the workplace nuances and be cognizant and reflective throughout the process. Incidental learning in the workplace provides individuals with authentic ways to learn and should be considered a central feature in any organization’s professional development plan; however, leaders cannot force individuals to work cooperatively, so Warhurst (2006) suggested that cohort models be created to enable participants to engage actively and take charge of their learning.

Informal learning is a dynamic, vibrant way to expand employees’ knowledge in any organization; however, it is not being recognized or being accessed to its full potential (de Laat
& Schreurs, 2013). Organizations can promote the efficient and effective use of intentional incidental learning for individuals in the workplace as ongoing and relevant learning to build their knowledge and skills (Hunter, 2014). The benefits of intentional incidental learning are endless, such as being low cost, highly relevant, and it can happen frequently or be ongoing as an effective way of learning. Individuals can engage in it to address their current learning needs to build their capacity (Hunter, 2014).

Joint effort: formal and informal. The educational and workplace settings are beginning to merge where students are taking their workplace know-how into their educational environments and vice versa (Conlon, 2004). This blurring of the lines of work and school is conducive for informal learning to occur through interactions with others. Jubas (2011) defined and compared formal versus informal and incidental learning, and addressed how online learning hazes the boundaries even further; and claimed that her “analytical framework similarly disrupts the essentialist distinction between formal and informal or incidental learning” (p. 229). These innovative learning venues, both synchronous and asynchronous, open up novel possibilities for future research focuses.

Although there is a need for a balance of formal and informal adult education opportunities (Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Conlon, 2004; Green, 2009), the majority of learning is derived from informal learning interactions (Conlon, 2004). There is a very fine line of relying too heavily on informal and incidental learning, as inaccurate information could be passed along that goes undetected which could have a negative and/or unproductive effect on the learning process as well as the workplace output (Conlon, 2004). Formal training is usually short lived and not as applicable in comparison to employees participating in ongoing, effective intentional incidental learning (Hunter, 2014). Although there were differing degrees due to age, gender,
and educational background in which adults participated in informal learning, participants indicated that they preferred informal learning in the workplace over formal training (Lai, Wu, & Li, 2011). Informal learning takes precedence over and is more beneficial than formal learning in the workplace in most instances; however, “both formal and informal learning networks come into play” (Boud & Middleton, 2003, p. 199). Despite these differing views, Billett (2004) voiced a valid point when he cited Lev Vygotsky about the transfer of knowledge. It is irrelevant whether something is learned during a school-based or non-school based setting, it just matters “whether the concepts and procedures were made accessible in ways that incite their adaptation to other circumstances” (Billett, 2004, p. 318). Green (2009) matched Billett’s (2004) sentiments by stating that the blurred lines between informal and formal learning as the venue of learning does not constitute whether it is implicit or explicit. “…the formal and informal realms are interlinked, rather than being distinct” (Green, 2009, p. 125). Both formal learning via structured training and education, as well as everyday learning in the workplace, are important for growth and development, so that there is a balance in participatory learning engagements (Billett, 2004; Lai, Wu & Li, 2011).

An organization can offer a balanced, enriching professional development program; however, it is up to the individual to take advantage of courses on offer. Each person is unique and approaches learning in her own way at the speed and depth she so desires, which will be explored in the next strand with regard to the learning continuum.

**Learning Continuum**

Individuals are in control of if, how, and to what extent they participate in informal learning interactions (Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013). Informal and incidental learning activates when a need presents itself to an individual, and then the learner actively seeks knowledge and
understanding due to her motivation (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). A learner’s engagement in the educational experiences could be plotted at a point or fluidly float back and forth on the incidental interactions continuum whereas at any given moment of the interaction, the learner can choose how engaged or disconnected she so desires (Warhurst, 2006). An individual’s desire and commitment to learning are essential to the extent in which one actively engages and participates in such learning (Billett, 2004). The participant’s dedication to making informal learning successful is the primary reason for achievement (English, 1999).

Intentional incidental learning “can transverse the lifespan” (Hunter, 2014, p. 51) in all areas of one’s life (work, family, community, etc.). Once an individual acknowledges and embraces this learning mindset as the way forward, she is continually alert and attuned to what is taking place around her, so, in turn, is always ready and willing to actively and fully engage in intentional incidental learning to develop her skills, knowledge, and conceptual understanding. Learning can take place anytime, anywhere; and it is solely up to the individual to actively engage as a lifelong learner or not. This study solely focused on newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members’ reflections with regard to their engagement in informal adult learning in the workplace setting of a K-12, private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan during a critical turning point in their professional careers.

**Intrinsic learning.** Learners take the lead in how much they gain from informal and incidental learning opportunities (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Informal learning can be propelled into motion when triggered by a learner’s intrinsic desire to learn something (Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Conlon, 2004; Green, 2009) and/or an “internal or external stimulus that signals dissatisfaction with the current ways of thinking or being” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 29).
“…informal learning can include some structured planning or learning, but more often it is driven by serendipity” (Marsick & Volpe, 1999, p. 7). For example, young adults intrinsically follow their passion for particular genres of music or musical instruments, which inspires them to want to learn more about the genre or how to play the musical instrument regardless if taught by an adult or they set out to explore and discover it in an informal manner with more abled others (Green, 2009).

Not all informal and incidental learning experiences are set into motion due to a person’s love of learning. Patients activated their informal, incidental, ad hoc learning after being diagnosed with an illness or disease; some of which learning was only short-term until they recovered while others carried on for an extended amount of time (Papen, 2012). Keeping & English (2001) purposefully chose to study informal learning during a traumatic situation where participants had been diagnosed with end-stage renal disease. Their life or death situation prompted them to educate themselves about their immediate health status and to figure out what the future held for them. These cases clearly demonstrated that self-directed adult education is sometimes triggered by an urgent need for survival (Keeping & English, 2001; Papen, 2012). Glazier’s (2004) choice of setting context about political, historical, and social tension and selection of Jew and Arab participants demonstrated that she was purposefully seeking to study and learn through tense, charged interactions. Glazier (2004) provided insight into how the development of cultural fluency in a tense situation between the privileged and oppressed can lead to informal learning at its best. Glazier’s (2004) primary focus was on the Jew’s experience and insight gained as the privileged other, given the context, which required her to reflect on her own as well as other’s cultural identity and understanding.
**Unique characteristics.** Hunter (2014) proposed that future studies might focus on identifying whether or not individuals possess certain characteristics that enable them to benefit more from their participation in intentional, incidental learning. Noe, Tews, & Marand (2013) claimed that their study was one of the first in this field to focus on positive psychology and Positive Organizational Behavior. They believed that positive psychology plays a significant role in informal learning. They raised awareness that an individual’s unique characteristics can be predictors as to if, how, and to what extent she engages in informal learning (Noe, Tews & Marand, 2013). They found that one’s agreeableness had a positive influence on informal learning. It is noteworthy to mention that one’s general, mental ability had a negative influence on her engaging or seeing value in informal learning opportunities, which one may assume that such an individual would view herself as one of the mentors or coaches supporting less-abled others via informal learning interactions. It was thought-provoking to conclude that zest was the only significant predictor of engagement and success of one’s informal learning through interactions (Noe, Tews & Marand, 2013).

Some studies included in this literature review set out to determine if other characteristics or demographics positively or negatively affected individuals’ ability to participate in informal learning opportunities. It was interesting to discover that both natives from the UK and non-natives from Poland, Macau, Angola, Iran, Algeria, Pakistan, and India carried out informal learning processes in the same manner by drawing on their prior knowledge and experience to build their knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding (Papen, 2012). It has also been determined if one has limited exposure to only her cultural perspectives, traditions, mother tongue, etc., she is not equipped to understand or to a great extent meet other’s diverse needs (Glazier, 2004). This particular study’s participants have a variety of cultural backgrounds and
experiences that was collected within the demographic data collection phase and factored into the data analysis process, which attested to this point.

In addition to actively engaging in formal and informal learning opportunities at varying degrees, it is advantageous to keep documented evidence to measure progress. Value added with regard to informal adult learning can be documented and measured in a variety of ways, some of which will be discussed at length in the next strand.

**Value Added**

Each interaction offers a multitude of learning experiences to the individuals involved whereas people’s learning flourishes during social interaction and dialogue (Warhurst, 2006). Some benefits a person acquires from participating in informal adult learning experiences are tangibly noticeable while others are hidden beneath the surface or lingering in one’s subconscious. There is a need for scholar-practitioners to investigate how an individual, an organization, or a community can create an environment that is conducive for intentional incidental learning to take place (Hunter, 2014). If informal and incidental adult learning opportunities are tracked and documented, leadership will be able to monitor and measure the extent to which there is value added in the workplace (Lai, Wu, & Li, 2011).

**Quality versus quantity.** Marsick & Watkins (2001) went as far as to say that there is a need to explore “the interface between learning at the individual, team, and organizational levels” (p. 32), stating that their study only covered the personal level. The quality of the interactions between employees determines how successful workplace participatory learning is (Billett, 2004). “A learner’s mental capacities, the quality and quantity of interaction between organizational members and organizational structures are three such ways to facilitate informal learning in organizations” (Marsick, Brooks, Cseh, Lovin, Vernon, Watkins, & Ziegler, 2000, p.
Informal learning has a valuable, noteworthy place in everyday training in the workplace (Schulz & Stamov Roßnagel, 2010). Glazier (2004) stressed the necessity of extensive collaboration in an educational setting that not only aids in the teachers gaining a broader, more in-depth understanding of the diversity amongst their students, but also enhances the understanding of their own and their colleagues’ identities so as to meet the needs of their students. Billett (2004) highlighted the fact that “learning and participation in work are inseparable” (p. 315) as “the reciprocal processes of learning are shaped by interactions” (p. 316); however, it has been argued that workplace learning should not be referred to as “informal, non-formal or unstructured learning environments” (p. 313) as he believes these terms give a negative connotation. He preferred to say that the concept of participatory workplace learning can be viewed as “permanent or semi-permanent changes in how individuals think and act” (Billett, 2004, p. 314).

**Collegial, trusting culture.** The extent to which one benefits from informal learning experiences is dependent on the group dynamics and the individual’s passion to engage in such opportunities (Boud & Middleton, 2003). It is advantageous for newcomers in organizations to actively participate in all available informal learning opportunities to expand their knowledge and conceptual understanding (Warhurst, 2008). Creating, nurturing, and maintaining a trusting relationship among team members is the foundation in which a collegial culture can be built (Drago-Severson, 2009). Informal learning is vital to the learning process (Ash, 2014) and participation in a learning community signifies intrinsic motivation to do so, which in turn promotes incidental collegial learning (Warhurst, 2006).

Working in departments does not automatically promote teamwork. A collegial culture is sometimes wrongly assumed. Warhurst (2006) reported that twenty-six of his twenty-nine
participants expressed a feeling of loneliness and isolation at work; however, they admitted to feeling connected and respected in their learning cohorts where they openly accepted, offered, and discussed pedagogic learning needs. Boud & Middleton (2003) noted a distinction between aligned and not-so-aligned workgroups where informal learning flows seamlessly in tightly coupled communities of practice to where informal learning is not accessed at all in loosely coupled communities of practice. There are benefits of both weak and strong relationships and the connections with regard to informal learning (de Laat & Schreurs, 2013). Interactions create moments in time for growth and development to take place. Collaboration and quality interactions can lead to reflection and a better understanding of one’s own as well as other’s identity, culture, and perspectives (Glazier, 2004). Interactions both aid and limit an individual’s learning at times depending on the varying degrees in which the individual chooses to engage or refrain from doing so (Warhurst, 2008). Drago-Severson (2009) recommended that more-abled others customize the learning support they provide to their colleagues to meet each individual’s needs and in turn these tailored interactions will aid in creating a collegial culture for growth to take place. Collegial inquiry, reflective practices, and open lines of communication among team members create the ultimate environment conducive for learning to take place (Drago-Severson, 2009). Individuals need to invest time and energy to nurture and maintain a collegial culture where teamwork and active engagement can flourish.

**Tracking and monitoring.** Organizations are not reaping the full benefit from informal and incidental adult learning opportunities as it is felt that if individuals do not keep documented evidence for later reference nor use tools to measure the effectiveness, their multi-episodic experiences will be boiled down to a just-in-time, short-term type of learning that is limited to the context in which they experience it (Ley et al., 2014). Individuals can transfer the short-term
lived experience to long-term transferable learning opportunities by purposeful, documented reflection where they connect what they are learning to their prior knowledge and experience to scaffold their learning (Eraut, 2000).

Workplace learning is vital to growth and development, so it would be beneficial to track and measure it (Ley et al., 2014; Hunter, 2014). Although informal learning is popular, it is difficult to measure (Lai, Wu, & Li, 2011). There are a variety of ways that researchers collect and analyze data when conducting studies; however, it is worth pondering if those same methods can be used by the human resource department in organizations to measure the effectiveness of informal and incidental adult learning in the workplace and the value added to the workforce. Boud & Middleton (2003) compared qualitative data from interviews, observations, and visual diagrams of interactions between colleagues that revolved around the communities of practice and informal learning. Participants were asked to draw a map of whom they communicated with regarding workplace matters over a specified timeframe. The map provided a visual organizer of the interactions in which an individual participated and potentially learned valuable knowledge and skills from (Boud & Middleton, 2003).

Reflection is vital to the informal learning process (Conlon, 2004) and a major part of learning and growth (Warhurst, 2006). Developers need to incorporate reflection into the learning process to “identify areas of alignment and areas of tension between practices associated with the teaching development community and the departmental communities” (Warhurst, 2006, p. 121). Glazier (2004) used data collected from reflective dialogues to prove that the teacher participants gained a better understanding of themselves as well as others while collaborating as a team regardless of their political differences. As the year progressed, it was apparent from the dialogue scripts that the target participant’s perspective as a Jew was gradually evolving which
was contributed to her culturally diverse interactions with her Arab colleagues. These interactions prompted her to reflect on her previous beliefs, biases, and understanding, take into account the other’s point of view and then incorporate her newfound knowledge within her own perspective (Glazier, 2004). Warhurst (2006) encouraged participants to keep practice and learning logs as running records of their experiences. Critical reflection and metacognition skills are heightened when consistently engaging in intentional incidental learning (Hunter, 2014).

In addition to the tracking and data collection methods and analysis tools aforementioned, some researchers have created models and software to track and monitor informal and incidental adult learning. Examples of such tools are mentioned below in the following paragraphs.

Based on Ley et al.’s (2014) in-depth contextual inquiry with participants, they created a model that revolves around three informal learning processes that employees are engaged in at the workplace and how technologies can be incorporated to support their learning. The three intertwined informal learning processes targeted by Ley et al. (2014) were: (a.) task performance, reflection, and sense-making; (b.) help seeking, guidance, and support; and (c.) the emergence and maturing of collective knowledge. The combined use of the model and software allowed individuals and teams to “meaningfully orchestrate adaptive, social and semantic technologies that played a key role in allowing professionals to draw on collective knowledge and to scaffold learning in a networked workplace context” (Ley et al., 2014, p. 1046). Ley et al. (2014) created the integrative model of scaling informal learning during their design-based research efforts. Kowald, Dennerlein, Theiler, Walk & Trattner (2013) created a software component to go along with Ley et al.’s (2014) model to serve as a cloud-based framework called the Social Semantic Network and Services.
Marsick & Watkin’s (2001) Informal and Incidental Learning Model was adapted with Cseh. They created the model in 1990 “rooted in the thinking of John Dewey (1938), Argyris and Schon (1974, 1978), and Merzirow (1991)” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 28). The circular model (Figure 1) depicts the thought process of how an individual approaches any given situation or encounter. With each new interaction, the person would reflect on previous experiences to assess the current situation as well as flow back and forth between the entire sense-making process and even revisit and question earlier understandings” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 29).

Figure 1 Marsick & Watkin’s Informal and Incidental Learning Model

This researcher believes that this model aligns with Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory as it allows the individual to reflect and gauge the extent of her zone of proximal development (ZPD) and when she needs to seek assistance from a more knowledgeable other (MKO).

de Laat & Schreurs (2013) mapped out the informal learning networks by using a learning analytics methodology that addressed three questions: (a.) Who is talking to whom?, (b.) What are they talking about?, and (c.) Why are they talking as they do? They also created a Networks Analysis Tool (NAT) where participants could create a profile page and list areas of
informal learning topics they would be interested in connecting with others. If someone in their group, department, organization, or around the world has any expertise in those particular areas, they can connect with that individual (de Laat & Schreurs, 2013). de Laat & Schreurs’ (2013) empirical base study was inspired by Homan’s (2006) research methodology called ‘change mirror’ where successful organizations recognize the relationship between nurturing the informal learning opportunities, mapping them with a software, and then using that information to maximize learning. Homan (2006) called this ‘informal organization’. When participants were asked why they would be inclined to use the software, the primary response was to save time and energy as there is no need to reinvent the wheel. de Laat & Schreurs (2013) appreciated the fruit of their labor; however, admitted that mapping out the networks to the degree that they did was too time-consuming. de Laat & Schreurs (2013) recognized the importance of creating a tool to actually track informal learning to maximize its potential.

Deakin Crick, Broadfoot, & Claxton, 2004 created the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI), which is an online self-report questionnaire that targets seven empirically derived dimensions where learners answer questions with regard to learning power based solely on the participant’s own experience within their specific context. The assessment tool addresses the complexity of learning by focusing on the following domains: changing and learning, critical curiosity, meaning making, dependence and fragility, creativity, learning relationships, and strategic awareness. ELLI is “designed to enable learners to become aware of their own learning power and to turn diagnosis into strategies for improvement” (Deakin Crick, Haigney, Huang, Coburn, & Goldspink, 2013, p. 2255).

Creating a collegial, trusting workplace creates an opportune learning environment for individuals as well as groups to actively engage in and benefit from formal and informal learning
opportunities; however, that does not guarantee that individuals, teams, or the organization will reap the benefits of such learning. To ensure that this is the case, individuals are encouraged to document, track, and measure value added as part of the learning cycle.

Conclusion

With the global market ever-changing, it is apparent that individuals need to reinvent themselves, adapt to change, be flexible, and work collaboratively with others in an attempt to stay current, continually build their knowledge and skills, and remain marketable (Conlon, 2004; Hunter, 2014). Organizations are encouraged to offer a balance of formal and informal professional development opportunities to their employees (Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Conlon, 2004; Green, 2009). Now, more than ever, there is a need for individuals to demonstrate lifelong learning skills by actively participating in authentic learning experiences with their colleagues, keeping in mind that the quality of interactions are more important than the quantity of such engagements (Billett, 2004; Glazier, 2004; Warhurst, 2006).

It is up to the individual if, to what extent, and how much she engages in informal and incidental learning (Noe, Tews & Marand, 2003). Informal and incidental learning can be triggered by a variety of reasons; for example, a need for survival in the case of health care patients (Keeping & English, 2001; Papen, 2012), a differing of viewpoints that has created a roadblock amongst team members that affects the teaching and learning in the classroom (Glazier, 2004), or an intrinsic desire inspired by a passion to learn a new genre of music or how to play a musical instrument (Green, 2009). Recent studies have questioned whether or not individuals who embrace the informal and incidental learning mindset possess unique characteristics in comparison to others (Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2003; Lai, Wu, & Li, 2011) and if so, how can such qualities be identified and celebrated.
Every interaction provides learning opportunities and growth for the participants involved and quality interactions between individuals superseded the quantity of interactions on all accounts (Billett, 2004; Glazier, 2004; Warhurst, 2006). de Laat & Schreurs (2013) gave an optimistic perspective stating that individuals can reap the benefits from both weak and strong relationships and connections with regard to informal learning as every moment offers a learning moment.

Just the notion of being on a team does not guarantee that each member of that team is a team player (Warhurst, 2006). It is crucial to establish and maintain a collegial, trusting culture amongst team members and for team members to realize that it is up to each of them to embrace such mindset. Each individual is responsible to take an active role in seeking, participating in and benefitting from informal and incidental learning opportunities (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Warhurst, 2006). Informal adult learning can support or serve as an obstacle to one’s learning and growth; however, the decision is left up to the learner as she is in control of whether or not to partake in such experiences (Warhurst, 2008). Not all teams are considered equal; there are close-knit teams that interact and work collaboratively and disjointed teams that divide and conquer rarely crossing one another’s paths (Boud & Middleton, 2003). Cooperation is the key to make a difference, which in turn would promote the notion of creating and nurturing a collegial, trusting culture among team members (Vanderline & Braak 2010).

Although there may be a variety of terms and definitions used to describe informal, incidental, or workplace learning, one does not argue that there is potential in using it as a valid method of adult learning in any given situation to enhance one’s knowledge, skills, and/or conceptual understanding. The question remains what is the best way to document, track, monitor, and measure the benefits of such a learning method as many have stated that informal
learning is challenging to identify and measure, (Lai, Wu, & Li, 2011) as well as time-consuming to do so (de Laat & Schreurs 2013).
Chapter III: Methodology & Approach

Introduction

The purpose of this doctoral thesis was to explore informal adult learning in the workplace as a potentially untapped mode of professional development in organizations and in specific, the K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan in which this researcher has been and still is currently employed at for the past sixteen academic years. The study provided a platform for the participants, who are in leadership positions in the organization, to share their reflections from their learning experiences during a critical transition time in their professional careers. The findings of this study was based on the participants’ in-depth, personal insiders’ perspective as to how a combination of formal and informal learning opportunities, with an emphasis on informal adult learning, enhanced individuals’ knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding to broaden the employees’ repertoire in the workplace context.

The overall research question guiding this inquiry was: What are the experiences of newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan; and how do they make sense of informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace?

This researcher chose to use Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory as the theoretical framework. This theory has a sociocultural perspective that emphasizes the importance of interactions in promoting cognitive development. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory concentrates on the fact that all development is derived from the individuals’ interactions with their social environments. It has two main principles: the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2014). The MKO could be an adult, a more-abled peer
or even a software program that interacts with the learner to scaffold her learning experiences to reach a higher ability level. The MKO is intertwined with the ZPD concept whereas the ZPD refers to what a learner can do independently without support and where scaffolding and support are needed for a learner to progress and gain more skills, knowledge, and conceptual understanding.

**Research Paradigm and Design**

This research focus was conducted as a qualitative study from a constructivist-interpretivist approach because the constructivist-interpretivist position enabled this researcher to empower the participants as co-creators who were deeply involved in constructing meaning from soul-searching and concentrated reflection in order to unveil what is hidden beneath the surface and brought to light (Ponterotto, 2005). Throughout the three semi-structured interviews, this researcher and participants engaged in intense, thought-provoking, reflective dialogue to analyze the conceptualized construction of meaning of how they activated informal adult learning during their pivotal career transition to their newly-appointed leadership roles. The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm of inquiry positioned this researcher so that she viewed this research from an idiographic and emic point of view taking into account that individuals are unique in and unto themselves and complex in nature; and the research findings are distinct to the individuals involved in this particular study as it is based on their diverse perspectives and interpretations (Ponterotto, 2005).

**Research Tradition**

As a scholar-practitioner, this researcher chose the qualitative tradition of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the best fit for the aforementioned research focus because “it is consistent with the epistemological position” of this study’s research question (Smith,
Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 46) where this researcher wanted to gain a better understanding of how individuals made sense of their firsthand experiences with informal adult learning in the workplace during a critical transition time in their careers as educational leaders. The double hermeneutics allowed this researcher, especially as an insider participant, to live vicariously through the participants’ experiences and then take it one step further by making sense of the participants’ sense-making of their accounts of “engaging with the world” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 8). “IPA aims to understand the lived experience of a conscious, situated, embodied being-in-the-world, where “the world” is understood through a respondent’s involvement in it” (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011, p. 330).

IPA philosophical underpinnings and overview. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) offers scholar-practitioners the chance to glean insight into when their participants’ ordinary daily experiences provide them with extraordinary life-changing learning opportunities (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In-depth reflection during the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews enabled the participants to tease out what makes these circumstances so unique and fulfilling (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This researcher purposefully chose to conduct an IPA study as providing ample time for participants to reflect, ponder, and share their sense-making process during the interview process was the key to gaining an astute perspective that mutually benefited both the interviewee and interviewer.

In the mid 90’s, “IPA was specifically developed by Jonathan Smith (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995) to allow rigorous exploration of idiographic subjective experiences and, more specifically, social cognitions” (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 215). Smith (2004) did not take full credit for coming up with the three individual key terms used in the name of the theoretical framework he developed, but he did give himself credit for stringing them together to
give essence to the meaning of what an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis entails. IPA was originally renowned for a qualitative approach to conducting research primarily in the field of psychology; however, it is now acknowledged as a revered qualitative approach in a growing number of research fields, one of which is in the area of education (Smith, 2004) in which this particular study was conducted in.

“IPA can be described as having three broad elements. It represents an epistemological position, offers a set of guidelines for conducting research, and describes a corpus of empirical research” (Smith, 2004, p. 40). Smith (2010) emphasized the importance of the participant and researcher working their way through the interpretation of the participant’s lived experiences ensuring that based on Husserl’s ‘phenomenological method’ of bracketing, the researcher set aside any preconceived notions she may have based on her values, judgments, thoughts, ideas, etc. from her unique lived experiences in relation to the world. Other researchers mirror that sentiment and revere the researcher reflexivity process as a key validity procedure (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

“IPA clearly has theoretical underpinnings in phenomenology and hermeneutics” (Smith, 2010, p. 187). It “is informed by Heidegger’s phenomenology, and is consistent with a ‘contextualist’ position” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 117). According to Shaw (2011), IPA provides scholar-practitioners the opportunity to capture the essence of their participants’ reflecting and reacting to life experiences, as according to Heidegger, they have been thrown into these situations in the world and hence need to keep in mind that these experiences are bound in culture and context in which the participants have experienced them at that particular timeframe.
Key Research Components Overview

**Research site.** The study was conducted at this researcher’s current place of employment, which is a K-12, non-profit, private, co-educational, bilingual (Arabic/English) educational institution that was established in 1981 in Amman, Jordan. This particular educational institution is renowned for being a pioneer school that welcomes research and strives to implement the highest international standards and practices. During the time that this study was conducted, there were approximately 1175 students enrolled at the school with 330 academic and support members of staff. The teacher/student ratio was 1:6. Based on the Board of Trustees’ desire to keep those in leadership roles abreast to what is taking place in the classroom, this study’s five participants have continued to teach in their areas of expertise whilst carrying out their leadership roles and responsibilities, as teaching and learning are the main priorities at this educational institution.

This site was selected to conduct the study due to its recent restructuring of the Executive Leadership, Leadership, and Extended Management Teams. The restructuring lent itself to conducting an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study to explore informal adult learning through the eyes of newly, internally-promoted educators transitioning to leadership roles as a potentially untapped mode of professional development in organizations.

**Research focus development.** As this researcher was completing the coursework for the doctoral program, her problem of practice with regard to informal learning continually developed over the past three years as she transitioned from Head of Kindergarten to K-12 Assistant Principal (Development). The problem of practice started out as how early childhood educators could maximize the use of informal learning during unstructured, transition time to enhance their
students’ language acquisition in the bilingual setting. Then the problem of practice shifted when the educational institution restructured the Leadership and Extended Management Team.

**Required approval.** This researcher sent a formal letter to the Principal of the institution in which the study was proposed to be conducted to obtain permission to carry out the suggested study. After obtaining written approval, this researcher requested approval from the Northeastern University (NEU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study with human participants. In preparation for conducting research, this researcher completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research training course and obtained a certificate verifying successful completion of such training. Once NEU IRB was granted, this researcher officially recruited participants.

**IPA Participants.** Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) recommend a sample size of three to six participants as it will give the researcher enough data to compare and contrast and the small sample size will not overwhelm her with too much data as would a larger sample size.

**Study participants.** Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. To specifically target relevant participants that fell within the realm of the aforementioned identified research focus, this researcher invited six individuals via formal invitation letter (Appendix A) to participate in the study with the anticipation of all six agreeing to do so. The invitation letter that included the purpose of the study and the research question was sent via internal school mail. Five of the six participants agreed to participate in the study. All participants that were targeted had a shared experience of recently transitioning to a higher level leadership role as either Leadership or Extended Management Team Members where during interviews they were encouraged to describe and make sense of their firsthand use of informal adult learning during this critical time in their careers. In August 2016, the participants assumed
their new roles that required substantially more responsibilities in comparison to their previous roles and responsibilities. This new scenario created a necessity for the participants to learn new knowledge and skills at an exponential rate without having access to immediate, long-term, formal professional development. This researcher thought this was the perfect opportunity to conduct a study with regard to informal learning as organizations do not normally restructure the Leadership and Extended Management Team on a regular basis. The timely restructuring created a conducive environment for this study to take place. The participants’ roles as leaders of departments, school divisions, and whole school responsibilities enabled them to share great insight into how their experiences with informal learning could potentially be cascaded down to others within the educational institution.

**Insider participant.** This researcher could be considered an insider participant as she, too, was internally-promoted from a Leadership Team Member role to an Executive Leadership Team Member role during the same timeframe. This kinship served as an advantage rather than a limitation as there was a shared understanding of the new role expectations at such a dynamic institution in which all participants and the researcher work. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, this researcher, as an insider, logged her reflections via jotting (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and memoing as they are key components of qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Groenewald, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Prior to conducting any interviews, this researcher answered all interview questions as reflective memos, so as to easily recognize and bracket off her experiences versus the participants.

**Trustworthiness.** Throughout the data collection and analysis process, this researcher vowed to establish, maintain, and nurture the participant/researcher relationship by conducting a study with the highest level of integrity and trustworthiness by implementing both external and
internal validation strategies. Participants’ identities were protected. Confidentiality was maintained by the use of pseudonyms. This researcher has no supervisory duties over any of the participants, so no one felt intimidated or concerned that their participation in the study would have any negative repercussions whatsoever. Interview transcript reliability was achieved as the interviews were audio-recorded and a professional transcription service, Rev.com, was hired to transcribe all transcripts (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The researcher recruited a critical friend to team code transcripts to ensure consistency in coding and interpreting the data collected (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The critical friend also assumed the role as peer reviewer as a validity measure (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This researcher used thick, rich descriptive text (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) during the data analysis process to ensure that the participants’ reflections of shared experiences were vividly detailed, as IPA is the platform for participant voices to be heard (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). During the second and final interviews, participants were given an opportunity for member checking to confirm accuracy or clarify their intended message (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Roberts, 2010; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012; Creswell, 2013). During the analysis process, this researcher triangulated the data collected to corroborate the evidence from the multiple participants obtained from the interview questions and use of self-selected artifacts that were used as springboard discussion starters for participants to verbalize their most memorable informal adult learning interactions with a more knowledgeable other (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Roberts, 2010; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012; Creswell, 2013).

**Data collection.** Three forms of qualitative data were collected to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this research: interviews, artifacts, and jotting and memoing.
Interviews. Semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted as they have been deemed the preferred means of collecting IPA data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). During such interviews, this researcher assumed the role as listener, allowing the participant ample opportunities to share her insight as the participant is the expert of her lived experiences. This researcher trained herself to allow moments of silence, which permitted the participant to collect her train of thought and go deeper into interpreting the root of her experience. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) summed up the essence of the in-depth interview very well when they referred to it as “a conversation with a purpose” (p. 57) where participants are given the chance to “speak freely and reflectively” (p. 56). This scholar-practitioner strived to meet this data rich requirement by creating a collegially intimate researcher-participant working relationship that was conducive for these interactions to be the most beneficial for both parties. During such interviews, this researcher promised to protect the participant’s human rights and informed the participant that at any given time throughout the research process, the participant had the right to withdraw from the study. Participants determined when and where they were interviewed in an effort to set a relaxed tone for the interviews in the most comfortable setting according to each individual’s needs. Although all participants speak multiple languages, all written and verbal forms of communication with regard to this study was conducted in English as all participants were proficient in English, hence there was no need for translation.

This researcher employed a three-interview format to collect and verify data. Interview protocols (Appendices C and D) that consisted of open-ended questions, prompts, and probes were prepared prior to conducting the interviews (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Prior to the first official interview, this researcher piloted the interview questions with a colleague who was
not included in the study as a participant to gain a better understanding of the flow of the questions and to anticipate any potential gaps. After the pilot, the protocols were updated accordingly. The protocols served to guide, but not limit, the potential path the interviews took given the engaged dialogued between participant and researcher. At the beginning of each interview, this researcher reiterated that the participant had the right to decline to answer any question she felt uncomfortable with. Rev.com was hired to transcribe all interview transcripts.

The first interview was brief as its main purpose was to establish and build researcher/participant rapport, acquire verbal and written informed consent (Appendix B), and collect background demographic data. Since the research focus revolved around social interactions and communication between co-workers, this researcher opted to collect and include language proficiency data as well because the participants work in a bilingual community where they interact with individuals who possess varying proficiencies of English and Arabic as well as several other languages, such as French and Spanish. It was to the researcher’s advantage to spend quality time during the first interview to build a rapport with each interviewee as it set the tone and flow of the interactions that followed (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis offered the researcher an opportunity to develop a very close working relationship with a small number of participants (Smith, 2004 & 2010, Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). This intimate relationship allowed the researcher to live vicariously through the participant’s experience and then take it to a more conceptual understanding while collecting and analyzing data through the participant’s sense-making process of that lived experience. The IPA researcher positioned herself in the mindset that IPA’s inductive procedures focus emphasized that the investigation
stems from and develops through the participant's perspective (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011).

Sixty to ninety minutes were allocated for the second interview where this researcher delved into the research question and sub-questions that were rooted in the Sociocultural Theory coupled with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Approach. The researcher noted that the participants were relaxed and candid during the second interviews, which took place seven months after they had assumed their more demanding leadership roles. Their recounts of how challenging the transition phase to their new positions were vivid and reflective; however, still had the feeling of being raw and work in progress.

During the second and third interviews, this researcher shared the coded transcripts and initial findings of the previous interviews and asked the participants to validate through member checking that all documentation was accurate (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Roberts, 2010; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012; Creswell, 2013).

The third and final interview was also dedicated for the interviewer or interviewee to ask any follow-up questions. The researcher reminded participants that their identities will remain anonymous as a pseudonym was assigned to each of them. All five participants confirmed that they were satisfied with the content and how it would be used in the study.

_Artifacts._ Prior to conducting the second interview, this researcher encouraged participants to bring an artifact to the interview that she felt represented a workplace learning interaction she had engaged in to serve as a conversation starter during the interview. Photographs were not taken; however, participants described their artifacts during the interviews, which was included in the transcript as part of the data collected and referenced in the study itself.
The participants’ recounts of their lived experiences provided a natural segue for this researcher to delve into the research question and sub-questions that were rooted in Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory coupled with the IPA approach.

**Jotting and memoing.** Throughout the data collection and analysis process, this researcher, as an insider, employed at the study site who had also been newly, internally-promoted from a Leadership to an Executive Leadership Team Member role, logged her own reflections via jotting (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and memoing into a reflexive journal as they are key components of qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Groenewald, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This researcher kept in mind that although she is an insider, given her recent promotion at the same educational institution, she as well as each of her participant’s experiences are bound in culture and context in which each individual has unique interpretations based on their historical backgrounds, perspectives, and how each person embraces and approaches each workplace learning opportunity (Shaw, 2011). This researcher’s reflexive anecdotal notes served as an informal audit trail that was used as a sounding board, informal measurement gauge, and guide for contemplation and redirection throughout the data collection and analysis process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Such notes also assisted this researcher in bracketing off her potential biases, assumptions, and beliefs. A sample of excerpts from this researcher’s reflexive journal are found below in Table 1.

**Table 1 Excerpts from Researcher’s Reflexive Journal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Discussion Topic</strong></th>
<th><strong>Quote from Participant</strong></th>
<th><strong>Researcher’s Anecdotal Note</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you say that the school invests in professional development (PD) and supports colleagues who</td>
<td>Yeah, there is a lot of emphasis on professional development, but I think it’s all about your attitude towards learning. So I think you have both attitudes. I think it’s about taking initiative. So sitting back or</td>
<td>I wonder if it is regardless whether or not an organization offers a wide or a minimal variety of PD, it is all up to the individual to actively seek growth and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Additional Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aspire to learn new things?</td>
<td>staying under the radar, you might not get as much professional development as someone who is actively willing to or nagging or going out to find ways to get professional development (Candi).</td>
<td>I am also curious about how much positive psychology and intrinsic motivation come into play when an organization has the same individuals taking advantage of professional development opportunities while others adamantly refrain from participating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please share what your main priority was when taking on your new leadership role and what you did to put your goal into action.</td>
<td>I showed up. I was present in every sense of the word. I was everywhere. I needed staff, parents and children to know I was there. So for a great deal of the first term, I rarely sat in my office. I was everywhere. It is all about building relationships and trustworthiness (Rosie).</td>
<td>Consistent, quality time invested in creating a positive work culture sets the tone for individual, team and organization success. Being present is a constant challenge in today’s technologically advanced world. How can organizations promote the concept of everyone “being present” when deadlines are looming and expectations are escalating to the highest level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your views about the benefits of workplace learning?</td>
<td>I think that workplace learning is crucial. The second you stop learning, is the second you should just give up. Really, just why bother? If you're not learning something new, then you've lost the passion to better your practice and that's not fair for yourself, and not fair for your learners, and not fair for your colleagues who will continue to push themselves while you leave yourself behind (Jayne).</td>
<td>How can one’s desire to participate in workplace learning be used to inspire others to do the same?  How can individuals or department teams raise awareness as to the benefits of workplace learning through both their trial and error efforts as well as their celebratory advances in areas they set out to improve in?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data storage.** Only the researcher and the interview transcriptionist had access to the data to ensure confidentiality. Interviews were digitally recorded on this researcher’s Samsung Voice Recorder app. Two digital voice recorders were purchased as a back-up if the smart
phone option failed at any time. All electronic data was securely stored on the researcher’s computer with password protection with a back-up saved on two separate external hard drives. All printed or handwritten data and notes were securely stored in the researcher’s home office. If the study is featured in any future publications, the participants’ identities will continue to be protected.

**Data analysis.** Snelgrove (2014) believed “that the aim of the IPA researcher is not to gain a mirror image, but to offer a believable and confident representation of participants’ experiences, supported by meaningful data and well qualified themes” (p. 24). Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) warn novice researchers not to get bogged down in being too descriptive when presenting their analysis as IPA offers them an opportunity to delve into the realm of the participant’s world peeling back and unearthing the multi-layers of interpretation. “…IPA research aims to go a little further than description of this experience. This is only partly because IPA researchers will recognize the obvious problems inherent in identifying a point where description ends and interpretation begins” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 113).

**Step-by-step process.** Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014) “advise interweaving data collection and analysis from the very start” (p. 70) as these two entities should not be treated independently. “For novice, data analysis is probably the most mysterious aspect of qualitative research” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 95). This researcher experienced the puzzling complexity of data analysis firsthand while implementing Smith, Flowers, & Larkin’s (2009) six step data analysis process (Figure 2) for novice scholar practitioners.
**Figure 2 Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) Six Step Data Analysis Guide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Read and re-read transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Initial noting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Deconstruct the transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Identify themes (First Cycle and Second Cycle Coding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Read the next transcript (Repeat until all transcripts have been read. Then move to Step 6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>Identify patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step one: read and re-read transcript.** In Step One of Smith, Flowers, & Larkin’s (2009) recommended guidelines, the researcher is encouraged to read and re-read the transcript multiple times while listening to the audio-recording in order to become one with the transcript content. Replaying the audio-recording of the interviews over and over again allowed this researcher to relive the interviews and tune into the inflection of the participant’s voice. During this process, this researcher gained a better understanding of the rhythm and flow of the interview as well as was able to identify when the participants felt most comfortable to share broad, surface level details or progress to much deeper, richer recounts of their lived experiences.

**Step two: initial noting.** Step Two of the Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) analysis process involves the initial noting stage which will require the researcher to spend a substantial amount of quality time making lengthy, descriptive notes on the transcript that have a phenomenological focus. It is recommended that the researcher analyze each interview thoroughly and completely before moving onto analyzing the next transcript. It is also recommended that immediately following an interview and while listening to the audio-recording while simultaneously reading through the transcript, it is advised for the researcher to record any thoughts, recollections, or notes as a form of jotting or memoing in a side reflexive journal or in an electronic format while the ideas are fresh and raw, so that the researcher can
bracket off her thoughts and ensure that they will not be lost when the analysis process begins (Groenewald, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Shaw, 2011; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). As aforementioned, this researcher, as an insider participant, took this step seriously and kept a journal with her at all times to record her notes.

**Step three: deconstruct the transcript.** In Step Three, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) challenge the researcher to deconstruct the actual transcript from working with the whole to working with the notes as parts to develop emergent themes, which represents one component of the hermeneutic cycle. This process permitted this researcher to drift from the participant’s direct thoughts and reflections to call upon her own interpretations of such lived experience, so that a collaborative effort was exerted at this stage of the analysis process. Breaking down the transcript enabled this researcher to dissect chunks of rich, descriptive text and zoom in on profound details that may have gone unnoticed if left intact.

**Step four: themes.** Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) suggest that the researcher search for connections across emergent themes in Step Four of the analysis process. They offer several examples of how other researchers have carried out this step in the process; however, encourage the researcher to devise a process that she is most comfortable with and to be innovative in how such connections are identified, organized, and mapped. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) recommend that once the researcher has devised a process for this step, she should keep notes in her research journal of her preferred analysis process and possibly create a graphic representation of the themes identified for future reference. After each interview, this researcher verified, coded and analyzed transcripts by hand. Carrying out this process by hand was therapeutic as well as informative. This researcher created a color and symbol coding system that was implemented on all interview transcripts. The margins of the transcripts were filled with notes.
Once this researcher was satisfied with the identification with the themes, NVIVO 11 software was used to do the same electronically.

**First cycle coding.** This researcher implemented In Vivo coding as the first cycle coding method as this method is typically used in “studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 74). This researcher chose to conduct an IPA study, so as to give the participants the freedom to share their insight with regard to workplace learning in the context of their recent promotion in the K-12 educational institutional. In Vivo coding, also known as Verbatim coding, features the participant’s key words and phrases as the codes, which brings their voice to the forefront of the data analysis. This allowed this researcher to go beyond the superficial layer of the words to a higher level of interpretation of how the participants’ chosen dialogue aligned with their reflection of their lived workplace learning experiences. This researcher recruited a critical friend to team code the first couple of transcripts as “Team coding not only aids definitional clarity but also is a good reliability check” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p.84).

**Second cycle coding.** Pattern codes were used as the second cycle of coding in this study. Being a novice scholar-practitioner, this researcher took Smith, Flowers, & Larkin’s (2009) advice to regard the analytic process as “multi-directional” (p. 81) and identify patterns across the data as a “creative task” at a “theoretical level” (p. 101). This researcher celebrated the uniqueness of each participant’s lived experience as well as the commonalities they shared with their colleagues who were also partaking in this study.

**Step five: next transcript.** As mentioned before, each interview transcript should be thoroughly analyzed before moving onto the next interview transcript. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) emphasize this point by dedicating Step Five to moving to the next case. They reiterate
the importance of the researcher completely clearing her mind of the previous interview transcript before moving onto analyzing the next one. Once again, the researcher is reminded to bracket off what she has recently added to her repertoire of lived experiences via the previous participant’s interpretations and move on with a clean slate to the next participant’s interview transcript.

*Step six: patterns.* Once all interview transcripts have been individually analyzed, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) recommend that the researcher look for patterns across cases as Step Six of the analysis process. They refer to this stage of the process as a creative task that should be approached at a theoretical level. A researcher should strive to produce an analysis that contains a “dual quality- pointing to ways in which participants represent unique idiosyncratic instances but also shared higher order qualities” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 101). Once again Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) acknowledge developmentally-appropriate novice versus experienced researcher expectations with regard to the three levels of interpretation. They expect the novice researcher to be working on the first level of interpretation whereas the experienced researcher would be expected to be mastering the third level of interpretation. Each level of interpretation is intended to take the study to a deeper, more micro-textural analysis that only experience can prepare the researcher to methodically carry out with precision and expertise.

After multiple passes through the transcripts, this researcher mapped out her plan of action. With the noting, coding and analysis of each transcript, she grew closer and closer to her data by gaining more experience and a deeper understanding of the hidden content it entailed. The process ebbed and flowed from examining the parts to a more holistic view, back to the parts and then on a higher level to make connections within a transcript, as well as connections between transcripts (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It took an extensive amount of time and
effort to pick up on the nuances of some of the patterns. While some patterns clearly identified themselves due to repeated frequency over multiple transcripts, others were elusive to this novice scholar-practitioner. This part of the analysis process required this researcher to approach the transcripts at a variety of angles with immense scrutiny over an extended period of time.

**Presentation of findings.** Smith (2004) acknowledged that, despite the debate of whether or not IPA is too lenient or prescriptive, “One cannot do good qualitative research by following a cookbook” (p. 40). Over the years, Smith (2004) and Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) have provided suggested guidelines in conducting IPA studies; however, they pointed out that these are only suggestions. IPA offers the researcher the flexibility to use the framework as she sees fit; however, she can go a step further stretching the boundaries to work closely with her participants to analyze and interpret their understandings of such sense-making processes to a higher level given the context in which they experienced it (Smith, 2004). An IPA study involves a double hermeneutic research approach where the participant shares her experience with the researcher and during the process the participant relives and tries to make sense of such experience while the researcher tries to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of her experience all while the researcher brackets off her intuitions, values, beliefs and own lived experiences (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is extremely useful to create a visual of one’s data, but such visuals must be translated into a comprehensible document that reflects the interactions between the researcher and participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the process, this researcher kept in mind that it was pertinent to handle the data in an ethically-appropriate manner so as to honor the study participants’ voices and run a combination of validation strategies to ensure that the findings of the data analysis were accurate (Roberts, 2010). When writing the interview analysis, this
researcher kept in mind to “write smart” and not “dumb down” the analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 327), so as to write in a scholarly manner; however, not make it too complicated.

“IPA studies usually deal with significant existential issues of a considerable moment to the participants and the researchers. Thus many are about significant life transforming or life threatening events, conditions or decisions” (Smith, 2004, p. 49). Larkin, Watts, & Clifton (2006) summed IPA up perfectly when they wrote,

IPA’s interpretative component contextualizes these claims within their cultural and physical environments, and then attempts to make sense of the mutually constitutive relationship between ‘person’ and ‘world’ from within a psychological framework (e.g., ‘What does this mean for this person, in this context?’) (p. 117).

It is up to the researcher to ensure that the participants’ lived experiences are reported on and the findings are presented in a socially impartial manner that does justice to the participants as well as adds value to the existing studies in that field. During the data analysis process, this researcher managed to achieve this where she celebrated dual qualities of the participants’ lived experiences where each were unique in their own right, yet commonalities amongst them were identified (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Chapter IV has been dedicated to sharing the findings of this study.
Chapter IV: Findings

The ever-changing demands in the workplace require employees to evolve and grow as tasks and responsibilities present themselves. Individuals have the mounting obligation to not only carry out their roles to the highest standard, but they are also expected to share their institutional knowledge with their colleagues and successors in an efficient manner so that growth, productivity, and momentum are optimized at the team and organizational levels.

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was to explore the informal adult learning experiences of participants who had been recently, internally promoted to more demanding leadership roles at a K-12, private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual (Arabic/English) school in Amman, Jordan. Internally-promoted participants were selected for this study as they were already familiar with the school’s strategic plan, guiding statements, academic and co-curricular programs on offer, school culture and dynamics, as well as being acquainted with Jordan as a country and the Middle East region in general. By only concentrating on internally-promoted participants, their shared experience allowed them to focus on transitioning within a familiar organization as opposed to newly-hired participants having a settling in phase to the country, region, and school climate while transitioning into their leadership roles.

Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theoretical Framework’s two main principles of the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) along with the constructivist-interpretivist approach proved to be the best fit, from this researcher’s perspective, for conducting this IPA study. Through in-depth, reflective conversations, the participants shared their perceptions on whether they considered being internally promoted versus externally hired as an advantage or hindrance. They also identified colleagues who they relied on during
this critical transition time in their careers and were able to share how they too supported their colleagues’ development. Another element of this study was for participants to share their firsthand views on how formal and informal learning opportunities are interlinked in the workplace context and used to enhance theirs and their colleagues’ know-how.

**Research Question**

The research question guiding this inquiry was: What are the experiences of newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan; and how do they make sense of informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace to enhance learning?

**Study Participant Profiles**

Through purposive sampling, three females and two males agreed to participant as recently, internally-promoted Leadership or Extended Management Team Members in this study. They had a range of nine to twenty-two years of experience in the field of education with six to fifteen of those years being at the existing educational institution in which this study was conducted. Between them they speak eight different languages to varying degrees of proficiency. All participants were originally hired as classroom teachers and worked their way into leadership roles, however, it is noteworthy to mention that they still have teaching assignments in addition to their Leadership or Extended Management Team status.

**Candi.** Candi is a Jordanian who was born and raised in Jordan. Arabic is her mother tongue. She is proficient in English and considers herself to be at beginner level in French, Italian, and Japanese. Candi holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature, a Masters in International Hospitality and Tourism Leadership, an Associate Degree in Child
Development and is currently working on a second Masters in Education. Candi graduated from the K-12 educational institution in which she has currently worked at for the past six academic years. She has three additional years of experience in the field of education from two other local, private schools. Candi is a member of the Extended Management Team where her remit has a focus on overseeing the implementation of the Grades 6-10 academic program. She is also a Middle Years School English language teacher.

Dave. Dave was born and raised in the United Kingdom. He is British. English is his mother tongue. He is at intermediate level with Arabic and beginner in French. He holds a Bachelor of Science First Class in Geography and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education. Dave has twelve years teaching experience; two in the UK and ten at his current place of employment. He has a teaching responsibility in Grades 11 and 12. Dave is a member of the Leadership Team with whole school roles with regard to international accreditation as well as student achievement and wellbeing. He is also the K-12 Designated Safeguarding Officer.

Jayne. Jayne was born and raised in Jordan. She holds dual citizenships: Jordanian and Canadian. Arabic is her mother tongue, and she is proficient in English. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a Post Graduate Diploma in Dyslexia and Literacy, and a Masters in Educational Leadership. Jayne has a total of thirteen years of experience in the field of education: eleven at her current workplace and two from another local, private school in Amman. She is a member of the Leadership Team and holds a whole school role as the Director of the Additional Educational Needs Department where she also teaches in the department as a specialist.

Logan. Logan is a Jordanian who was born and raised in Jordan. Arabic is his mother tongue. Logan possesses varying degrees of proficiency in five additional languages; he is fluent
in English, intermediate in German, and can manage quite well in Spanish, French and Hebrew. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theater and Professional Practice and a Post Graduate Diploma in Classical Acting. He is currently working on a Masters in Education. Logan has twelve years of experience in the field of education all of which were in Jordan: nine at the current educational institution, two at another local, private school, and one year at a local cultural center. He is a member of the Extended Management Team where his responsibilities revolve around Grades 9 and 10 student wellbeing and student council. Logan is also a Grade 8 drama specialist.

**Rosie.** Rosie was born and raised in the United States of America. She has dual citizenships: American and Jordanian. English is her mother tongue. She is proficient in spoken Arabic and is a beginner in Spanish. Rosie had the most experience in the field of education among the participants where fifteen of her twenty-two years of experience were at her current workplace. The other seven years of experience were from another local, private school in Jordan. Rosie holds a Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Science with dual certification in K-6 Elementary and K-12 Special Education. She also has a Masters in Multidisciplinary Approaches to Learning. She aspires to pursue a doctorate in the near future. Rosie is a member of the Extended Management Team. She is responsible for the Kindergarten-Grade 5 as Director of the English Program and Student Wellbeing. She also has a K-12 role as Deputy Director of Wellbeing. Her teaching commitment is in the Primary School.

Table 2 features a summary of the study participants demographics and language proficiency levels.
### Table 2 Study Participants Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Tertiary Degrees</th>
<th>Nationality/Nationalities</th>
<th>Language(s) Proficiency</th>
<th># of Yrs at Current Educational Institution</th>
<th># of Yrs at Other Educational Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candi</td>
<td>-Bachelors -Masters -Associates -Working on second Masters</td>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>Arabic: mother tongue</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English: fluent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>French, Italian &amp; Japanese: beginner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>-Bachelors -Post Graduate Certificate of Education</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>English: mother tongue</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic: intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>French: beginner speaking &amp; reading, but does not write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayne</td>
<td>-Bachelors -Post Graduate Diploma -Masters</td>
<td>Jordanian/Canadian</td>
<td>Arabic: mother tongue</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English: fluent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>-Bachelors -Post Graduate Diploma -Working on Masters</td>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>Arabic: mother tongue</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English: fluent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>German: intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>French &amp; Spanish: intermediate in reading, beginner in speaking &amp; writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hebrew: intermediate in speaking, beginner in reading, but does not write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>-Bachelors with dual certification -Masters -Aspires to earn a Doctorate</td>
<td>American/Jordanian</td>
<td>English: mother tongue</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic: fluent in speaking, but does not read nor write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish: beginner in speaking, but does not read nor write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Artifacts

Although this researcher has had a mutually positive working relationship with the participants throughout their careers at the study site, encouraging them to bring artifacts to the second interview proved to be the perfect ice breaker to ease into a relaxed conversation about the research topic at hand. Four participants brought one artifact each and one participant chose to bring two items: one from a mentor and one from a colleague she herself had mentored the previous academic year. This researcher found it enlightening that the participant who brought two artifacts inadvertently through her explanation demonstrated how the role as a more knowledgeable other naturally shifts back and forth between individuals depending on the context of the interaction at a particular place and time.

The participants’ artifacts ranged from a keychain, daily planner, meeting notebook, color-coded sticky notes, a decorative graduation cap with tassel, and a jar filled with motivational quotes. These everyday objects served as the springboard to extraordinary revelations that were shared between the researcher and the study participants in the second interviews.

Logan shared that his ‘Keep Calm, I’m a Deputy Head’ keychain’s mangled state symbolized the way he felt during the transition time into his new leadership post.

I don't know if you can tell the edges of it have been scratched and dented quite severely. I stopped carrying it around because the keys themselves were mangling the actual plastic. In a sense, it's quite a poetic image of how I feel all of the time, what I consider the many things that I've gone through and what I need to remember and what I need just to go through like bruised, beaten, chunks ripped out, but I’m still there. I’m still hanging in there. I'm failing miserably at keeping
calm, but I try. I consciously decided to stop carrying the keychain on a daily basis in order to protect it from being completely destroyed, so that it could be preserved as a celebratory memorabilia from my line manager of my Extended Management Team appointment (Logan, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Jayne revealed that she had chosen her meeting notebook as her artifact as she felt that the weekly meetings that she attended with ten other leadership team members provided ample informal learning opportunities that have allowed her to develop in her leadership capacity. She went on to say that “…in a setting like the weekly meeting, everyone is learning from one another whilst working on common goals and objectives” (Jayne, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Dave explained that it was easy for him to select his artifact, the decorative graduation cap with tassel that normally sat upon his previous line manager’s office desk, as it served as a symbol of comfort that “rekindled all the work-related conversations we had over an extended period of time” (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017). During the interview, he reminisced about the long conversations he would have with his line manager while twirling the tassel around. He admitted that it had actually broken once and had to be mended, which was representative of some of the intense discussions he had had in that particular office.

Rosie brought two artifacts. One object was from her mentor. The other was from a person she had mentored in the past and had left a positive, lasting impression on that relationship and in turn the individual was mirroring that collegiality by presenting her with a token of her appreciate. When asked to share her first artifact, Rosie stated that she chose a small set of multi-colored sticky notes from one of her mentors as she says,
The person that gave me this is someone who I find has vision, has the ability to set short term and long term goals, even in the presence of the most stressful situation. That is an area that I feel I need to work on. As organized as I am, I find that I make lists and lists, but I still get to a point where I almost don't know where to begin. And this person has become someone that I look up to very much and it's sort of my hope for action for myself to be strategic in that manner and someone who is able to set short term and long term goals in such a strategic way. The post-it notes remind me of this person. Because the colors represent different aspects of the things that I have to cover, especially in my role because I wear so many hats in what I do. And every time I feel overwhelmed, that artifact is on my desk and it centers me. They serve as a safe haven. I look at them and I'm centered and I remember to break things up, I remember to chunk it through and I remember that I need to stop and pause and the colors remind me to sort of classify or prioritize what it is I need to do. And this is very significant for the role that I'm in (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Then Rosie was asked to describe how and why she chose her other artifact. She shared that in the past, she had mentored a member of her team who appreciated her positive energy and continued support. This particular colleague sensed that the new role that Rosie would be venturing into would be more demanding, so she presented her with a jar of inspirational quotes. …my colleague said that during every single interaction with her I had given inspiration to her, so she was giving it back to me in the form of a tangible object as she felt I was going into uncharted territory in terms of what I was doing.
Whenever I feel overwhelmed, I pull a quote from the jar to steer me back on course (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Candi shared that she chose her daily planner as her artifact as it has aided in her successful transition to her new leadership role that had a wide range of responsibilities. She always carried it with her during interactions with her line manager as well as her colleagues. Her daily planner symbolized the necessity to create an action plan and implement it rather than being overwhelmed and immobilized.

I wouldn't have survived without it. So basically I needed to plan everything because there's so much to do and I think it's helped me with my self-management skills and it's helped me become more productive. I think a lot of people can be busy all the time, but if you have a goal and you know what you need to get done, you're more productive in less time than just thinking of all the things you need to do (Candi, personal communication, March 21, 2017).

During the sharing time, the participants spoke with pride and conviction about their chosen artifacts and their importance. It was evident that they found comfort in these items and openly shared how they sought refuge in engaging in interactions with more-abled peers in order to seek guidance and support. As they spoke, this researcher could visualize the trust and collegial bond each of the participants had with the co-workers they were talking about.

**Role Transition Reflection**

It is interesting to note that four of the five participants described their transition experience to their new leadership role as a “steep learning curve” (Dave, Jayne, Logan, and Rosie, personal communication, March 2017). Candi referred to her transition as “a bit bumpy at
first, but smooth from thereon out” (personal communication, March 21, 2017). After discussion, Candi contributed this to the fact that she had a slight advantage over the other study participants as she had shadowed her line manager for an entire academic year prior to assuming the full leadership role and responsibilities.

Each participant confirmed that they had not been formally trained nor taken specific courses between the time they were appointed during spring 2016 and the time they assumed their new leadership roles in August 2016. They vividly described the first few months of this steep learning curve in similar ways, all emphasizing that they were expected to learn a lot in a short amount of time, all of which played out in real-time through trial and error and seeking the support of more knowledgeable others.

Logan stated that although he had the full support of his line manager and colleagues based on the previous years working with them and building a solid reputation, he felt it was a “baptism by fire” as he was required to learn a vast array of new skills simultaneously while carrying out his new role as a member of the Extended Management Team (personal communication, March 20, 2017). Logan admitted that he questioned himself during the early transition days as to why he had ventured into a leadership role. “What had I gotten myself into was the pre-eminent feeling or idea at that time, but also there were glimmers of hope that I was actually doing something right” (Logan, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Rosie described her first few months of her leadership role as sinking and swimming multiple times a day for weeks on end.

Really it was exactly just that. There was sometimes you felt like I’ve got this and then it was almost like you jinxed yourself because then you were drowning again and that's how I felt. That's exactly how I felt. I still sink and swim, but I sink and
swim less, and I might sink for a less period of time then I did before (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Dave noted that it was downright manic in the beginning where he did not even realize the gravity of what all his roles and responsibilities entailed; however, he felt the weight of the world on his shoulders wanting to live up to his colleagues’ and students’ expectations (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

The first three months were crazy. Maybe it didn't sink in because I didn't even have time for it to sink in. It was just manic, day after day, just making sure that timetables were okay and getting part one done for the CIS re-accreditation. I was also teaching a new subject, ESS, but that's a different matter, that's a teaching responsibility. That was hugely consuming as well. Not letting the kids down in the classroom is still an ultimate goal as an educator, so that was another huge area of stress as well. The first three months were definitely very, very difficult, and again, I guess you could say, there's no course that can prepare you for all of that (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Jayne stepped into the new role trying to micromanage as well as empower others. She summed up the tension between the two extremes in two words, “crazy hectic” (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

I was a pretty young appointee to the leadership team and so I felt on a personal level, there was a lot for me to prove. So everything had to be done to a degree of perfection that was inhumane for me to expect of myself and a degree of efficiency. So, if something was due in a month and a half, I would get started on it today, even though there was a back track of things that were due last week that
I was still catching up on. So my ability to prioritize was out of whack, making sure that the children were okay, and every child is getting the right teacher and the right support ... And the parents were okay, and the parents were happy ... And I was answering my phone until midnight because parents wanted their answers now. And I think finding the ability to say, No, I need to take a step back and prioritize, was the biggest challenge. And that's I think where the craziness began, because to begin with I wasn't able to be assertive because I think ... I think to a certain extent, you come into a role and you're hired, and you're like, Wow, I got it, I made it. But then, you start to doubt yourself and you're like, Oh, my god, what if they were wrong in hiring me. Then I think imposter syndrome set in, and I think the first two months I was like, Oh my god, they're gonna catch me out, they're gonna figure it out. They're gonna figure out that they just put a child on the leadership team (Jayne, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Although the participants collectively described their role transition as a challenging force to be reckoned with, each participant shared glimpses into their inner thoughts during the interviews when revealing qualms and queries that were unique to each of them. While listening, this researcher began to appreciate the concept of each human bringing her history with her to each interaction and striving to make sense of it the best she can given the circumstances that she is dealing with at that particular time (Shaw, 2011).

**Summary of Findings**

The findings showed that the study participants perceived being internally promoted had its pros and cons to varying degrees and after lengthy reflection, all five agreed that the pros outweighed the cons. Candi felt her promotion was a natural progression from student to
educator to leader. She shared, “I was actually a student at this educational institution as well. I'm familiar with the buildings, a lot of people who work at the school taught me when I was at school. It was kind of like coming home when I first started” (Candi, personal communication, March 21, 2017). Rosie explained how nurturing existing relationships at a familiar organization made her transition smoother than if she had joined a new institution. “I know the school and I have already established a positive rapport with the teachers. One that I feel stems from respect” (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017). Being internally promoted allowed Jayne to leap into action as soon as she assumed her new leadership role. “You are familiar with how processes work so you can skip that step of actually having to learn how things need to be managed in order for you to fulfill your role” (Jayne, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Contrary to previous studies that proclaimed that individuals more readily seek assistance from colleagues as opposed to their line managers (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Hughes, 2004), all five participants in this study identified their direct line managers as one of their more knowledgeable others. Jayne acknowledged the immense role a line manager has when she was sharing a recount of one of her informal learning experiences with her line manager. In the midst of her story, she pondered and said, “And I think that's when we both realized what we needed from each other, in terms of being able to understand that dynamic of, your line manager being somebody that you can go to and they're your anchor” (personal communication, March 20, 2017). The participants also shared that regardless of a person’s position or title, learning takes place for all parties involved when individuals actively interact in engaged dialogue whether it is colleague and line manager, student and student, parent and educator, educator and student, colleague and colleague, etc. (Dave, Jayne, Logan, & Rosie, personal communication, March 2017).
When asked to elaborate on informal adult learning in the workplace, the participants did not readily recognize such interactions as learning opportunities, but after answering multiple questions during this study’s semi-structured interviews with regard to informal adult learning in the workplace, they became more aware of its existence and how it fits into the scheme of professional development.

All five participants value formal education and professional development opportunities; however, when they shared vivid details of their day-to-day encounters in the workplace, they gave great weight to their informal adult learning experiences as a vital method of gaining organization know-how. One of this study’s participants shared that she believed that informal adult learning provides the most important learning opportunities as she stated that, “…by just being around people, an individual is learning habits, mannerisms, inconsequential things in addition to skills and know-how” (Candi, personal communication, March 21, 2017).

**Thematic Analysis**

During the coding and analysis process, explicit patterns started to emerge within an individual participant’s transcript as well across all participants’ transcripts like the importance of raising awareness of what informal learning is and the need to offer both formal and informal opportunities within an organization’s professional development plan. It took longer for the implicit patterns to emerge like how critical it is to nurture a positive workplace culture and how an individual’s attitude towards learning either enhances or hinders her growth and development.

Table 3 depicts the three main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data with regard to the use of informal adult learning in the workplace to enhance learning at all levels: individuals, teams, and organization. The first theme highlighted that an individual’s development is maximized with a positive attitude towards learning. The second theme found
that investing in the establishment of quality relationships benefits the individual, team and organization. The third theme identified that organization know-how is most effectively transferred via informal learning interactions.

Table 3 Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An individual’s development is maximized with a positive attitude towards learning.</th>
<th>Investing in the establishment of quality relationships benefits the individual, team and organization.</th>
<th>Organization know-how is most effectively transferred via informal learning interactions.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Formal Learning -Tertiary -Courses and Training</td>
<td>• Promotion -Internally-promoted vs. newly hired</td>
<td>• Informal Learning -Subconscious learning on a daily basis</td>
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<td>• Reputation and Rapport</td>
<td>• Intrinsic Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Informal Learning -Authentic Learning</td>
<td>• Learning and Work Preference</td>
<td>• Interlinked -Individual -Department -Organization</td>
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<td>• Ethos</td>
<td>• Form of Professional Development</td>
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**Attitude Towards Learning**

An individual’s development is maximized with a positive attitude towards learning. During the second interview, participants were asked to share their credentials and a brief history of the professional development opportunities their current educational institution had provided them with over the years of their employment. All five participants reported that their place of employment values professional development for the employees and invests an ample amount of time and funds to build the staff’s skillsets. “We are fortunate to work at an organization that ensures that its staff members are continually exposed to and trained in the latest educational trends at the highest international standard” (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017). Jayne commended her workplace on the amount of support it offers its staff members as she shared that “I was able to earn a Post Graduate Diploma in Dyslexia and Literary and a Masters
in Educational Leadership as my professional development opportunities” (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Throughout the interviews, participants noted that regardless whether it was formal or informal learning, the main factor in determining whether or not learning would take place depended on the individual’s attitude towards learning. Dave said it succinctly, “I think it’s all about what you get out of every day when you come to work” (personal communication, March 20, 2017). Candi went on to elaborate,

There is a lot emphasis on professional development, but I think the attitude, it's about your attitude towards learning. You find a lot of teachers who complain when we have professional development sessions because they're not interested. They're happy where they are and they're in their comfort zone, but you also have those and they also feel that there's nothing left for them to learn. So that's one of the attitudes. You also find people who are willing to learn and want to grow and don't think that they've grown to the point where they can't grow anymore. So I think you have both attitudes. I think it's about taking initiative. So sitting back or staying under the radar, you might not get as much professional development as someone who is actively willing to or nagging or going out to find ways to get professional development (personal communication, March 21, 2017).

Ultimately, this stagnate mindset and/or negative attitude towards learning neither benefitted the individual nor the organization. If the individual was pro-active in seeking professional development opportunities, took initiative in participating in them and was interested in the topic at hand, she was provided with ample professional development
opportunities. The growth mindset and positive attitude towards learning benefitted the individual, the team, as well as the organization.

**Formal learning.** The study participants acknowledged the importance of formal education. “Building a firm foundation of theory allows one to confidently explore and experiment with practical implementation in the future” (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017). During the second interviews, participants spoke at length about being lifelong learners who continually seek ways and means to build their own capacity through earning tertiary degrees and certificates. They all listed a vast array of courses, workshops, and higher education opportunities they had taken and benefitted from over the years.

**Tertiary.** At the time of this study, between the five of them, the participants had earned five Bachelor degrees, four Post Graduate certificates, and three Masters degrees. Two of the participants were actively working on Masters degrees, and one stated that she aspires to earn her doctorate in the future. It was evident in the manner in which the participants passionately spoke about their educational backgrounds that they were the driving force behind their academic achievements. Rosie stated, “Once you enter the workforce, it is challenging to pursue additional formal education. An individual must have the drive and commitment to obtain higher education degrees while trying to balance family, work, and university” (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

**Courses and training.** Each participant was encouraged to share highlights of a specific face-to-face, hybrid, or online formal course or training she felt that she had benefitted the most from. Three of the five participants shared that they felt they had gained the most from face-to-face training they had attended (Dave, Logan, & Rosie, personal communication, March 2017). The topics of those training sessions included intercultural learning, language acquisition, and
the constructivist approach to learning. Dave spoke about the intercultural learning training he considered to be his most beneficial formal professional development experience.

I was always interested in differences between people anyway, and how putting together the right team delivers better results, but this just definitely secured the idea that I just love learning about people and learning about how our differences need to be understood if you're going to run an effective school. You see people not understanding each other in front of you, and you're like, Ah, if only you could just show some more empathy (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Candi shared that although she normally avoids online training courses, the Harvard Visible Thinking Routines course proved to be one of the best learning experiences she has been involved in.

I dread online courses because I find especially when they're three week ones and they're quite easy, you don't have to do much. You can just put in ideas off the top of your head and you get the certificate at the end, but the one I did on visible thinking routines was fantastic. I think it was one of the best professional development opportunities and it required me to take a look at my lesson plans and sit and think about every single detail and try out different routines with the students and I feel that is where I felt a huge growth. It wasn't necessarily linked to my leadership role, but just me as a teacher and it gave me this awareness and that's helped me now even just listening to other people talk about their experiences (Candi, personal communication, March 21, 2017).
Jayne felt that she had furthered her knowledge and skills the most from the online Post Graduate Diploma courses where she gained more understanding with the practical side of her area of expertise that complemented the theory she had learned in her undergraduate coursework (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Whilst sharing their thoughts on these formal training endeavors, three participants specifically stated that regardless if the course was face-to-face, online, or hybrid, they contributed the success of such training to the engaging dialogue they had had with the instructors and/or colleagues who were with them (Dave, Logan, & Rosie, personal communication, March 2017). The learning community in which the participants were engaged with made the positive difference in the professional development. Logan even commented that, “I thrived on the healthy competition that was initiated amongst my cohort members during the course” (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

**Informal learning.** During the second interview, participants used artifacts to springboard into discussions about how their more knowledgeable colleagues scaffolded their learning by just being in their presence and giving them quality time to interact. All five participants identified their direct line managers as people they naturally gravitated toward when they were in need of support. They also paid tribute to learning knowledge and skills from a range of colleagues who share similar levels of responsibility as well as those who do not have leadership responsibilities. For example, Jayne shared how she is the line manager and Performance Management reviewer of one of her colleagues, who through observation, she learned so much about change management from.

I’ve learned the most from one of my team members, who in achieving his goal, has involved every single person who teaches within his discipline. His target was
to adapt an assessment tool to be used by our school. And he’s managed to get everybody in the department onboard. So, he's shown the most advanced level of change management. When I know that we've tried to adapt this several times in the past and there's been so much resistance because people were doing their own thing, and he's just brought everyone together. And managed that change to the point where they're giving each other feedback in a way that's the most constructive thing in the world.

I think it was successful due to the fact that he didn't walk around like the more knowledgeable other. I think he has this way of making people feel ... Even though he's actually on paper, very, very, very qualified and in practice, very qualified. He doesn't walk around telling people how qualified he is, so he would not go to one of the other teachers who has a BA saying, I have a masters in curriculum design, so I can design whatever I want. He said, Look, what are our needs, how can you help me make this better? He accepted their feedback, he made changes at every level based on their feedback. So it wasn't, Oh, I'm gonna listen ... Please tell me your feedback, but I'm gonna ignore it and do what I want. So I think people felt involved, people felt ownership of the project and that helped him take it to the next level, and to be honest, it's one of the best performance management projects or goals that I've had the pleasure of supervising. And I think he's taught us all about change management, which was an area I had identified as an area I wanted to build my capacity in (personal communication, March 20, 2017).
During the conversations, the participants mentioned that they had learned invaluable skills and organization know-how from working side-by-side with individuals in their workplace. Candi gave an example of how she was honing her skills as a leader after observing and picking up tricks of the trade from her line manager.

I think one of the things is being in meetings with my line manager when she's having conversations with teachers or heads of departments or even parents and students and telling them that they need to get their act together. You learn how to speak to people, how to say it in a way where they're not completely devastated, but they know that you're serious and you need to get things done. So I find that I'm starting to use her phrases and mannerisms (Candi, personal communication, March 21, 2017).

The participants nonchalantly spoke about how the role of teacher would organically move from one individual to the next multiple times during a single interaction or during a series of many encounters over a period of time. The natural manner in which individuals were engaged in learning made knowledge, skills, conceptual understanding, and organization know-how transfer between colleagues seem effortless. Logan referred to it as a dance.

I think the key word there is model. I think it's very important to lead by example. I think it's essential. I think that more than anything else, people will pick up on these unconscious cues that you give out when they see you dealing with situations, when they see you dealing with students, when they see you speaking to parents. Now it's been more of a, I'd describe it more as a dance. There's this back and forth when it comes to working with a new colleague on a situation that involves some students, so the two grade leaders directly under me are much more
experienced when it comes to being grade leader. I mean I’ve never held that position. I’ve held something similar or the personal project coordinator and I think I bring in very different expertise as a former Head of Department, but I’ve never been a grade leader. I have many of the same skills that are transferrable, but these guys have done it for longer, so they have a lot of expertise that I need to learn from (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

**Authentic learning.** As participants shared their firsthand informal adult learning experiences, three distinct categories of informal learning began to emerge from these authentic learning interactions (Figure 3).

![Categories of Informal Adult Learning](image)

Participants elaborated about how their everyday encounters with their colleagues provided them with a multitude of learning experiences on a variety of levels. Logan interjected that during his interactions, he picks up valuable lessons from his colleagues and when he implements them, he tailors them to suit his leadership style.

…the two grade leaders I'm working with are people with vast store of knowledge and expertise, so they've been invaluable. I've been observing them. I've been watching how they work and I mean to a certain extent, trying to collaborate, not so that I would come in and change what they're doing. If it works, it works.
Great, but maybe modify it a little bit in line with my own expectations and what my priorities are (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Not only did the participants emphasize the vital organization know-how they were picking up from conversations with their colleagues, they also shared that they relearned a skill or task as a corrective measure after watching their colleague approach it in a more successful and/or efficient way in comparison to how they had originally learned it. Dave shared how poignant the interactions with his previous line manager were for him, especially since what he learned was transferrable to his new leadership role.

The informal conversations was a huge learning experience for myself as to how to conduct myself with staff in an administrative role, how to conduct myself with upper management as well, how to conduct myself if I'm in interactions with board of trustees as well, I suppose how to keep calm and professional on a daily basis despite the fact you are carrying more and more responsibility on your shoulders. How to keep it all together and make sure that people are viewing an in-control and stable administrator. This was a huge lesson I learned from my colleague, never to overreact, not to make a tree out of a seed, to always see the big picture, to go home early sometimes and see your family and just get a reality check from the bubble of your office where everything's going on. Sometimes you can make rash decisions, just small things like that (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Another noteworthy point that all five participants mentioned was that they also used the informal adult learning venue to observe and take note of undesirable mannerisms their colleagues used on occasions when interacting with others, so they kept in mind not to replicate
or mirror such behaviors as they perceived them to hinder morale, performance and/or productivity. Rosie declared that although an individual might be professional and knowledgeable, she must also possess people skills and emotional intelligence. As stated by Eraut (2004) and Rosie pointed out,

...you want to come in as someone very professional and very structured, you also must have the people skills. Because if you have a great deal of knowledge and you have a lot to bring, if you aren't able to reach people and communicate with them, it's almost insignificant and I've learned that (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

**Summary.** The participants recognized that the bulk of the institution’s professional development opportunities on offer revolved around formal, structured coursework, however, highlighted that the collaborative nature in which colleagues met on a daily, weekly, and bi-weekly manner provided the venue for informal learning to take place. Overall, the participants stated that a solid base of theoretical knowledge and skills which are gained through formal education provide the foundation for workplace and life experience learning to build upon. The participants’ passion with regard to how pertinent an individual’s attitude towards learning was evident throughout the three-interview approach process conversations. They gave admirable credit to the educational institution in which they are currently employed for providing them with a plethora of both formal and informal professional development opportunities and arranging time off work for them to participate in such endeavors. However, the participants gave example after example of how it was up to the individuals to be active learners or let such opportunities pass them by because they felt they had nothing else to learn or were uninterested in venturing out of their comfort zone to invest in their own growth.
**Relationships**

The tone of mutual respect was woven throughout the participants’ recounts of their workplace learning experiences they had encountered with their go-to mentors. It was evident that each of them believed that investing in the establishment of quality relationships has the potential to benefit the individual, team and the organization.

**Promotions.** In addition to demographics during the first interview, each participant was asked if they perceived being internally promoted at a familiar workplace as an advantage or disadvantage in comparison to being newly hired at an unfamiliar workplace. All five participants proclaimed that there were pros and cons to both situations, verbatim excerpts from their transcripts are recorded in Table 4. Each participant spoke with vigor about their firsthand experiences of being internally promoted and also shared their perspectives about colleagues they work with or have worked with in the past who were either internally promoted or newly hired. It was interesting that their reflections all revolved around interactions, relationships, reputation, and trust, whereas not even one participant mentioned anything about credentials, educational background, skills, or knowledge when comparing the benefits or hindrances of being internally promoted or newly hired.

Table 4 Internally Promoted vs. Newly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internally Promoted</th>
<th>Newly Hired</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pro/Con: I think you always step into a role where you have to either fill in shoes or contend with a legacy, whether positive or negative of the person that was filling the role before you (Jayne).</td>
<td>Pro: I feel if you come into an institution where you don't know anyone, you get to establish the persona you want from the get-go (Rosie).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro: I know the school and I have already established a positive rapport with the teachers. One that I feel stems from respect (Rosie).</td>
<td>Pro: If you move to a new school no one knows you. If you have made career mistakes or mishaps in the past along the</td>
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There's a lot more willingness for people to work with you because they know how you deal with people (Dave).

Pro: I was actually a student at this educational institution as well. I'm familiar with the buildings, a lot of people who work at the school taught me when I was at school. It was kind of like coming home when I first started (Candi).

Con: When you go into an unfamiliar institution and take on a leadership role, there's a lot more that you need to work on in terms of acceptance (Candi).

Pro: You are familiar with how processes work so you can skip that step of actually having to learn how things need to be managed in order for you to fulfill your role (Jayne).

Pro: When you're already there, people know you and know what you're capable of (Candi).

Pro: I think the advantage of staying at a school is you get the opportunity to see loyalty from some of your colleagues in an age where I feel that sometimes loyalty is being abandoned for personal progress (Dave).

Pro: It's nice to actually put some time in, to an institution, and work with that institution and make things better. The advantage of staying around is that I would hope I develop a working community of colleagues who understand me and understand what my values are, what I'm trying to achieve and that can open doors ultimately. And the more doors open, the more skills you can learn (Dave).

Pro: If you actually invest time in your own school, you're setting out and operationalizing development plans and then taking it to a higher level by reflecting on whether they have actually worked or not. And if they haven't, you have to start again. And that's the process. So it's the real deal. If you stick around, there's actually enough time for people to hold you accountable before you move on again. So if you stick around, it has to work. You can't just put a plan and just leave it halfway through. You have to see it through and bear the fruits from those plans as well (Dave).

Pro/Con: Previously, I applied for an internal promotion, however, was unsuccessful. At first, I was disappointed, but once I reflected, I realized that I just needed time for growth and additional workplace experience. Once I switched my
negative perspective to positive, I knew what I needed to do and did just that (Dave).

Con: When you've been with an organization for a long enough time, people have certain preconceptions about you. They have certain, shall we say, boxes that they will use to categorize you. Again, I don't think this is malicious. It's just human nature. They will see you in one light, and not think of you in another light (Logan).

Con: You might be put in a situation where you and your colleagues are applying for the same role and it just becomes more cliquish (Candi).

As aforementioned, participants had between two to seven collective work years’ experience at other institutions and six to fifteen years at the current institution. They claimed there were pros and cons to both being internally promoted at a familiar institution or being newly hired at an unfamiliar institution. However, this researcher noted that when the participants shared their perspectives, the pros of being internally promoted outweighed the combination of the cons of being internally promoted and the pros and cons of being newly hired, which is reflected in the Table 4.

**Reputation and rapport.** Throughout the interviews whilst reflecting on both formal and informal learning experience interactions, the participants spoke about their own as well as others’ perceived reputations and rapport with their colleagues. Jayne commented about the mutually caring relationship in the school culture, “I mean, we're lucky that we don't have a massive turnover, in terms of staff because we do take care of our staff and our staff care so much about the students (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

All five participants commented and respected that individuals, including themselves, have unique personalities, work ethics, learning styles, and preferences, and that people naturally gravitate toward individuals or groups of colleagues who enhance or complement their
characteristics. Rosie stated, “I always keep a positive outlook on any given situation and do my utmost to bring out the best in everyone I interact with knowing that each person has a distinct perspective to share” (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

As in any workplace, individuals will have disagreements or conflict where some will reach out to others for assistance. Candi provided a firsthand experience where she was asked for advice:

I had a colleague who was having trouble with another colleague. They got into the marathon of emails and she came to get my advice. She calls me Mother Teresa because I always try to see the other side of the coin, let's say. I mean, I always have an excuse for someone let's just say. So if someone gets angry, I say, well they might have been having a bad day. So you accept it and move on. They don't think it's a good quality in me and I'm not always like that, but she wanted to see what the best professional way to deal with it is because I try not to get my emotions involved. I try to keep it as professional as possible. So she came to seek my advice for that and how to deal with that. Because I can be quite level headed (personal communication, March 21, 2017).

From the intimate conversations with the participants, this researcher concluded from their collective insight to perceive that efficient, productive teams are made up of individuals who pool their strengths together to enhance their group dynamics. Jayne shared her perspective on the role as coach/mentor in comparison to a leadership role when it comes to bringing out the best in each individual in order to benefit the team (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

I think being a good coach and being a mentor are things that usually come naturally to a person, I think. I think you're born that way. You're born with those
skills innately in you where you're naturally giving and you naturally share your experiences, and that's what a mentor or a coach needs to be. But I think becoming a formal leader is a very, very different experience because it's not just about sharing your knowledge, but a certain extent about understanding your team and understanding how to get the best out of them. I have a relatively small team, so there's 13 with me. They're very, very, very different people. Very different personalities. They react very differently to different initiatives (Jayne, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

In addition to the participants’ acknowledgements of the positive reputation they had already established amongst their colleagues, Rosie emphasized, “…it is crucial that the staff’s wellbeing is also taken into account as part of the rapport-building process among team members (personal communication, March 17, 2017). This researcher asked her to elaborate on her statement by giving an example of how she accomplished this with her team of educators. She shared a story about her welcome meeting at the beginning of the academic year.

When the members of staff came into the room, I could tell they were overwhelmed because they weren't getting much time in their classrooms. I could tell it was almost a routine for them. Here we go, it's another staff meeting with more things that we have to do.

When they came into this staff room for this meeting, it was different. Because what I did was, I started by celebrating our successes. What are our strengths as a team? The strengths were documented on a large piece of chart paper. We celebrated our diversities. While we shared, the team members focused on
looking at all the areas that we excel in, acknowledging all of the experts among us. It was a true celebration.

I used a smaller piece of chart paper to record the areas we want to focus on and I did that on purpose. Because I feel when we zoom in on less items, but something of quality and substance, we're more likely to attain them. As a team, we quickly identified our goals for the year.

When people walked out of the meeting, their posture was different, music was playing and I met them in the hallway as they exited. And the comments they said, "Wow, we really feel like we've been inspired. We're ready." I could have stayed inside, I had finished, I could have walked out. I made sure that I was the face that greeted them on the way in and I was the face that greeted them on the way out (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Over the course of an hour the tone had changed from somber and apprehensive to inspired and optimistic all because Rosie invested quality time to nurture her team’s social, emotional wellbeing and build a rapport. It was evident throughout Rosie’s reported interactions with her colleagues, students and parents, she placed wellbeing at the forefront of her mind and actions as she believes that her kindness and efforts would pay off in future interactions with those she had established a mutually respected rapport with (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Dave shared a similar story about how his colleague ensured that he took into account the students’ wellbeing when interacting with them.

He took the time to get to know the students, he was strict, he kept tabs on what was going on with students as well. There are a number of examples I can use
here, but definitely just seeing him in the corridor not shouting but remaining firm with the local students that we have here. I witnessed and watched, and then that influenced how I conduct myself with students in the corridors, and that was then relayed onto any wellbeing team that I have worked with, and also any practitioners who asked for advice inside the classroom as well (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

**Learning and work preferences.** During the interviews, participants were never at a loss for words thanks to the fact that they are all educators who were asked to talk about learning in the workplace. Each participant spoke with confidence about her learning and work preferences. As their stories unfolded, it was interesting to note that they would start at one point and then weave other components into the mix. For example, Candi stated,

I mean, some people say, I don't like formal learning, I prefer the informal learning. Or, I like formal learning. I don't really like informal learning. But you do in both cases. So with the formal learning, I would say I enjoy it more. I enjoy sitting, researching, coming up with plans more than sitting in a group and seeing what other people do. So I find more benefit in that, but having said that, if I don't see both. If I don't do both, I don't think I can learn it as well. It might not always be a balance. I might like the formal learning more and find that more beneficial to me, but if I don't see it happening, if I don't see people around me doing that. I can read a book on how to let someone go, but if I don't see it happening in front of me, I won't be able to, I mean, in a book you can't read body language. It consolidates the learning (personal communication, March 21, 2017).
Another example was when Logan stated he ultimately prefers to work alone, however, he affirmed that being able to interact face-to-face enhanced his learning during a training course. “I think that a collaborative atmosphere brings out the very best in me and it helps drive me towards really applying myself” (Logan, personal communication, March 20, 2017). He shared how impactful an onsite course he took was in comparison to a less engaging online course mainly due to the fact that he felt that the asynchronous dialogue between participants demotivated him. When asked to expand on his comment that he prefers to work alone, he acknowledged that depending on the circumstances his work preference altered. For example: “I work collaboratively with my co-post partner where there are times when we divide and conquer and other times when we team up as joint forces depending on the task at hand” (Logan, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

While each participant may have her personal preferences, it was apparent that as a group of educated leaders they are all open-minded individuals who take full advantage of learning opportunities and workplace scenarios.

**Ethos.** It takes time, effort, and commitment to establish, nurture, and maintain a positive, learning culture in an organization. Rosie stressed that dedicating quality time to build and maintain relationships and trustworthiness are pertinent in developing a school culture where learning can take place. She commented that each individual is responsible to lead by example. Kindness must remain something we feel is contagious. You can still remain professional and have the highest standard of expectations for yourself and others. You can be a role model. You can show up and you can be there for people, but at the end of the day, if you are not kind and respectful, I feel we are teaching our
children nothing. And that is really the core of my philosophy. Yes, it is coupled with being professional and having the highest standard in terms of what I expect from myself and in others, but is paralleled with kindness (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Logan echoed Rosie’s sentiments of the necessity of being a role model and stated that it is very important to lead by example. “I think that more than anything else, people will pick up on these unconscious cues that you give out when they see you dealing with situations, when they see you speaking with students, parents, or colleagues” (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Dave commented that the majority of the staff at the organization are originally from Jordan. However, regardless of the local/expatriate ratio, he stated that

…it is important to create a climate where there is mutual respect and intercultural awareness and understanding in order to foster healthy, productive working conditions. It doesn’t matter where you come from. What matters is your perception and understanding of people and intercultural relations. There's no one size fits all here. There's no magic wand here. It takes lots and lots of conversations to work things through (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

He believed that this educational institution has achieved this, which has enabled it to “put together the right team that delivers the best results” (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Summary. The participants presented the significance of establishing and sustaining positive relationships in order for there to be an intercultural understanding and supportive
climate in the workplace. Mutual respect, trustworthiness, and the innate ability to demonstrate emotional intelligence are key components to ensuring that individuals’ wellbeing are considered as priority when interacting with others. From their collective commentaries, the participants unanimously agreed that taking the time to build a rapport amongst colleagues is an investment that sets the tone for the future success of the team, as well as the organization.

**Activating Informal Adult Learning**

Although an individual may be an expert in her field, she would benefit from gaining a better understanding of the actual day-to-day running of the organization which some employees share freely while others keep to themselves. When this researcher asked participants to share how best they settled into their new leadership roles, they shared that they depended on more-abled others to demonstrate how best to complete unfamiliar tasks or to provide support by allowing them to shadow them whilst carrying out those tasks. It was found that organizational know-how is most effectively transferred via informal learning interactions.

**Raising awareness.** Having a genuine interest to learn more about a topic or skill triggers an individual to seek as much information as she possibly can in order to achieve her goal. Many times, individuals do not seek formal training or a structured course to learn something new, instead they set out to find someone who can assist them. Although the study participants agreed to participate in this study about informal adult learning, they did not quite understand what the research focus was all about. After this researcher defined informal, incidental, and intentionally-incidental learning and asked them to share some of their firsthand experiences with regard to the aforementioned, they gave example after example of how they engaged in informal learning on a continual basis where they sought out support as well as offered support to others.
Informal adult learning is an unrecognized form of learning mainly because it comes so naturally through everyday occurrences. Candi acknowledged that “by just being around people, you’re learning, even if you think you’re not learning. You could be learning habits, mannerisms or inconsequential things. Your brain filters what it wants to learn or adopt during interactions” (Candi, personal communication, March 21, 2017).

**Intrinsic learning.** An individual is in control of being attuned to informal adult learning engagement opportunities, when to partake in them, with whom to interact with, which skill/topic she is interested in learning more about, and how frequently she wants to engage in such interactions.

Candi stated “whatever you find interesting, you will want to learn more about” (personal communication, March 21, 2017). Dave claimed that “professional development is what you make of it, and regardless what the course has to offer, you can't get away from the fact that it is a one-size-fits-all. They can't tailor a curriculum or a session that is going to work in each and every culture” (personal communication, March 20, 2017). He said it is up to the individual to capture the take-away, make it their own, and then implement it in the context of his workplace environment. Dave remarked that he admires people who take initiative to develop themselves and push their boundaries to step out of their comfort zone to learn new things.

I like to see in people, if I was to talent spot, it's people who develop themselves. They're not paid for it, they're doing it every day, they're pushing their boundaries, they want to learn new things, they want to go on accreditation visits, they want to learn more in IB, they want to become consultants and field reps, and they want to know how to do timetabling or they want to do templates. They want to lead
meetings, they want to get involved in the PTA, they want to come to expeditions, co-curricular (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

He acknowledged that it all comes down to the individual’s attitude towards learning. “These sort of initiatives take hours and hours of informal interactions to bring to fruition” (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Interlinked. When participants were asked if they felt workplace learning was interlinked at the individual, team, and organizational levels, all participants confirmed and elaborated by sharing a specific example they had initiated or witnessed firsthand. “You cannot go a day without having learned something new, either from a student or a colleague. Sometimes you’ve not necessarily learned something new about your techniques, but it could be learning something new about yourself from your interaction with that student or colleague” (Jayne, personal communication, March 20, 2017). It was interesting to note that as participants described interlinked workplace learning experiences they had been involved in, they indicated that the individual providing the support was not always the same person, yet it was more as if it was a chain reaction where the original person shared the knowledge or skill and then the learner from that interaction would then assume the role of teacher and share it with another person or group and so forth and so on. Dave summed up how a group’s dynamics can cultivate the informal learning opportunities to an exponential level where productivity is maximized by stating that

…it's not just that we're a team. It's not one way. They might come to me for advice, but in the conversation, they may realize that they had a brilliant idea. Hey, you need to roll with that. You're spot on with that, in reflection. You're absolutely
right. That's where they grow within an informal discussion (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Rosie reverberated the same connotation Dave eluded to,

During planning sessions some teams rely on me to map out the lesson from start to finish. I use that opportunity to empower them. I spiral off of the teachers’ ideas, by asking questions that get them to come up with a solution on their own. By nudging them into a reflective, affirmation cycle, they realize that with only a little support, they have accomplished the task at hand (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

**Form of professional development.** Based on the participants’ positive feedback during interview 2, they claimed that the educational institution in which this study was conducted invests ample time and funds into the staff’s professional development. This is especially true for those individuals who demonstrate that they are lifelong learners, are proactive in building their skillsets, and implement what they learn for the betterment of their team and organization as a whole. Formal training and courses are the focus of the existing professional development menu on offer. Time for collaborative planning meetings, horizontal and vertical articulation meetings, and sharing sessions are also planned for on the calendar and timetable. Learning is definitely a priority at this educational institution, not only for the students, but also for the staff. Informal adult learning could also be considered as an untapped form of professional development as it is economical, happens on a daily basis, and is the most efficient method to transfer organization know-how amongst colleagues.

Jayne declared, “I think informal learning, in any field is something crucial, but especially in the field of education because learning and teaching is our bread and butter” (Jayne,
personal communication, March 20, 2017). She went on to say that individuals are continually learning from and alongside one another. A child learns from an adult and the adult learns from the child. A child learns from his peer and his peer learns from a child. An individual learns from her colleague and her colleague learns from an individual. It is through this mutually beneficial learning cycle where informal learning flourishes the most.

Dave reported that in his opinion workplace learning is the way of the future. Previously, he had tried to empower teachers who were experts in their fields to offer sessions or one-on-one support to colleagues who had indicated a desire to learn more about that particular skill or field. The professional development model in which he had proposed was indeed informal adult learning. “The knowledge is in a school. It's a huge resource” (Dave, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Logan felt that workplace learning plays an important role in an individual’s growth and development. He went on to say,

I mean really that's how you build 90% of your capacity, your knowledge, and experience. It's by living these situations day after day, and the metacognition that comes afterwards when you consider what you did, what you could have done better, what went wrong, when you watch somebody else tackle a situation and you think either, I can learn from this because I can do what they're doing, or I need to avoid that and do it better or do it different (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Rosie’s analogy of comparing an individual’s workplace learning encounters to sinking and swimming several times a day lent itself to being depicted as a profound visual display of informal learning. Dave, Jayne, and Logan’s recounts of informal adult learning experiences
during their steep learning curve transition time to their new leadership role mirrored similar perspectives of Rosie’s. This researcher interpreted their collective renditions whereas their success was dependent on them fully activating informal adult learning in the most efficient and effective manner; and they each went about it in their own way, yet faced common experiences. (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Sinking/Swimming Analogy: Informal Learning Visual Depiction

I mean, look, you're sinking and I sink several times a day as I said before. But just as you're sinking, you're finding a way to put your head above water. That alone is informal learning. Because you're trying to figure it out and when you do, you breathe again. You pause, you talk, you read, you remember. And really, that for me, that's informal learning. You reach out to your community or you just go back to yourself and you just look at things a different way. I don't know the
degree that you can get in that. You've got to be resourceful. I'm telling you, I've tapped into something (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Jayne elaborated on this point by sharing that,

Whether on purpose or not. Lots of times people will ask a question and it will be something I hadn't even thought to ask or to consider, and those are my ah-ha moments or my light bulb moments, where it's like, Oh I hadn't even thought of it that way. Once you assume you're the most knowledgeable person on the topic and you just take that stance, then you stop learning. And I think, because I work within a department with such a vast ... I mean it's years and years and years of experience, and we come from all different walks of life, from different types of schools, from different backgrounds. So, some of us were classroom teachers before we became specialists. Some of us just started off as specialists, and others actually just had a passion for it. So, after having acquiring degrees in things other than academics, they went back and they went back for a degree in education and they came to the field. So that variety I think, gives us such a different ... It gives us a wealth of knowledge that if I'm gonna say I'm superior, and I'm the knowledgeable other and not seek out their help, then I'm not supporting my students. I'm just being stuck in that you know, my little bubble where I will do what I'll do, irrespective of its impact on the child, and I think that's not fair. The end of the day, the more knowledgeable other needs to be the department as a whole because it's not about the individuals, it's about the sum of our knowledge as a department and what we can offer our learners. I think informal learning, in any field is something crucial because again, different experiences, lending
themselves to growing all these individuals interacting with those experiences.

But I think in the field of education itself, because learning is our bread and butter, teaching is our bread and butter, you cannot go a day without having learned something new, either from a student or from a teacher ... And sometimes it's not necessarily you're learning something new about your teaching techniques, but it could be learning something new about yourself from that child, from your interaction with that child and it's the same thing with other teachers. Instead of having 30 years of experience at the end of it, you'll have one year of experience done 30 times (Jayne, personal communication, March 20, 2017).

**Summary.** It was evident from the participants’ reflective commentaries about theirs and their colleagues’ experiences with informal adult learning in the workplace, there was a need to raise awareness about this subconscious form of learning. Participants identified that informal adult learning is dependent upon a learner who thrives on intrinsic motivation as she is the driving force for her learning success. She decides whether or not to engage, who to interact with, how frequently to do so, and what she is interested in learning more about. Also through discussions, it was noted that within the educational community, informal adult learning opportunities can multiply rapidly through an interlinked chain reaction where it starts with an individual, gains momentum and branches out to a group, and then sometimes spreads and grows as large as the entire organization. Informal adult learning is the future of professional development as it is triggered by a staff member’s desire to learn a new skill, task, or organization know-how, it is economical because staff members’ share their areas of expertise with their colleagues who are interested while working alongside one another, and it happens naturally during day-to-day conversations and demonstrations.
Conclusion

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study was to explore the informal adult learning experiences of participants who had been recently, internally promoted to more demanding leadership roles at a K-12, private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual (Arabic/English) school in Amman, Jordan. Additionally, the study served to examine how the participants make sense of informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace to enhance learning. The findings revealed an individual’s development is maximized with a positive attitude towards learning, investing in the establishment of quality relationships benefits the individual, team and organization, and organizational know-how is most effectively transferred via informal learning interactions. Learning is ultimately up to the learner. The individual is in control of if, when, to what extent, how often, with whom, and which skills or topics she is interested in learning more about. The participants perceived that intrinsic motivation and a positive attitude toward learning set the tone for the learner’s success. They also believed that it is pertinent to invest time in establishing, nurturing, and maintaining a healthy ethos where there is mutual trust, respect, and intercultural understanding in order to create an environment that is conducive for learning to take place.

In Chapter V, this researcher will provide an overall summary of the findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework, implications for practice, recommendations for future study, limitations of study, and the conclusion.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings

In today’s fast-paced, technologically-advanced world, individuals are expected to be adaptive, lifelong learners who are well-versed in multiple domains and flexible enough and willing to expand their areas of expertise whenever they are presented with challenging projects or additional posts of responsibility in the workplace.

The goal of this study was to determine how prevalent informal adult learning is accessed in the workplace setting by inviting the study participants to elaborate on their shared experience of transitioning to more demanding leadership roles in their educational institution and to gain insight into how they made sense of their use of informal adult learning in the workplace as a mode of professional development to enhance their learning.

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was to explore the firsthand informal learning experiences of five participants during a critical transition time in their careers where they were recently, internally promoted to more demanding leadership roles. Through candid conversations, the participants shared their perspectives of how they unknowingly, however, ironically, purposefully sought support from their colleagues to build their skillset and capacity during this challenging transition time. Four of the five participants stated that they endured a “steep learning curve” over a very short period of time (Dave, Jayne, Logan, & Rosie, personal communication, March 2017) and the fifth participant acknowledged it was “a bit bumpy” in the beginning, but thankful for shadowing her line manager for a full year aided in her smoother transition (Candi, personal communication, March 21, 2017). With each interaction with their more-abled co-workers over the first few months of their leadership appointment, they slowly, but confidently, settled into their new roles.
This researcher chose to use Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory as the theoretical framework as it has a sociocultural perspective that emphasizes the importance of interactions in promoting cognitive development. Upon reflection during the interviews, the participants discovered that they had accessed informal learning opportunities to equip themselves with knowledge, skills, tools, and tactics to handle their new responsibilities. From the participants’ stories shared, this researcher concluded that the participants recognized that informal learning in the workplace is an untapped mode of professional development in the organization and that they acknowledged that a positive, mutually-respective culture sets the tone for individuals to contribute effectively via informal learning opportunities to the team’s dynamics and overall productivity.

This final chapter of this dissertation will focus on the discussion of the research findings, the themes of the findings in relation to the literature and the theoretical framework, implications for practice, recommendations for further study, the limitations of the current study, and the conclusion.

Research Question

The research question guiding this inquiry was: What are the experiences of newly, internally-promoted Leadership and Extended Management Team Members of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual (Arabic/English) school in Jordan; and how do they make sense of informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace to enhance learning?

Themes

As noted in Chapter IV, after analyzing the data collected from the semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews, three significant themes stood out. The first theme was that an
individual’s development is maximized with a positive attitude towards learning. The second theme honed in on the fact that investing in the establishment of quality relationships benefits the individual, team, and organization. The third theme recognized that organization know-how is most effectively transferred via informal learning interactions.

Subthemes stemmed from each of the three major themes; all of which were intertwined with one another showing the complexity of detecting and measuring the effectiveness of informal learning whilst showing how prevalent it is accessed and used as the most efficient way to transfer organization know-how in a timely manner.

**Discussion of Findings and Themes in Relation to Literature**

When conducting the literature review for this study, this researcher noted that there were a limited number IPA studies conducted on the same topic in a similar educational setting as the one this study was conducted in, so the literature review included a vast array of studies with regard to informal learning in a variety of workplace settings (e.g. offices, construction sites, churches, health care facilities, schools, etc.) from countries all over the world (e.g. Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Taiwan, etc.). It is noteworthy to mention that regardless of the workplace settings or countries in which studies were conducted the three main themes identified in the literature review were similar to the themes that emerged from this study. The first theme in the literature review emphasized that employees benefit from organizations providing them with a combination of informal and formal learning opportunities. The second theme bolstered that individuals are in control of if, how, and to what extent they engage and/or participate in informal learning. The third theme revealed that individuals do not readily recognize informal learning as a form of learning due to the fact that it is happening naturally on a continual basis and it is challenging to track and measure value added.
**Formal and informal learning opportunities.** Based on the existing literature and this study’s findings, it was determined that it is important for organizations to offer a combination of formal and informal learning opportunities to its employees with the understanding that an individual acquires a mere 10-20% of her knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding from formal learning and the remainder from informal learning interactions (Conlon, 2004). This study’s participants were grateful that their place of employment places great emphasis on professional development to build the skillsets of the employees and consistently provides the employees ample opportunities to attend courses and workshops in addition to providing collaborative planning time in the schedule to ensure articulation amongst colleagues.

When this study’s participants were asked to share their educational background and briefly describe the formal professional development opportunities their current workplace had provided them with since they had joined, they did so by systematically listing their tertiary degrees, course titles, and descriptions of the content covered. When asked to describe how informal learning is interlinked at the individual, team, and organization levels, the participants included vivid details of the topics or tasks at hand; however, often also added descriptions of the context of the environment, the relationships and rapport among colleagues, and the collaboration between the people involved. Equally, the participants spoke about their credentials with great pride of their achievements; however, when they described the day-to-day interactive learning with their colleagues in the workplace, their descriptions became more animated with analogies, emotion, and vibrant word choices to describe their learning as well as the learning of others. All participants admitted that from the timespan from appointment to assuming their new leadership roles, they had not received any formal training, so they primarily depended on their colleagues to scaffold their learning. This researcher interpreted the variance
in ways in which the participants reflected on the two types of learning as an indicator that they relied heavily on informal learning during their critical transition time, and during the second interview, seven months after being in the leadership role, they were feeling more equipped and confident in their positions due to the on-the-job support they had been given.

The literature review and this study’s findings acknowledged that most often informal learning happens without the learners actually realizing it. These authentic learning episodes can occur in a conversational manner where colleagues are talking amongst themselves inadvertently passing on organization know-how to one another. It can also take place when an individual intentionally seeks out a more-abled co-worker to ask them to explain or demonstrate know-how, knowledge, or skills. This study’s participants gave multiple examples of their firsthand experiences with both intentional and unintentional workplace learning interactions.

**Learning continuum.** In the literature review, this researcher discovered that previous studies acknowledged individuals have the ability to glide back and forth on a learning continuum depending on their interest in the topic at hand. The learner is in full control of whether or not she will engage or withdraw from a learning moment. As mentioned in the literature review, informal learning is not only accessed for organization know-how or hobbies, there are times when individuals activate informal learning while they are in dire straits with health issues. The learner’s success ultimately depends on her intrinsic motivation, which was found to be true in this study’s findings as well. This study’s participants spoke with great passion as to how an individual’s attitude determines her success with both formal learning (tertiary degrees, courses, and training) and informal learning (authentic learning) opportunities. The participants’ conviction with regard to how pertinent an individual’s attitude towards learning is was evident throughout the three-interview approach process dialogues. Intrinsic
learning was mentioned in conversations when this study’s participants paid tribute to how individuals who strived to acquire knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding would do everything in their power to make it happen. Candi stated “…whatever you find interesting, you will want to learn more about” (personal communication, March 21, 2017). If the learner has the drive to inquire to learn something new, then she will activate informal learning to propel herself along the learning continuum. This study’s participants unanimously agreed that the educational institution in which they current work provides a plethora of both formal and informal professional development opportunities and arranges time off work for employees to participate in such endeavors. However, they pointed out that it is up to the individual whether or not they take full advantage of such learning opportunities. Candi point blank said, “There is a lot of emphasis on professional development, but I think the attitude, it’s about your attitude towards learning” (personal communication, March 21, 2017). Dave reiterated, “…professional development is what you make of it” (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

**Value added.** As found in the literature review, it was noted in this study that value added took on the form of organization know-how transfer via informal learning. It was found that organization know-how is most effectively transferred between colleagues as well as to their successors via informal learning, which is rarely recognized as a form of professional development due to its casual nature of being a subconscious level of learning that happens on a continual basis throughout the day. The participants also gave genuine examples of how informal learning is interlinked from an individual, to the department, and then at times on the grander scale of the entire organization. This study’s findings aligned with the literature review that quality interactions have a greater impact on individual, group, and/or organization development as opposed to quantity of meetings. It was found in this study and the literature
review that establishing, nurturing, and investing in mutually-respectful relationships in the workplace setting cultivates a collegial, trusting culture in which team members can thrive in collaboration (Drago-Severson, 2009). Dave demonstrated this point,

…it is important to create a climate where there is mutual respect and intercultural awareness and understanding in order to foster healthy, productive working conditions. It doesn’t matter where you come from. What matters is your perception and understanding of people and intercultural relations. There's no one size fits all here. There's no magic wand here. It takes lots and lots of conversations to work things through (personal communication, March 20, 2017).

Discussion of Findings and Themes in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory concentrates on the fact that all development is derived from the individuals’ interactions with their social environments. The Sociocultural Theory links what individuals are thinking and feeling and how they go about acting on such stimulation. It has two main principles: the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2014). The MKO could be an adult, a more-abled peer or even a software program that interacts with the learner to scaffold her learning experiences to reach a higher ability. The MKO is intertwined with the ZPD concept whereas the ZPD refers to what a learner can do independently without support and where scaffolding and support are needed for a learner to progress and gain more skills, knowledge, and conceptual understanding.

More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). In this study, it was evident that the role of more knowledgeable other drifts between individuals in the organization depending on the subject matter being discussed or skill being demonstrated. At times, multiple individuals in a group setting assume the role as MKO. Jayne stated, “At the end of the day, the MKO needs to be the
department as a whole because it’s not about the individuals, it’s about the sum of our knowledge as a department and what we can offer our learners” (personal communication, March 20, 2017). The synergy in such an informal learning environment, attracts interested learners who are driven by their attitude toward learning and their intrinsic motivation to learn. Through these informal settings, the individuals involved feel empowered where they find their inner voice (Peeters, De Backer, Buffel, Kindekens, Struyven, Zhu, & Lombaerts, 2014). At all times, the individual is in control of engaging or disengaging from informal learning opportunities. The learner chooses if, when, with whom, how frequently and to what extent she will access or withdraw from the learning process.

In contrast to what other studies have found that employees do not seek assistance from their direct line managers (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Hughes, 2004), this study’s participants all identified their direct line managers as well as colleagues with varying degrees of responsibilities as their MKOs. They described their MKO network as experienced resources from whom they learn valuable knowledge, skills, and concepts from by just being in their presence. They mentioned that learners not only pick up knowledge and skills from their experienced peers, they also learn far more as acknowledged by Candi, “by just being around people, you’re learning, even if you think you’re not learning. You could be learning habits, mannerisms, or inconsequential things. Your brain filters what it wants to learn or adopt during interactions.” (personal communication, March 21, 2017).

**Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).** Participants shared vivid, descriptive reflections with regard to the steep learning curve they had experienced during their transition time to leadership roles that were more demanding. They elaborated how the MKOs guided the learning process through multiple episodes of interactions until they were able to succeed on their own.
One of the participants had a slight advantage over the others because she was given the opportunity to shadow her line manager a full academic year before assuming the post. Candi attributed her smoother transition to the fact that she had consistent access to her MKO who scaffolded her learning and stretched her zone of proximal development over an extended period of time. She stated that “practice is the most important learning opportunity” (personal communication, March 21, 2017). The other four participants all acknowledged the supportive ethos; however, felt that they were overwhelmed trying to carrying out the required and expected tasks whilst seeking MKOs in an attempt to quickly build their ZPD.

Figure 5 depicts an image of what an interlinked workplace learning network would look like based on the participants’ descriptions. Although the interlinked informal workplace network seems to be linear, the multiple times MKO appears in the figure indicates that more than one MKO is most likely to be present and engaged in the interaction.

Figure 5 Interlinked Workplace Learning Network
Implications for Practice

Based on this study’s participants’ reflections with regard to the importance of individuals accessing and taking full advantage of informal learning in the workplace, this researcher identified a variety of ways in which the leaders, pre-service, new, and existing teachers and students can benefit from informal learning in the context of their situations.

Given the leadership positions of the study participants and their firsthand experiences with participating in this study, the results of this study will provide them with a bird’s eye view of their lived experiences with informal adult learning in the workplace and raise awareness as to how such opportunities can be highlighted and arranged for so that their department team members can take advantage of such interactions. Jayne celebrated the diversity of her team and complimented their collaborative efforts, “…being able to actually bounce ideas off each other and share our learning experiences with each other has been fantastic” (personal communication, March 20, 2017). Not only does organization know-how cascade down from leaders to their team members via informal learning opportunities in the workplace, it was noted that a positive climate provides an environment in which all individuals contribute as well as receive knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding from one another as a learning community. “We are all learners who must view every encounter as a learning moment. Teaching and learning moments are all around us; every day, all day” (Rosie, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

As Jayne stated, “You cannot go a day without having learned something new, either from a student or a colleague” (personal communication, March 20, 2017). Informal learning should not be confined to interactions between colleagues. The teachers need to give students space to take on the role as the more knowledgeable other as Peeters et. al (2014) warned that the
teachers presence may hinder the students from assuming the teaching role amongst their peers in an informal learning setting. Some students fear asking questions and accessing informal learning as they are concerned that by doing so it will highlight their limitations or shortcomings (Yanchar & Hawkley, 2015). Teachers should also highlight the benefits of informal learning to their students of all ages by raising awareness of its existence, creating a culture conducive for it to take place, and legitimizing how complementary it is to formal learning.

Through reflective contemplation, this study’s participants realized how much they had learned via informal learning since their appointment to more demanding leadership roles despite the fact that they had not been provided any formal training. Pre-service and new teachers should keep this in mind and take advantage of the informal learning opportunities that present themselves when they shadow their mentors and work collaboratively with their grade level and department teams.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Through the research, it is noted that individuals are continually learning through informal learning interactions whether they realize it or not. This researcher recommends future studies to be conducted with participants in a variety of settings throughout their everyday life. Another recommendation for further study would be to conduct a similar study at an educational institution that does not factor in collaborative planning into the leaders and teachers timetables to determine if participants voluntarily access informal learning by gravitating toward more knowledgeable others or they work in isolation. Other future studies could engage entire department teams in various organizations and/or professions.

It is recommended to extend this current study to investigate how study participants access informal learning in other aspects of their lives in addition to their workplace setting. For
example, study participants could be identified as having a shared experienced in a workplace setting, however, they could also be asked to elaborate on how they activate informal learning in other domains of their lives, such as at home with their family, while participating in social events or hobbies with their family and friends, when they are volunteering with community members on service projects, while working on committees, etc.

The site in which this study was conducted, is committed to collaborative planning and factors such into the leaders, teachers, and students' timetables. It would be interesting if a further study would be to conduct a similar study at an educational institution where collaborative planning is not scheduled into leaders, teachers, and students' timetables to see if those individuals voluntarily gravitate towards more knowledgeable others to access informal learning in order to benefit on their own accord or if they work in isolation.

It is also recommended that future studies with regard to informal learning in the workplace be conducted as a participatory action research where department teams work together to reflect on the informal learning dynamics among the individuals in their group and to track and measure if some individuals access and benefit more or less than others, and if so, what could possibly be the characteristic traits or reasons why. Warhurst (2006) suggested that future researchers focus on the “interrelationship of practice associated with a teaching development community and the evolution of practice situated in departmental communities” (p. 121). To take this idea a step further, future research at multiple sites could focus on informal learning effectiveness by measuring to determine if particular organizations or professions benefit more from it than others (Keeping & English, 2001; Hunter, 2014).
Limitations of the Study

This IPA study was limited to five participants who were selected through purposive sampling at one educational institution. Due to the nature in which the participants were selected of all being recently, internally-promoted Leadership or Extended Management Team Members at this specific location, informal adult learning in the workplace cannot be generalized to other employees at the study site nor to other organizations.

This researcher being considered an insider participant could be construed as a limitation regardless of the fact that she kept a reflective research journal throughout the data collection and analysis process to keep notes of her potential biases, values, beliefs, and own shared experience of being recently, internally promoted to a more demanding leadership role during the same timeframe as the participants.

The study was conducted in only one language as all five participants were fluent in English; however, all individuals spoke between two to five other languages to varying degrees of proficiency. Only catering to one language during the three-interview approach process could be viewed as a limitation.

Conclusion

Employers are seeking to hire a workforce that has the agility to be diverse in a variety of skillsets and continually reinvent themselves for the benefit of the organizations for which they serve. Formal education is highly valued as it provides a solid base for on-the-job training to build upon. However, it is noteworthy to mention that individuals gain 80-90% of their knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding from informal learning in the workplace. The casual nature in which learning occurs during informal interactions tends to go unnoticed, yet as identified in this study, learners acquire a vast amount of knowledge, skills, and conceptual
understanding along the way. Once an individual activates this mode of learning and possesses a positive attitude towards learning, she then makes a conscious effort to gain the most of each encounter. There are times when she will assume the role as the more-abled person where she will share her skills with others and then there are times when her colleagues will do the same for her. As demonstrated in this study’s findings, diverse individuals bring their strengths to the team and elevate the group’s dynamics for all to benefit, including the organization as a whole. It was identified that individuals transfer organization know-how most effectively to their colleagues and successors via informal learning, which is seen as value added at all levels: individual, group, and organization.
References


Appendix A

Leadership and Extended Management Team Member Recruitment Letter

February 14, 2017

Re: An Exploration of Leaders’ Experience with the Informal Learning Process during Role Transition at a K-12 Private, Non-profit, Co-educational, Bilingual School in Jordan

Dear Colleague:

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about informal learning in the workplace. This study is being investigated by myself, Sandy Abu-Arja, at Northeastern University as part of my doctoral dissertation.

The study will provide a platform for the participants, who are in leadership positions in the organization, to share their reflections from their learning experiences during this critical transition time in their professional career. The findings of this study will be based on the participants’ in-depth, personal insiders’ perspective as to how a combination of formal and informal learning opportunities, with an emphasis on informal adult learning, can enhance individuals’ knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding to broaden the employees’ repertoire in the workplace context.

The overall research question guiding this inquiry is “What are the experiences of newly, internally-promoted Leaders of a K-12 private, non-profit, co-educational, bilingual school in Jordan; and how do they make sense of their firsthand experience with informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the workplace?”

As a Leadership or Extended Management Team Member who has been newly, internally-promoted, I am inviting you to participate in this research study. Your participation is completely voluntary and will involve three one-on-one interviews for a maximum of two hours. I will digitally audio record the interview for later analysis. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interviews to ensure that your point of view is accurately captured.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me through my Northeastern email at abu-arja.s@husky.neu.edu to express your interest. If you begin the study, you may choose to leave the study at any point without consequence. If you do not choose to participate, you do not need to do anything further, and you will not be contacted again about this research study.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Sandy Abu-Arja
Doctoral Student
Northeastern University
Department of Education
Appendix B

Informed Consent Document – Leadership and Extended Management Team Members

Northeastern University, Department of Education, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, Kelly Conn, Ph.D.; Student Researcher, Sandy Abu-Arja, M.Ed.

Title of Project: An Exploration of Leaders’ Experience with the Informal Learning Process during Role Transition at a K-12 Private, Non-profit, Co-educational, Bilingual School in Jordan

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to participate because you have recently been internally-promoted to a Leadership or Extended Management Team position.

Why is this research study being done?
The goal of this research will be to explore informal adult learning in the workplace as a potentially untapped mode of professional development in organizations.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer some questions about how you make sense of your firsthand experiences with informal adult learning interactions as a mode of professional development in the context of the workplace.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at a time and location of your convenience. The first interview will take about 10-15 minutes. Prior to conducting the second interview, the Secondary Investigator will encourage participants to bring an artifact to the interview that the individual feels represents a workplace learning interaction he/she has engaged in since his/her promotion to serve as a conversation starter during the second interview. The second interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Within a few days of the second interview, you will be provided a typed transcript of the interview to check for accuracy and invited back for the third and final 10-15 minute interview to either confirm the transcript accuracy and/or clarify any points you felt were inaccurate or taken out of context.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Your risk for participating in this study is negligible. Your identity will be protected through the use of a mutually-agreed upon pseudonym during the study.
Will I benefit by being in this research?

There are no direct benefits for participants. However, potential benefits for others include gaining insight into if and how they access informal adult learning in the workplace and, if deemed beneficial, raising awareness as to how such opportunities can be highlighted and arranged for so that their department team members and potentially the whole school community can take advantage of such interactions.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you or any individual in any way as taking part in this project.

The audio recording of your interview(s) will be labeled using a pseudonym. Any questions about your identity should be answered using your pseudonym during the interview process.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to ensure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the Secondary Investigator, Sandy Abu-Arja at abu-arja.s@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Kelly Conn at k.conn@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part    Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

____________________

Printed name of person


Date
Appendix C

Interview 1 Protocol for Leadership and Extended Management Team Members

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the recordings which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed by an outsourced agency, rev.com.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.

This interview should last about 10-15 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary for me to cue you to push ahead and complete this line of questioning or we may mutually agree to bring the interview to an end and schedule another day and time to continue with the remaining interview questions. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used? Please state your mutually agreed upon pseudonym for this study and note that you will be referred to as such pseudonym in all documentation. If you refer to any of our colleagues by name during the interviews, I will assign a pseudonym to that individual so as to keep all identities confidential.

If you are ready, let’s begin the interview.

Please state where you originate from and do you carry more than one passport? If so, what are they and please share the story behind your multiple residency status.

Since you work at a bilingual (Arabic/English) school that also offers French starting at Grade 4, I was wondering how many languages you speak and what are they? Please share your proficiency levels of each of those languages.

Please state your current position with this educational institution and how long you have been in your current position?

How many years have you been employed at this educational institution?

What was/were your previous position(s) at this educational institution and how many years did you serve in that/those capacities?

How many years have you been in the field of education?

If you have held other positions within the educational field at other institutions, please state what those positions were, the length of time in those positions and which country/countries you were living in at the time of those experiences.
If I asked your colleagues at this particular institution to use five words to describe key characteristics about you, what would they say? Do you think those five words reflect you? If not, please provide me with five words that you think reflect you best.

Do you feel you had an added advantage of transitioning into your new leadership role at an organization you are already familiar with over if you were newly hired as a leader at an organization you were just joining? If so, please share insight into what such advantages you are referring to.

Is there anything else you would like to share with me at this time?

At the next interview, I kindly ask you to bring an artifact that you feel represents a workplace learning interaction you have engaged in since your promotion to serve as a conversation starter during the second interview.
Appendix D

Interview 2 Protocol for Leadership or Extended Management Team Member

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts.

This interview should last about 60-90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary for me to cue you to push ahead and complete this line of questioning or we may mutually agree to bring the interview to an end and schedule another day and time to continue with the remaining interview questions. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used? The Secondary Investigator will recap Interview 1 data collection as a summary to start this interview.

You were encouraged to bring an artifact to this interview that represents an informal learning engagement you have experienced since you have assumed your new leadership role. Please describe that particular experience using as vivid details as possible so that I can live vicariously through your lived experience.

Please describe a brief history of the professional development opportunities this educational institution has provided you with over the years you have been employed here.

Please tell me about a professional development experience you have had that you felt was particularly beneficial to your growth and development.

Do you believe that informal learning is interlinked at the individual, team and organizational levels? If so, please share an example of a particular instance where you experienced or witnessed this firsthand.

When you applied for the promotion, which domains of your new leadership responsibilities did you feel were your strengths? Please give examples of how you planned to assume the role as the MKO to share those strengths with your team or a particular individual who you felt would benefit from such experience.

When you applied for the promotion, which domains of your new leadership responsibilities did you feel were areas that would require capacity building on yours, as well as the organization’s part to support such development and share ways in which you aspired to achieve the desired results?

Once appointed to your new position in spring 2016, please share how you prepared yourself over the following six months to assume this role prior to reporting to duty the first day of work in August 2016.
Once you assumed your new position, how did you find the first couple of months of transition? Please share specific details of your day-to-day experiences while getting oriented with your new role.

With whom did you naturally gravitate toward in your workplace when you needed support or confirmation that what you were doing was aligned with the organization’s guiding statements and strategic plan? Please describe a particular interaction you had with this individual you would describe as a positive learning opportunity for you.

What are the five main characteristics that you think resourceful colleagues possess that encourage you as an individual to seek their insight, support, or guidance?

Please describe a time when one of your colleagues sought out your support or guidance with regard to a challenge he or she was facing. Was that encounter an isolated interaction or one of a series of interactions? Why do you think this particular colleague approached you for assistance?

What are your views about the benefits of workplace learning? Please give an example of how you learned a new task or skill for your leadership role from one of your colleagues.

At this time, are there any questions you thought I would ask, but didn’t and you prepared an answer to with regard to informal adult learning in the workplace context? If so, please share.