

Identifying Competency Gaps in the Civil Service Promotional Process: A Foundation for
Officer Development in the Elizabeth Fire Department

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of the Requirements for the
Executive Fire Officer Program

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Abstract

The Elizabeth Fire Department promotes firefighters to captain through the New Jersey Civil Service Commission's standardized testing process, which includes written and oral components. While this system evaluates tactical and supervisory decision making in simulated emergency scenarios, it may not fully assess broader leadership competencies such as emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, personnel management, and organizational awareness. In contrast, high performing fire service organizations often emphasize these attributes through structured officer development programs that integrate mentorship, competency modeling, and ongoing evaluation. This qualitative research study explores the perceived gaps between the New Jersey Civil Service promotional model and the leadership competencies emphasized in high functioning officer development systems.

The study examines what the current model assesses well, where it falls short, and what implications these gaps may have on officer performance, leadership effectiveness, and organizational readiness. Interviews and literature review form the basis of the methodology, with participants drawn from the Elizabeth Fire Department within the civil service structure. The findings aim to identify areas of improvement in leadership preparation within civil service based fire departments and offer insight into how targeted officer development can enhance supervisory performance. While the study does not propose a specific program, it offers a foundation for future implementation strategies based on competency needs and operational demands. These insights may assist departments in improving promotional preparedness, organizational consistency, and leadership outcomes across the fire service.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The modern fire service has evolved from a primarily tactical organization to one that requires sophisticated leadership at every level. Officers are increasingly expected to lead personnel, resolve conflict, manage risk, and make administrative decisions, roles that many fire service authors now consider essential to company level leadership (Leeb, 2023; Jones & Bartlett, 2021). In response to this expanded role, many fire departments across the country have adopted officer development programs rooted in leadership theory, competency modeling, adult education, and experiential learning. These programs aim to build confidence and consistency across the command staff by preparing prospective officers with the skills needed before assuming formal leadership roles.

The Elizabeth Fire Department currently lacks a structured officer development program. Promotions to captain are made through the New Jersey Civil Service Commission, and while this process includes oral components intended to evaluate supervisory communication, it places greater emphasis on tactical decision making in simulated scenarios and does not comprehensively assess broader leadership competencies such as emotional intelligence, personnel development, or organizational awareness. As noted in the literature, high functioning officer development systems typically include pre promotion mentorship, post promotion evaluation, and formal instruction in areas that go beyond tactical decision making (Angemi, 2024). Without pre or post promotion development pathways, new officers may find themselves underprepared to handle administrative responsibilities, personnel issues, and organizational

leadership tasks. Inconsistent performance and decision making at the officer level can affect operational safety, personnel morale, and public perception. This study aims to understand these gaps more clearly by analyzing the alignment, or misalignment between the civil service promotional model and the expectations placed on company officers.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its potential to identify gaps in officer preparedness and inform the future development of an officer leadership program designed to improve leadership consistency, raise professional standards, and strengthen organizational performance. The study has direct relevance to the Elizabeth Fire Department and to other agencies within New Jersey's Civil Service system, as well as those operating under promotional processes similar in structure and limitations, where structured testing models serve as the gateway to supervisory positions but may not reflect the full spectrum of skills needed in those roles. This study aligns with National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program content areas such as human resource management, leadership development, and organizational effectiveness. It also responds to national trends calling for more robust officer development, as outlined in publications such as NFPA 1020: Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications. By highlighting the implications of the current model, based on a review of the literature and participant feedback, and identifying both its strengths and its limitations, this study supports evidence based improvements to officer readiness. Implications extend beyond individual departments. The fire service as a whole continues to face challenges related to retention, morale, and trust in leadership. Officer development rooted in meaningful competencies has been shown to strengthen leadership pipelines and improve outcomes in both

emergency and administrative contexts (Nugent, 2024). Understanding how existing testing models support or hinder this development is a critical first step in building better systems.

Problem Statement

The Elizabeth Fire Department promotes firefighters to the rank of captain through a structured testing process administered by the New Jersey Civil Service Commission. This process includes a written multiple choice exam and two oral assessment exercises designed to evaluate fireground decision making, communication, and supervisory skills in simulated scenarios. While structured and standardized, the civil service promotional process places greater emphasis on tactical performance and situational communication, while offering limited opportunity to assess or develop broader officer competencies such as conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, personnel management, or organizational leadership. In contrast, high performing fire service organizations with formal officer development systems tend to integrate mentorship, leadership training, and competency based evaluation into their promotion pipelines (Kennedy, 2019; Nugent, 2024; Schwabe, 2018). These systems aim to prepare officers not only for emergency operations but also for the interpersonal, administrative, and ethical demands of supervision. This study explores the leadership competency gaps between the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process and the leadership competencies emphasized in high functioning officer development models. By examining which competencies are emphasized, omitted, or insufficiently addressed, this research seeks to identify areas where supplemental development could improve officer preparedness and leadership effectiveness within civil service based departments.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify and evaluate the gaps between the competencies assessed through the New Jersey Civil Service promotional model and those emphasized in effective officer development systems, with the goal of informing future leadership preparation strategies for the Elizabeth Fire Department.

Research Question(s) or Hypothesis

1. What core leadership competencies are emphasized in high functioning fire service officer development programs?
2. How do the competencies assessed by the New Jersey Civil Service Commission promotional process align with those emphasized in high functioning officer development models?
3. What gaps exist between the New Jersey Civil Service promotional model and the leadership competencies outlined in national officer development standards and literature supported models of effective fire officer performance?
4. What organizational, operational, or cultural challenges, and their consequences, arise when officers are promoted without being adequately prepared through structured, competency based leadership development programs?

Summary

This chapter introduced the research focus, background, and rationale for evaluating competency gaps in the civil service promotional model. It defined the problem, outlined the purpose and research questions, and highlighted the significance of the study for the Elizabeth Fire Department and similar organizations. Moving forward, Chapter 2 will explore existing literature related to fire officer development, competency modeling, leadership expectations, and promotional processes, followed by Chapter 3, which will detail the methodological approach used in this qualitative study. Subsequent chapters will present the findings, analyze their implications, and offer recommendations for practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The development of effective fire service officers requires more than tactical proficiency or operational experience. Leadership in today's fire service demands emotional intelligence, personnel management skills, organizational awareness, and the ability to adapt within complex systems. This literature review explores how these competencies are developed, assessed, and integrated into officer development programs across the country, with a focus on identifying gaps in the civil service promotional process in New Jersey. This chapter draws on disciplines including fire service leadership, public administration, adult education, and psychology to frame the broader context of officer preparedness. These intersecting domains reveal a tension between systems that rely solely on examinations versus those that implement comprehensive, ongoing leadership development.

Existing Literature

Civil Service Testing and Promotional Frameworks

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission (NJCSC) governs the promotional process for first level supervisors in all New Jersey municipalities that operate within the state's civil service system. First level supervisors in the Elizabeth Fire Department are identified as Fire Captain. As outlined in the NJCSC (2025) orientation guide, the current testing structure comprises a multiple choice written exam and two oral components, one focused on tactical decision making and the other on supervisory communication within a scenario. The process is designed to be job

relevant, standardized, and legally defensible; however, according to Angemi (2024), the NJCSC process emphasizes tactical reasoning and basic supervisory communication but does not assess broader leadership skills such as emotional intelligence, personnel development, or conflict resolution. Angemi (2024) also highlights that the NJCSC's officer job descriptions and skill requirements are vague at best. Officers must demonstrate the "ability to organize the work of their assigned company" and "remain cool and decisive," yet there is no guidance or structured development pipeline to ensure candidates are equipped to meet these expectations. Moreover, unlike certifications by the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety, such as fire inspector or fire instructor, there is no formal certification or continuing education requirement for officers promoted through the civil service system. As a result, there is no state mandated mechanism for requiring ongoing training, nor can departments revoke the title for lack of professional development unless formal disciplinary action is taken. This structural gap allows individuals to supervise personnel and manage complex situations without ever receiving instruction in leadership, conflict resolution, or administrative supervision.

This deficiency can have operational consequences. Officers may lack the tools to address personnel issues, manage team dynamics, or respond to crises involving behavioral health or conflict. As Angemi (2024) argues, minimal development input yields minimal performance output. The system rewards testing ability rather than leadership readiness, creating a performance gap that many departments fail to close post-promotion. Notably, historical efforts like the Wingspread Conferences (1966–1996) and the IAFC's Officer Development Handbook (2010) have long emphasized the need for deliberate, systematic leadership development in the fire service. These calls for reform reflect the profession's recognition that leadership competencies must be intentionally cultivated, not assumed to emerge through rank alone.

Officer Development and Competency-Based Leadership Models

Many executive fire officer (EFO) papers and department based studies emphasize that effective officer development requires structured, competency driven programming rooted in experiential learning and mentoring. Across the literature, several common features emerge: tiered officer academies aligned with NFPA standards, progressive evaluations, and leadership practicums that blend technical, behavioral, and administrative training (Desy, 2019; Headman, n.d.; Schwabe, 2018; Underwood, 2019). These models consistently stress the importance of preparing officers before promotion, not just afterward, to reduce transitional friction and ensure readiness for both emergency and interpersonal challenges (Kennedy, 2019; Nugent, 2024; Vetterick, 2019). Furthermore, some authors argue that successful programs are intentionally aligned with department culture and values, helping to build consistent leadership pipelines rather than relying solely on test based promotion (Chavez, n.d.; Kessinger, 2019; Tofano, n.d.). Collectively, these sources suggest that comprehensive officer development must be continuous, scalable, and directly tied to the competencies required in modern fire service leadership (Pyeatt, 2024). These findings reinforce the central problem in civil service departments like Elizabeth's: without a structured program, officers may enter leadership roles without ever having developed the competencies necessary for supervisory success. Examples of these approaches can be seen in department based programs that integrate credentialing, mentorship, shadowing, and progressive evaluation to support officer growth and organizational consistency (Kennedy, 2019; Kessinger, 2019; Nugent, 2024).

Credentialing Systems and National Frameworks

Modern credentialing systems offer structured pathways for fire officer development. The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) supports officer advancement through the Commission on Professional Credentialing (CPC), offering designations such as Fire Officer (FO), Chief Fire Officer (CFO), and Fire Marshal (FM), among others. The CPC process includes a portfolio review, peer evaluation, and formal interview (Ward & Carley, 2025). This structured, peer-reviewed process ensures officers meet professional benchmarks across education, experience, training, community involvement, and technical competencies. The National Fire Academy's (NFA) Managing Fire Officer (MFO) program further supports structured development through multi-year training, including community risk reduction, leadership in safety culture, and analytical decision making. Completion of the MFO requires online prerequisites, in person classes at the NFA, and a capstone project. This program is designed to foster adaptive leadership and strategic thinking (Ward & Carley, 2025). Both CPSE and NFA initiatives demonstrate scalable officer development models that prioritize continuous improvement. In contrast, NJCSC's current promotional process provides no pathway for post promotion growth or credentialing alignment. While departments like Elizabeth may offer internal officer development programs, they are limited in their ability to mandate participation or tie completion to promotional eligibility, since civil service law governs advancement criteria. As a result, these programs are often voluntary and lack enforceable consequences, creating inconsistent outcomes in officer preparedness.

NFPA 1020 Consolidation

In 2025, NFPA released the new NFPA 1020: Standard for Fire and Emergency Services Instructor, Fire Officer, and Emergency Medical Services Officer Professional Qualifications, consolidating NFPA 1021 and 1041. This consolidation, part of a broader Emergency Response and Responder Safety (ERRS) initiative, aims to streamline job performance requirements (JPRs) and reduce conflicting guidance across previously separate standards. The four tiered officer structure, Fire Officer I through IV, provides a clear framework for technical and leadership competencies at every level. NFPA 1020 defines Fire Officer I and II as company level leaders responsible for supervision, training, code enforcement, budgeting, and incident command.

The standard reinforces the need for professional development in areas such as cultural competence, fire prevention, human resources, and mental wellness, competencies currently omitted from NJCSC's promotional evaluations. The new consolidated standard reflects the fire service's complexity and provides a national benchmark against which local systems like NJCSC can be compared. While the civil service system in New Jersey allow departments to supervise, evaluate, and discipline promoted officers, they offer limited authority to tie leadership development to rank retention or progression, making it difficult to mandate post promotion growth without formal state level requirements.

Adult Learning Theory

Understanding adult learning theory helps frame how fire officers best absorb leadership content and adapt behaviors. Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy posits that adults learn most

effectively when the instruction is self directed, problem centered, and immediately applicable.

In fire service contexts, this translates into the need for training that integrates real world challenges, interactive simulations, and opportunities for reflective learning. Self directed learning is one important aspect of professional development; however, in paramilitary organizations like fire departments, self directed learning must be complemented with structured guidance and organizational support, as personnel often rely on top down approval, standardized expectations, and mentorship to validate and prioritize professional development efforts.

Firefighters cannot be expected to independently pursue leadership development without the tools, mentorship, and expectations in place. That's why authors like Schwabe (2018) and Kennedy (2019) argue that mentorship and guided experiential learning are crucial to successful officer development programs. Angemi (2024) also reinforces this point, emphasizing the need for institutionalized development structures. His recommendations include CEU requirements for fire officers and the creation of grant supported programs tailored to officer education in the fire service. These concepts align closely with adult education models that advocate for reflective practice, mentorship, and scaffolded learning.

Leadership & Officer Competencies

Literature across the fire service, military, business, and educational domains highlights a consistent set of core competencies expected of effective first level supervisors. These include emotional intelligence, communication, decision making, team leadership, ethics, and cultural competence (Goleman et al. 2017; Northouse, 2021; Willink & Babin, 2025). Goleman et al. (2017) emphasize that emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and those of others is foundational to effective leadership. This is echoed

by Leeb (2023), who argues in *Cornerstones of Leadership* that today's fire officers must blend humility, confidence, and presence with accountability, influence, and compassion. Brush and Kastros (2024) take this further in *Mastering Fireground Command*, suggesting that officer development must simultaneously address fireground command competency and leadership under pressure. They advocate for repetitive scenario based simulations and after action reviews to reinforce leadership behaviors. The Jones and Bartlett (2021) *Chief Officer: Principles and Practice* textbook identifies leadership, human resource management, administrative functions, and community risk reduction as vital fire officer responsibilities.

The Ward & Carley (2025) *Fire Officer: Principles and Practice* textbook identifies leadership, human resource management, administrative functions, and community risk reduction as vital fire officer responsibilities. Yet, civil service promotional processes in New Jersey rarely evaluate candidates in these domains, focusing instead on tactical judgment and isolated communication scenarios. Moreover, as Dena Ali (2024) points out, leadership is not only a performance variable but also a determinant of mental wellness in the fire service. Psychological safety, active listening, and mentorship directly influence team cohesion, stress resilience, and burnout prevention. The SAMHSA (2018) review cited by Ali reveals that a cooperative effort between leadership and team members is essential to mitigating trauma and occupational stress. Her findings underscore that these leadership attributes are best developed through structured officer development, not tested under exam conditions.

Synthesis of the Existing Literature

Across the reviewed literature, a clear theme emerges: the development of effective fire officers requires more than pre promotion testing. The existing civil service model in New Jersey

offers structure, standardization, and legal defensibility, but fails to assess or cultivate many of the competencies required for high performing fire service leaders. These include emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, team building, mentoring, and mental wellness support. Studies by Schwabe (2018), Underwood (2019), and Nugent (2024) demonstrate that successful officer development programs are those that combine credentialing with experiential learning and guided mentorship. Angemi (2024) furthers this by identifying structural gaps in the NJCSC system and advocating for mandatory CEUs and a revised officer development matrix. Leeb (2023) and Ali (2024) stress the link between leadership behavior and firefighter wellness, reinforcing the need to develop emotionally intelligent, attentive supervisors who build psychological safety within teams.

Adult learning theory supports these findings, indicating that firefighters benefit most from leadership development when it is problem centered, experience driven, and guided by reflective practice. Programs like those found in Frisco, Texas, Suffolk, Virginia, and Altoona, Pennsylvania provide strong blueprints for combining theory, fieldwork, and accountability in officer development. While the NJCSC model provides a legally sound promotional framework, it lacks depth in assessing the human competencies that define successful fire service leadership. The literature consistently recommends integrated, ongoing officer development that aligns with NFPA 1020 and meets the evolving expectations of today's fireground and administrative environments. The NFPA 1020 standard, CPSE credentialing model, and NFA MFO program collectively offer a structured, national framework for preparing officers for contemporary leadership demands. In contrast, NJCSC's promotional approach remains outdated and overly narrow in scope. While the NJCSC model provides a legally sound promotional framework, it lacks depth in assessing the human competencies that define successful fire service leadership.

The literature consistently recommends integrated, ongoing officer development that aligns with national standards and meets the evolving expectations of today's fireground and administrative environments.

Summary

This literature review examined current research and practice on fire officer development, civil service testing structures, and the competencies required for effective leadership in the modern fire service. Drawing from disciplines including fire service management, public administration, psychology, and adult education, the chapter identified major themes: the limitations of tactical only promotional testing, the importance of structured officer development programs, and the critical role of mentorship and emotional intelligence in fire officer success. The literature consistently suggests that comprehensive officer development requires pre-promotion preparation, post promotion support, and institutionalized expectations around continuing education. These elements are largely absent from New Jersey's current civil service framework, creating a gap between assessed competencies and operational needs. Moving forward, Chapter 3 will outline the methodological approach used to explore this gap through interviews, document analysis, and comparative program review. Chapter 4 will present findings from this research, while Chapter 5 will offer conclusions and recommendations tailored to the Elizabeth Fire Department.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research methodology using a generic qualitative approach. This design was selected due to its effectiveness in capturing nuanced perceptions and professional experiences, particularly within organizational systems such as the fire service. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that qualitative research allows for the exploration of complex human phenomena, such as leadership development, through open ended inquiry and thematic analysis. This design aligns with the study's aim to investigate fire officers' perspectives on leadership competencies and promotional processes within the New Jersey Civil Service framework. The generic qualitative approach was chosen because the research was not limited to a single bounded case (as in case study research), nor was it aimed at uncovering the shared essence of a lived experience (as in phenomenological studies). Instead, this study sought to identify patterns and themes derived from a range of individual responses to open ended survey questions. This allowed for the integration of multiple viewpoints while maintaining thematic coherence and fidelity to the lived reality of front line fire officers. Each of the four research questions guided the structure of the survey and framed the data analysis. The questions focused on identifying core leadership competencies, evaluating the alignment between those competencies and the civil service promotional process, uncovering developmental gaps, and exploring the consequences of inadequate officer preparation. The survey instrument included eight open ended questions, with two questions aligned to each research question.

Specifically, questions 1 and 2 explored the types of leadership competencies emphasized in formal or informal officer development. Questions 3 and 4 examined the perceived alignment

or misalignment between the civil service promotional exam and real-world supervisory responsibilities. Questions 5 and 6 investigated gaps between national standards for officer development and the current promotional model. Questions 7 and 8 asked respondents to describe any organizational, operational, or cultural consequences they had observed as a result of promoting officers without structured leadership preparation. This structure ensured that the data collected would directly inform the purpose of the study and provide insight into how fire service leadership development and promotional practices might be improved within both civil service frameworks and departmental policies.

Population and Sample Size

The target population for this study was first level fire officers, specifically individuals currently holding the rank of fire captain within the Elizabeth Fire Department, which is New Jersey Civil Service process fire department. Participants were required to be active duty company officers with direct supervisory responsibilities and have been promoted through the New Jersey Civil Service Commission promotional process. The inclusion criteria focused on officers with firsthand experience navigating both the testing process and subsequent leadership roles. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure that participants could provide relevant and informed responses. Twenty fire captains participated in the study. This sample size is appropriate for a qualitative study using thematic analysis, as it supports saturation while allowing for the collection of rich, diverse insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The final sample included captains from various shifts and firehouses, capturing a cross section of operational assignments, years of service, and supervisory exposure.

Instrument(s)

The primary research instrument was a custom-designed, open ended, qualitative survey consisting of eight questions. Each question was crafted to align with one of the four overarching research questions, with two questions aligned to each research domain. The survey was designed to elicit in depth responses related to officer development, leadership competencies, civil service preparation, and organizational outcomes. The survey instrument was developed based on the researcher's professional experience, a review of relevant literature, and preliminary discussions with peer chief officers and fire service instructors. To enhance content validity, the survey was peer reviewed by two experienced fire service leaders not participating in the final study. Their feedback was used to refine the clarity and alignment of the questions with the research goals.

The eight open-ended survey questions were as follows:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real-world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the Civil Service promotional process?
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?

6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or Civil Service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?

The survey was delivered electronically via a secure, anonymous Google Form. This format allowed respondents to provide thoughtful, uninterrupted responses while maintaining confidentiality.

Research Process

Data collection occurred from Friday, January 16th at 3:00 p.m. to Friday, January 23rd at 3:00 p.m. The survey was distributed by the Fire Officers Union, the Professional Firefighters Association of New Jersey (PFANJ), International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 2040. The distribution targeted all sworn fire captains in the Elizabeth Fire Department. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and informed consent was built into the introductory section of the form. No identifying or personally sensitive information was collected from respondents. The purpose of the survey, the confidentiality of responses, and the use of the data were all explicitly explained in the introductory instructions.

Upon completion, the survey responses were exported into a Google Sheet for initial organization. The data was then transferred into qualitative analysis platform, specifically,

Microsoft Excel, where a structured thematic coding matrix was developed. Microsoft Excel was chosen for its flexibility in organizing response data, coding, and generating frequency tables. Codes were initially based on the four research questions, with inductive codes added as new patterns and ideas emerged from the responses. The researcher independently conducted the coding process using Microsoft Excel as an organizational and tracking tool, with periodic peer review and debriefing by a fellow fire officer experienced in qualitative methods and officer development. This strategy was used to enhance credibility and mitigate individual bias in code interpretation. After coding was finalized, a frequency table was created to track the number of respondents who expressed each theme. These codes were then sorted and aligned with the study's four primary research questions, allowing for axial coding and higher order thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research principles to ensure the protection of all participants and the integrity of the research process. Several strategies were implemented to address confidentiality, minimize bias, and maintain professional standards consistent with the guidelines of the Executive Fire Officer Program and the Privacy Act.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All responses to the qualitative survey were anonymous. The survey did not request or collect any personally identifiable information (PII) such as names, dates of birth, badge numbers, addresses, or other traceable identifiers. The participants were instructed not to include any identifying references in their open-ended responses. No IP tracking or login was required to

access the survey, ensuring that all contributions remained confidential. Although the responses were collected from a known group of sworn fire captains within a single department, no quotes or references in the final report were attributed in any way that could reasonably identify a specific individual. In accordance with the Privacy Act, care was taken to ensure that the information shared in this document cannot be triangulated with other known data points to deduce the identity of participants.

Informed Participation

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Prior to accessing the survey, participants were presented with an informed participation statement explaining the purpose of the research, its voluntary nature, the estimated time to complete the survey, the measures in place to ensure anonymity, and how the data would be used. Proceeding to the questions served as implied consent to participate in the research.

Bias Mitigation

To reduce potential researcher bias, the survey instrument consisted entirely of open ended questions designed to elicit authentic, narrative responses. Coding and thematic analysis were conducted systematically using a structured matrix. Codes were developed inductively as well as deductively, and regular peer debriefing was conducted with a fire service colleague external to the Elizabeth Fire Department who has experience with officer development and qualitative analysis. This provided a layer of external validation and increased the credibility of the interpretations.

Organizational Sensitivity

Because this study was conducted within a municipal fire department, special attention was given to how cultural or operational critiques were presented. While the findings may contain references to organizational challenges, no negative characterizations were directed toward individuals, and the goal of the study was framed around system improvement and professional development. Pseudonyms or general terms were used when referring to incidents or examples that might be recognizable within the department. This study complies with the ethical expectations of the Executive Fire Officer Program and was conducted with transparency, integrity, and respect for all individuals and institutions involved.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used to explore how fire officers perceive the alignment, effectiveness, and gaps within the New Jersey Civil Service promotional system as it relates to officer development. A qualitative research design was employed using a generic qualitative approach, which allowed for open ended responses and inductive thematic analysis. This approach aligned with the study's objective to gather in depth perspectives from first level supervisors in the fire service. The research instrument consisted of eight open ended survey questions, strategically developed to align with four overarching research questions. These questions focused on identifying core leadership competencies, assessing alignment between those competencies and the civil service promotional process, identifying developmental gaps, and exploring the consequences of promoting officers without structured preparation. The instrument was reviewed by external fire service professionals for clarity and relevance prior to distribution.

The target population was sworn fire captains in the Elizabeth Fire Department. Twenty eligible participants received the survey, which was distributed by the Professional Firefighters Association of New Jersey, IAFF Local 2040. The data collection window spanned from Friday, January 16th at 3:00 p.m. to Friday, January 23rd at 3:00 p.m. Responses were submitted anonymously, exported into a Google Sheet, and organized within Microsoft Excel to support researcher led coding, theme development, and frequency tracking. The research process emphasized transparency, consistency, and ethical rigor. Open coding was followed by pattern coding, allowing for both inductive emergence and deductive alignment with the study's research questions. Ethical considerations, including anonymity, voluntary participation, and avoidance of personally identifiable information, were addressed throughout the design and implementation of the study. Chapter 4 will present the results of this analysis, including major themes that emerged from participant responses and how they correspond to the stated research questions.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative research study conducted to explore fire officers' perceptions of leadership development and the effectiveness of the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process. The purpose of the study was to examine how fire captains, serving as first level supervisors, experience the transition into leadership roles and how prepared they feel based on their formal and informal training, as well as their success in navigating real world responsibilities following promotion. Participants were all sworn fire captains from the Elizabeth Fire Department in New Jersey, promoted through the New Jersey Civil Service

Commission testing process. To protect participant confidentiality, no personal identifiers such as age, race, or specific work locations were collected or reported.

The study was guided by four central research questions. These focused on (a) identifying the core leadership competencies emphasized in high functioning officer development programs; (b) examining the degree of alignment between these competencies and the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process; (c) exploring perceived gaps between Civil Service promotional systems and national standards for officer development; and (d) understanding the organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that may result from promoting officers without formal leadership preparation. Themes were derived through a structured coding process that involved both deductive and inductive methods. Initial codes were informed by the four research questions, while emergent codes were added as patterns and perspectives surfaced during review of the open ended responses. Code frequency counts were then used to assess which ideas and concerns were most commonly shared across participants. The full survey instrument used in this study, along with a frequency table of thematic codes, is provided in the Appendix to support transparency, replication, and further analysis. Each theme presented in this chapter corresponds to one or more of the four research questions. By organizing the results thematically and mapping each theme to a guiding question, this structure provides clarity and supports a rigorous alignment between the raw data, the research design, and the study's core objectives.

Theme 1: Leadership Competency through Experience

(Research Question 1: What core leadership competencies are emphasized in high functioning fire service officer development programs?)

This finding aligns with Leeb (2023), who argues that fire service leadership competencies are primarily shaped through experiential learning, mentorship, and modeled behavior rather than formal instruction alone. While experience remains essential, the literature cautions that relying exclusively on informal learning creates inconsistency in leadership readiness without a structured development framework. A dominant theme across participant responses was the belief that leadership competency is primarily developed through real world experience rather than formal coursework. Thirteen of the twenty respondents emphasized that working under effective captains, exposure to emergency scenes, and learning by example were the most critical factors contributing to their leadership development. As one respondent stated, “Everything I do now emulates something I’ve learned along the way from each and every one [of the captains I worked with].” Another emphasized, “What prepared me was the leaders that I have worked for,” while a third noted, “Following in the footsteps of the people you respected that came before you” was essential to developing leadership skills. Respondents repeatedly stressed the importance of soft skills such as composure, decision making, and interpersonal communication. Competencies like emotional intelligence, team management, and gaining the respect of senior firefighters were cited more frequently than classroom derived concepts. This suggests that in high functioning environments, mentorship, repetition on the fireground, and modeled behavior are viewed as the foundation for leadership competency at the company officer level.

Theme 2: Civil Service Testing is Insufficient Preparation

(Research Question 2: How do the competencies assessed by the New Jersey Civil Service Commission promotional process align with those emphasized in high functioning officer development models?)

This perceived misalignment reflects Angemi's (2024) conclusion that New Jersey's Civil Service promotional system prioritizes test performance over leadership preparedness, leaving critical supervisory competencies unassessed. The findings reinforce broader concerns in the literature that standardized testing alone cannot capture the interpersonal and organizational demands of modern fire officer roles. Fifteen respondents reported that the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process did not adequately prepare them for the practical and interpersonal responsibilities of fire officer leadership. Many described the test as focused on "memorization," "study ability," and "what they want to hear," rather than actual job performance or crew management. One participant stated, "The testing is a vacuum and indicates one's study abilities, not competency." Another said plainly, "To me, the test didn't prepare me. What prepared me was the leaders that I have worked for." Although a few respondents acknowledged that the exam helped with communication skills or tactical vocabulary, most expressed frustration that critical administrative, procedural, and supervisory responsibilities were not evaluated. One suggested that "a test that more thoroughly tests our ability to manage a crew or smaller incident would be more appropriate." Overall, the data suggest a significant misalignment between the civil service evaluation criteria and the actual competencies required for successful field performance and crew leadership, highlighting a potential disconnect between policy level assessment mechanisms and frontline operational needs.

Theme 3: Administrative and Procedural Gaps After Promotion

(Research Question 3: What gaps exist between the New Jersey Civil Service promotional model and the leadership competencies outlined in national officer development standards and literature-supported models of effective fire officer performance?)

These administrative preparedness gaps are consistent with national leadership standards outlined in NFPA 1020, which identify documentation, human resource management, and organizational accountability as core fire officer responsibilities. The absence of these competencies in the promotional evaluation process supports the literature's assertion that tactical proficiency alone is insufficient for effective supervision (Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2021). Over half of the respondents (11 of 20) described being unprepared for the administrative aspects of their new roles after promotion to captain. Several cited difficulties with NFIRS/NERIS reporting, sick time documentation, disciplinary procedures, training logs, and using software such as Red Alert (a records management system). One respondent admitted, "Paperwork, training logs, Red Alert responsibilities, these caught me off guard." Another shared, "Disciplinary side and knowledge of city contract and ordinances" were areas they were not prepared to handle. These findings underscore a lack of training in organizational, administrative, and supervisory domains that are heavily emphasized in national standards such as NFPA 1020 and the chief officer principles of leadership, documentation, and ethics. While many respondents felt well prepared tactically due to their years of operational experience, they consistently identified gaps in the bureaucratic and managerial competencies needed for effective supervision and compliance. This reflects a core misalignment between what is assessed through civil service testing and what is required to function fully and confidently as a first line officer within the department's broader organizational system.

Theme 4: Lack of Structured Departmental Officer Development

(Research Question 3 continued, and Research Question 1)

This absence of formal officer development mirrors findings by Kennedy (2019) and Nugent (2024), who emphasize that departments lacking structured, progressive leadership programs experience variability in officer performance and confidence. The literature consistently supports the need for intentional, department supported development pathways to ensure leadership consistency. A consistent theme across 14 responses was the absence of a formal or structured officer development or mentoring program within the department. Although some captains described learning informally from mentors or predecessors, often by chance, there was no consistent or required leadership preparation prior to promotion. One respondent reflected, “Mentoring happened at the company level...but it wasn't structured by the department and was just lucky to be assigned to work under them.” Another noted, “Nothing was ever structured. It was more about following in the footsteps of the people you respected.” While a few mentioned limited officer development classes, these were described as either “optional,” “PowerPoint slides,” or “two classes”, not part of an integrated or mandatory training track. This reveals a clear gap in succession planning and developmental programming within the department. In high functioning officer development models, such as those promoted by the National Fire Academy or CPSE credentialing, leadership growth is intentionally scaffolded with progressive education, mentoring, and evaluation. The data here show that such systems were either absent or minimally implemented, increasing the likelihood of variability in officer competence and confidence across the organization.

Theme 5: Consequences of Promoting Without Preparation

(Research Question 4: What organizational, operational, or cultural challenges, and their consequences, arise when officers are promoted without being adequately prepared through structured, competency-based leadership development programs?)

The operational and cultural consequences described by participants reflect Ali's (2024) assertion that leadership competency directly influences psychological safety, team cohesion, and operational effectiveness. Without structured preparation, leadership gaps can manifest as increased risk, reduced morale, and diminished trust within the organization. Nine of the twenty respondents cited specific consequences that arose from promoting officers without adequate preparation. Some described operational breakdowns or increased risk on emergency scenes. One participant referenced recent serious incidents, stating, "We have seen in the past 18 months the fruits of this question" Others described morale and team cohesion issues, such as seasoned firefighters being forced to work under inexperienced or "incompetent" officers. As one respondent put it, "Experienced firefighters do not want to work for or with an incompetent captain... being forced to work in an environment like that only builds resentments." Another noted, "Mishandling of situations as well as varied levels of compliance to orders... some inconsequential and some involved injuries." These statements illustrate how underdeveloped officer leadership not only impacts operational effectiveness but can also undermine trust, discipline, and unit culture. The consequences reported here support the notion that structured preparation is not merely academic but has real world implications for team dynamics, safety, and mission success.

Theme 6: Recommendations for Improving Officer Development

(Primarily aligned with Research Question 3: What gaps exist between the New Jersey Civil Service promotional model and the leadership competencies outlined in national officer development standards and literature supported models of effective fire officer performance? Secondly aligned with Research Question 4: What organizational, operational, or cultural challenges, and their consequences, arise when officers are promoted without being adequately prepared?)

Participant recommendations closely align with national best practices outlined in NFPA 1020 and CPSE credentialing models, which advocate for competency based progression, mentorship, and continuous professional development. These findings support the literature's position that officer readiness is best achieved through structured preparation rather than reliance on promotional testing alone (Ward & Carley, 2025). A majority of respondents (13 out of 20) offered thoughtful and often specific suggestions for improving officer development at both the departmental and civil service levels. These recommendations centered around increasing experiential requirements before eligibility, enhancing the content of promotional testing, and establishing more formalized, department sponsored development tracks. Several respondents emphasized that the current eligibility threshold of three years as a firefighter was insufficient, particularly for individuals with limited real world experience. One participant recommended, "Raise the minimum years to test - seven years for first level, unless a specific burden applies. Fourteen years for chief officer." Others echoed this sentiment, proposing a higher standard of experience and calling for expanded prerequisites such as Fire Officer I and II certifications, national incident management training, or structured acting officer programs. "There should be more required courses to better prepare candidates for real world on the job situations and

success,” one captain stated. Another reinforced this, saying, “Only needing three years of time as a firefighter should not qualify a candidate to be eligible to test.”

Several participants also recommended changes to the civil service exam itself, with some calling for broader question sets and inclusion of administrative, personnel, and procedural duties, not just emergency scene tactics. One noted, “The written should have more questions, particularly with a section to include admin and procedural aspects of officer duties, not just tactics.” Another proposed giving more weight to experience, stating, “I believe the seniority component should have a higher weight,” while also suggesting consideration of documented volunteer time. At the departmental level, respondents consistently advocated for the implementation of standardized, formal officer development programs, especially prior to promotion. Suggestions included cross-tour officer preparation classes, recurring SOP/SOG training, incident report writing instruction, and mentorship opportunities for acting captains. As one respondent explained, “Department-level standardized officer preparation classes across tours could begin changing the differences across shifts. This could be offered to members that act or can act as officers as well as those on the promotional list.” Another added, “Formal training on SOP/SOG and admin duties, writing the book, incident writing, etc.” should be part of officer onboarding or orientation.

These responses underscore a strong interest among company officers for more intentional, transparent, and competency based development systems. The collective sentiment points toward a need for both systemic reform in the testing process and internal department-level investment in leadership cultivation. These recommendations represent not only personal opinion but informed professional insights drawn from firsthand experience in the field.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of a qualitative study exploring how fire captains promoted through the New Jersey Civil Service process perceive their preparation for leadership roles. Drawing from responses provided by 20 sworn company officers within the Elizabeth Fire Department, the study examined experiences related to leadership development, promotional testing, and operational readiness following promotion. The survey was distributed anonymously through union channels, and participants responded to eight open ended questions aligned with four central research questions. Thematic coding and frequency analysis revealed a number of significant trends. Many respondents emphasized that core leadership competencies were learned primarily through experience, mentorship, and time on the job, rather than through structured training. Participants widely viewed the Civil Service promotional exam as insufficient in preparing candidates for the practical and interpersonal demands of company officer roles. Several respondents highlighted the disconnect between the tactical focus of the exam and the administrative, procedural, and supervisory challenges they encountered after promotion.

Another dominant theme was the lack of structured officer development at the departmental level. While some captains benefited from informal mentorship, many described being left to “figure it out” after promotion. The consequences of this gap were noted throughout the responses, ranging from inconsistent leadership practices to preventable operational errors and low morale. In addition to identifying these deficiencies, many participants offered clear and constructive recommendations to strengthen officer development. These included raising eligibility thresholds for testing, implementing department wide supervisory training, and aligning local practices with national officer development standards. Taken together, these

themes offer a compelling look at how leadership preparation, or the absence of it, shapes frontline supervision in the fire service. The findings demonstrate a clear disconnect between the formal promotional process and the real world responsibilities of newly promoted officers. These results will be interpreted in Chapter 5 through the lens of relevant literature, national standards, and the study's guiding research questions, with recommendations offered for improving officer development in Civil Service fire departments.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Results

This study explored how fire officers in the Elizabeth Fire Department promoted through the New Jersey Civil Service process perceive their preparedness for leadership roles, with particular attention to officer development, promotional testing, and post promotion challenges. Responses from 20 sworn fire captains in the Elizabeth Fire Department provided detailed insight into their experiences transitioning into supervisory positions. These six themes represent respondent level prevalence derived from axial coding and synthesis of open-ended survey responses. The eight question qualitative survey generated rich, narrative data that were coded and analyzed to identify recurring themes. Six primary themes emerged from the data. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that key leadership competencies, such as

communication, decision making, and emotional intelligence, were acquired informally through on the job experience rather than through formal training. Many participants expressed concern that the civil service promotional exam did not adequately prepare them for the administrative and interpersonal responsibilities associated with fire officer roles. Several responses highlighted gaps in preparation related to department specific procedures, supervisory duties, and organizational expectations.

Participants also reported a lack of structured officer development programs within the department. While informal mentorship and personal initiative were common, few officers described any formal post promotion training or professional development. This lack of preparation was viewed by several captains as contributing to operational inconsistencies and cultural friction. Despite these concerns, many respondents offered constructive recommendations, including raising eligibility requirements for promotional testing, integrating department led officer development programs, and aligning local leadership practices with national standards. These themes form the foundation for the conclusions, implications, and recommendations presented in the following sections. Each is directly tied to the study's four research questions and reflects the lived experiences of officers serving in leadership roles under the civil service promotional model.

Conclusions Based Upon Results

The findings of this study suggest that the current New Jersey Civil Service promotional process does not fully equip fire officers with the leadership skills, administrative preparedness, or department specific knowledge necessary for success in their roles as first level supervisors. The officers surveyed consistently described a promotional transition that relied heavily on

experiential learning rather than formal training. This reflects a gap between what is assessed during the promotion process and the realities of leadership on the fireground and in the firehouse. The prominence of the theme related to on the job learning highlights an organizational reliance on informal mentorship and individual adaptability. While these factors can foster resilience and leadership growth, the absence of a structured developmental framework creates inconsistency and inequity in officer preparedness. Officers who lacked strong peer mentors or prior acting experience reported feeling overwhelmed or unprepared for the expectations of their new role.

The perception of the civil service exam as overly focused on memorization and detached from real world application underscores a disconnect between statewide testing standards and the functional demands of municipal fire officer positions. While some respondents acknowledged the exam's value in reinforcing fireground knowledge, most expressed concern that critical leadership and administrative responsibilities, such as performance management, conflict resolution, and documentation, were not emphasized. The absence of structured departmental officer development further amplifies this disconnect. Respondents noted that while national models such as NFPA 1020, the fire officer series, and credentialing systems like CPSE's FO designation emphasize competencies in human resource management, community engagement, and strategic thinking, these areas are often overlooked at the local level. This lack of alignment not only leaves officers underprepared but may also expose departments to operational inefficiencies and increased risk.

The operational and cultural consequences cited by participants reflect the human impact of unstructured officer preparation. Several respondents described challenges with peer

credibility, intergenerational conflict, and missteps in handling supervisory responsibilities. These outcomes suggest that inadequate preparation does not simply affect individual officers, it can ripple outward to affect morale, company cohesion, and service delivery. However, the study also revealed an encouraging trend: officers are not only aware of the gaps but are also invested in improving the system. Many offered thoughtful, actionable recommendations rooted in firsthand experience. Their suggestions, including raising prerequisites to test, expanding acting officer opportunities, and developing formal mentoring or onboarding programs, represent a willingness to strengthen the profession and support the next generation of fire service leaders. The conclusions drawn from these results affirm that leadership development in the fire service must go beyond traditional testing. A comprehensive, structured, and department supported approach to officer preparation is essential to meet the complex demands placed on first level supervisors in today's fire service environment.

Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into fire officer development and the perceived shortcomings of the New Jersey Civil Service promotional system, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was limited to twenty participants from a single municipal fire department. Although the participants represented a cross section of captains from various shifts and firehouses, the perspectives gathered cannot be assumed to reflect the views of all first-level officers across the state or in departments with different governance structures, operational demands, or organizational cultures. The use of purposive sampling further narrows generalizability, as it specifically targeted individuals promoted through the civil service system within the Elizabeth Fire Department.

Second, the qualitative nature of the study, while rich in descriptive detail, is inherently subjective. Data were self reported through open ended survey responses, and the thematic coding process relied on the researcher's interpretation. While peer debriefing was used to enhance credibility and reduce bias, alternative researchers might have interpreted or grouped responses differently. Additionally, the anonymity of responses prevented follow up clarification or deeper probing that might have been possible in interviews or focus groups.

Third, because the study prioritized participant anonymity, no demographic data such as years of experience, prior acting officer assignments, or educational background were collected. These factors might have provided important context for understanding differences in officer preparedness or perception. Without them, the data cannot account for the influence of personal or professional history on the themes that emerged.

Finally, the scope of the research was limited to perceptions of officer development and the civil service promotional process. While some participants mentioned organizational or cultural consequences, these outcomes were not independently measured or validated. Future studies incorporating quantitative performance data or broader stakeholder perspectives would help further substantiate or expand upon the findings presented here. Despite these limitations, the study offers a meaningful snapshot of how a group of experienced fire officers view their leadership transition and the systems intended to prepare them. These insights can serve as a foundation for more targeted research, policy review, and strategic improvement within officer development programs.

Implications and Recommendations to the Field

The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of aligning officer development programs with the real world responsibilities that newly promoted fire officers encounter. The data reveal a pronounced disconnect between the civil service promotional process and the leadership demands placed on first level supervisors. Participants consistently reported that passing the exam did not adequately prepare them for supervisory duties, particularly those related to communication, administrative oversight, mentorship, and decision making under stress. One major implication for the fire service is the need for departments, especially those operating within civil service frameworks, to invest in comprehensive officer development prior to and following promotion. Departments cannot rely solely on the promotional exam as a benchmark for leadership readiness. Instead, leadership competencies must be cultivated through structured education, scenario based training, peer mentorship, and a clear developmental pathway designed to prepare members for formal leadership roles.

It is recommended that the Elizabeth Fire Department, and similarly organized agencies, implement a formal officer development program that aligns with national standards such as NFPA 1020. This program should incorporate a task book system or milestone based learning framework that provides members with guided exposure to leadership principles, administrative processes, and command responsibilities prior to promotion. This proactive preparation would help ensure that newly promoted officers are ready to lead effectively from day one, without compromising the role or authority of current company officers. Additionally, departments should establish mentorship models that connect future and current officers in ways that reinforce leadership values and operational consistency. Peer mentorship was consistently

highlighted in this study as a key factor in supporting officers during their transition into command roles, even when informal. Formalizing this mentorship process would enhance continuity, morale, and professionalism across the department.

Fire departments should also explore greater coordination with civil service agencies to ensure promotional assessments reflect the multifaceted realities of company officer responsibilities. While tactical knowledge remains essential, participants identified communication, emotional intelligence, and organizational leadership as equally vital. Exam content and preparatory pathways should be expanded to reflect these competencies. Lastly, performance feedback mechanisms, such as structured evaluations following promotion, should be developed to support ongoing growth, identify areas for improvement, and reinforce a culture of accountability and development. These systems would serve both individual officers and the broader organization by closing the loop between promotion, performance, and professional growth. Taken together, these recommendations outline a pathway for evolving from a test centric promotion system toward a leadership centered model of officer development. This transformation would strengthen leadership at the company level, enhance organizational cohesion, and better prepare departments to meet the complex challenges of the modern fire service.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provided valuable insight into the perceived shortcomings of the current promotional process and the leadership development needs of first level fire officers, it also opened several avenues for further exploration. Future research should consider expanding the scope of participants beyond a single municipal department to include a broader range of

departments across New Jersey and other states that utilize civil service testing. Doing so would allow for comparative analysis and determine whether the findings from this study are reflective of systemic issues or more localized in nature. Another recommendation is to explore the perspectives of other ranks within the fire service, particularly battalion chiefs and deputy chiefs, regarding the readiness of newly promoted captains and the observable impact of structured development versus trial by fire experience. Their insights could deepen the understanding of how leadership gaps manifest across the chain of command and influence department operations.

Further qualitative inquiry could examine the effectiveness of specific developmental interventions, such as structured mentorship programs, leadership academies, or task book models, in preparing future officers. Action research designs or longitudinal studies could be particularly useful in evaluating the implementation and long term outcomes of these initiatives. Additionally, future research could focus on examining the alignment of state and national fire officer credentialing frameworks, such as Fire Officer I–IV, NFPA 1020, and Center for Public Safety Excellence models, with the current promotional structures in civil service jurisdictions. Investigating the gaps between these frameworks and the lived experiences of newly promoted officers could guide the modernization of leadership standards in credentialing and civil service alike. Finally, research could explore the organizational consequences of poor officer development through the lens of employee morale, incident performance, safety outcomes, or disciplinary trends. This would help quantify the downstream effects of leadership preparation (or lack thereof) and strengthen the case for systemic reform.

Conclusion

This capstone research project explored the perceptions of first level fire officers regarding leadership development and the effectiveness of the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process. Through qualitative analysis of open ended survey responses from twenty sworn fire captains, six major themes emerged: leadership competency through experience, civil service testing as insufficient preparation, administrative and procedural gaps after promotion, lack of structured departmental officer development, consequences of promoting without preparation, and recommendations for improving officer development. These findings revealed a consistent sentiment among respondents that experience, mentorship, and leadership qualities are cultivated more through operational exposure and informal guidance than through standardized testing or formal instruction. The research underscores a disconnect between the competencies assessed in the civil service promotional exam and the real world expectations placed on newly promoted company officers.

While the testing process may serve as a standardized method of assessment, it does not adequately prepare officers for the leadership, administrative, and interpersonal demands they face after promotion. Respondents expressed strong support for the introduction of structured officer development programs, including formal mentorship, task books, and leadership education initiatives that precede promotion, not follow it. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform organizational improvement, policy development, and future research related to fire officer leadership preparation. By highlighting the experiences and insights of those serving on the front lines, this research contributes meaningfully to the broader fire service discourse on officer development and competency based leadership. As departments continue to

navigate the challenges of recruitment, retention, and accountability, the need for intentional, competency driven officer development will remain paramount.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions and Responses

Note: The following responses were collected from 20 fire captains within the Elizabeth Fire Department as part of a qualitative survey for this Capstone Research Project. All responses are anonymous and are presented in their original form, lightly edited for clarity where needed.

Respondent 1:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - Before: New York Fire Officer 1 & 2, AAS Directed Studies Fire Science Technology
 - After: New Jersey Fire Officer 1 & 2, NFA STICO & PICO, Mastering Fireground Command, NFFF Leadership Classes
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Rapid Assessment, Risk Management, Conflict Resolution, Clear Direction, and Coaching
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - I do not think the CSC promotional process prepared me for my responsibilities as a company officer, nor do I believe that was the intention of the CSC. It is impossible to test for everything that come from the job analysis. While I have not participated in a job analysis I still feel that there are gaps between the analysis and the test.
 - I think the reference books in the orientation guides are a good start towards officer development, but just reading them does not help you implement the knowledge from those resources. With that said, to get the most out of the testing process it requires a lot of individual effort. Individuals who limit their preparation to the references tend to do well while sometimes those who go beyond in their preparation and learn to be officers by applying knowledge and strategies outside those references miss the grading matrix and have to appeal for the inclusion of outside material. So the process isn't preparing you to think on your own to be a company officer, it is testing you on regurgitating the reference material.

4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - From the fireground it is seeing the immediate impact of the selection of tactics. In the testing process your decisions always seem to be right, but in the real world that is not always the case. In the testing process there are also unlimited resources with little application of the timing of when you receive those resources. In the real world it could be 20min to receive those resources and you have to make decisions on the limited resources at your disposal. We are all doing more with less and the testing process ignores that.
 - When looking at personnel decisions, our members tend to treat us to situations that are a lot more difficult and complex. In real life the players are a lot more difficult and less reasonable. While we are taught and tested to address these situations many departments do not let their first level supervisors address them which weakens the officer.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - I feel that my personal preparation has helped me to avoid any situations or responsibilities that I could not handle. Reflecting upon certain situations there are times I could have handled things better, but overall I felt confident.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - In addition to testing there needs to be a certification requirement for a promotion. The lack of training and certification opens departments up to liability. In addition, that certification needs to include leadership training, not just operations based requirements.
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - None. Everything I have sought for officer development or mentoring has been on my own.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - I think culturally we see many officers promoted and they remain on their shifts. Without the formal education to understand how difficult it is for those officers to

perform they regress to the mean of the establishment. Rather than advancing, shift identity and culture dominates to the detriment of the department.

- Organizationally, I feel that there are less consequences at the first level supervisor level, but deficiencies in officers become apparent when we hit the Battalion Chief level. It may be in our best interest to implement the second-level supervisor position to prevent these deficiencies hurting the leadership of the department.
- Operationally, we are a very busy department. For Type 5 incidents we do a very good job in the absence of formal training, but when we hit those incidents that are Type 4 or bordering on Type 3 we start to fail in our implementation of incident command because we do not have those large scale incidents every day. So those bad habits that get us by during Type 5 incidents are applied even when incidents become more complex.

Respondent 2:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - As related to fire department leadership, other than the required NIMS and ICS training, none. Previous Captain Bauer taught me a lot
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Tactics number 1, and then people managing number 2. A lot of times managing the people is the hard part, fighting fires ironically the easier part. Managing egos, narratives, rumors,
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Tactically it prepared me well, managing personnel not well.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Managing people and civilians attitudes and demands wasn't tested as much as you encounter those problems in the real world
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?

- Yes, when sewage pipes back up and your bathrooms to your firehouse are now out of service and you have to be the firehouse property manager, notifications, relocations, managing poor attitudes towards firehouse conditions.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - I feel an officer class, designed for each rank would be a great asset to newly appointed officers. Maybe even a mentorship program where newly appointed officers work with someone that is already in that rank, so if they have questions they can reach out for advice.
 7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - SOGs, fire officer 1, previous Captain Bauer trained a ton on it, and Senior captains developed a flash drive and “captains college” of forms and information on reports/tactics/SOGs.
 8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - No, has been that way for a while. I think it’s the norm. I feel the captain position is a very serious position and anyone getting promoted or interested in getting promoted should take their own initiative to learn the job before the title comes. That in itself I believe should be a criteria for a good/qualified leader.

Respondent 3:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Initial size up to properly position apparatus and assign incoming units for specific tasks. Proper building construction terminology and the hazards associated with each type of construction. Accountability of units on scene and location of all units.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.

- I personally feel that 3 yrs on the job is not enough experience time to properly and confidentiality run a company. Although some people have the book smarts, experience at fires or other incidents is is hands down one of the biggest assets to knowing how a fire will travel, what a spongy floor or roof feels like, or how to attack a fire with fire on multiple floors with report of people inside.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Real world differences are dealing with actual people who are upset, panicking or hostile. Situations that require split second decision making for yourself and your crew. Situations that empathy can be go a long way. Testing loses that real world feel, where eye contact or just listening can completely change a bad situation.
 5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - One of the biggest situations that stand out for me is when one of your members is having trouble coping with seeing a dead body of a young person after a bad accident. We don't have the training or even procedures for getting them help within the department. Besides calling the crisis hotline, which isn't flawless itself. There are times where first responders will need help themselves, and we created an environment that looks down on these people instead of helping.
 6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - I feel an officer class, designed for each rank would be a great asset to newly appointed officers. Maybe even a mentorship program where newly appointed officers work with someone that is already in that rank, so if they have questions they can reach out for advice.
 7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - I had no department training after being promoted to Captain.
 8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - I've experienced crews or a member in a company calling the shots because the Captain lacks experience or knowledge and the Captain is afraid of upsetting the crew to go train. Captains need to come into a company with expectations of what is expected of each member at different incidents, and train continues until you can't get it wrong.

Respondent 4:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - Prior to nothing, after attained masters degree in executive leadership, instructor, and am currently pursuing Fire Officer 1.
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - That's a tough question. But people should be fit into one of two categories, maybe 3, but the first would display excellent organizational skills and possess proficient clerical skills as improper reporting becomes a liability to all parties regardless of rank as well as the department or municipality. The second would be tool use and physicality, while some people have bigger brains, others are excellent with their hands. A split between the two would theoretically help each of them gain in their abilities where weaker. After all they did pass an exam and have the intent to rise. The 3rd would be a combination but mainly focus on communication skills. Poor communicators are detrimental to their company and shift as it can fail to address company grievances and maintain a motivated staff.
 - Ultimately all of these competencies are necessary, yet in a career as diverse as the fire service, funneling people into these concentrations can help obtain with core mission of the department.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - It didn't whatsoever. I was promoted with the knowledge obtained from my initial training academy, skills from work, watching dept role models, and learning on incidents while staying in the books unofficially. The civil service exam has also produced many higher ranked people who don't know how to make decisions, have trouble thinking outside the box, can't perform basic office and clerical tasks, and make the process a joke.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - All of it... literally... the results are on the streets as we speak... inadvertently, the testing process is geared towards new recruits more than experienced firefighters. New recruits just underwent rigorous book work and learning and the information is fresh. As a result they lack life experience and true decision making experience.

5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Yes. Superstorm Ida. Incident command broke down. The very supervisors staffed to guide newer and younger officers was missing. Some company officers rose to the challenge, some hid, some rose the company rule book. But most critically there was no PIA or time to go over fundamental weakness and celebrate the victories or dissect the mistakes constructively. Everyone working that day got a real life lesson and hopefully they gently reflected on their decisions and sought necessary improvements in their knowledge, management style, and performance. But we shall never know.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - Age or service requirements or a combination of life age and job experience. Life is the best teacher. Those with experience in both excel.
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - None, none whatsoever, it was planned but never implemented like most things.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - Yes, the department can't keep up with national and local changes and is slipping so far if we were a business we would be out of business. We are great at extinguishment, mainly because then eventually runs out haha.

Respondent 5:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Team building, how to reenforce training.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.

- I feel it is the start to the process to become an officer but to fine tune your skills you need to advance on your own through classes and hands on training.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - In the Civil service world everything is a textbook answer which does not always apply to emergencies we always respond to.
 5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - I would say you are never fully prepared for everything. Curve balls happen all the time and its how you adapt to it.
 6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - I feel the steps our dept is taking now is very proactive.
 7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - I recently took fire officer 1 and that is a great stepping stone which was offer by our dept.
 8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - None yet

Respondent 6:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - Almost none outside the study process
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Tactical competency and people skills
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.

- It helps prepare for the base line of the role
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Departmental specifics and SOGs can't be measured and admin skills are not taught formally in the real world
 5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Record keeping and admin work needed to be self-taught unless a prior captain showed you before promotion
 6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - Department should provide specific training for the role to firefighters preparing for promotion
 7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - Department offers in house courses that State also offers but no in house training program exists for new officers without asking other officers for guidance
 8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - No, department for most part wants to help all members succeed and will help anyone that asks

Respondent 7:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - The Company Officer Academy
 - Incident Management Level 1
 - Intro to Unified Command for all Hazards Incidents
 - ICS and resource Management for the Fire Service
 - On Scene Incident Command
 - Think Like and Incident Commander

2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Strong communication and active listening skills, ability to remain composed and make thoughtful decisions in demanding situations. Leads by example while encouraging teamwork and continuous development. Keeping a positive organizational culture grounded in respect, trust, and empathy.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - The New Jersey Civil Service promotional process does not prepare you for the position. The individual must be willing to go outside the civil service commission to obtain proper company officer abilities.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - The process can be realistic and knowing how to response is key.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - None
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - More classes specifically to prepare fire officers.
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - None
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - None

Respondent 8:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?

- None as of yet. I anticipate taking Fire Officer 1 soon.
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Choosing proper Strategy/Tactics at working fires and managing your manpower at stressful incidents.
 3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Somewhat. Strategy/Tactics and supervisory are tested well enough, but there is a disconnect when it comes to administrative duties (paperwork, especially incident reports) and EFD OGs. Those disconnects can be resolved with a program for newly promoted officers.
 4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Paperwork, not that CSC can test for that.
 5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Again, paperwork. I had very little experience as an A/C prior to being promoted. NFIRS (now NERIS) was completely new to me and I had to learn it on the fly.
 6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - Unsure what civil service can do differently. As for the department, an officer development program would greatly benefit newly promoted officers.
 7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - None. I intend to take the next FO:1 course offered.
 8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - Yes. I've had numerous new captains promoted after me asking how to find certain forms on the computer (ex. SCBA reports, rig check sheets, first report of injury, etc) and how to fill out these forms (NFIRS especially). Myself and others

had to learn on the fly to do these things and rely on each other, rather than our department, to learn these things.

Respondent 9:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - All classes I attended regarding leadership training, prior to promotion were through the marine corps. After promotion I attended several officer development programs such as STICO, FOI, ISO & others.
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Being able to focus from the moment the bell comes in and collecting all available information about the call prior to arrival as well as when you first arrive from possible bystanders. Knowing the roles & responsibilities of the company you are assigned to that day, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the crew you are working with, having trust in each other. Being able to multitask, especially at the start of an incident when you may be the IC prior to a Chief Officer arriving on scene.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - I believe the NJCSC promotional process in itself did little to prepare me for the responsibilities of a company officer, besides telling me which books to read in preparation and giving me an outlet to see my overall progress, ie; the exams, written & oral. However, having to prepare for an exam it is up to the individual how much effort they will put in to being ready for whatever may be presented in the NJCSC promotional exams.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - I believe the biggest difference between my real world experience and what is tested is our manpower. I feel very blessed to work in my hometown, with a department that is adequately staffed. Having the manpower to accomplish any task we may come across is a key difference from what is presented in the exams, where manpower issues seem abundant.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Thankfully to date I have not had any situations where I did not feel prepared.

6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - Similar to the marine corps I believe a board would be beneficial. Administered by an outside agency to negate bias. Have each candidate go through a series of questions or scenarios where they are required to solve problems a first level supervisor may encounter in the firehouse and on the fireground. In addition I believe physical exam similar to the CPAT should be administered. As a company officer we are still on the fireground working and I believe we don't pay enough attention to our physical health. Neither of these suggestions would be a detriment to the promotional process because you would have those candidates with the most drive and determination to succeed that rise to the top.
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - I attended your STICO class. That was the only program provided by the department. I had most others required for the state FOI certification. What I lacked I completed on my own through outside agencies within 5 months post promotion.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - I have seen multiple people promoted and praised to their face only to be ridiculed when they turn their back. Lack of respect for the individual, missteps on calls- none of which are life threatening thankfully, an attitude of cockiness that FFs view as a result of promotion. I don't know how much of that is due to lack of formal leadership training and how much is just the culture of the department and interactions between certain individuals. But the biggest consequence I've noticed is a distrust between FFs who may view themselves as more experienced and officers who displays any of the tendencies aforementioned.

Respondent 10:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?

- Knowledge of the following: people managing, foreground tactics, construction, public relations, fire behavior, crew integrity such as team building, safety and accountability.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
- It was a tool to gain knowledge of the Five Types of construction as it relates to firefighting; both engine, truck and rescue, fire behavior, collapse, firefighter and civilian safety and subordinate scenarios both at the foreground and at the firehouse.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
- The testing process is a general outline and basic test criteria. The biggest difference is it doesn't relate to your specific city. The demographics and topography for each city is different specially the call volume and construction types. As you begin your job as a Captain the mental and physical aspects of responding to a working fire and making split second decisions weather it's line stretches, water supply or prioritization of life safety is critical; a promotional test might prepare you somewhat to what you will encounter.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
- Some members who have been promoted are not trained or have minimal knowledge of computer skills; ReD Alert, NIFIRS and NERIS. I would also like to have more awareness on how to direct a member who is struggling financially, emotionally or just a personal issue. There are times I don't have all the answers to all the questions related to engine work. I'm very comfortable with all five types of construction but feel the department can incorporate more training on the ever-changing environment, layout and building design.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
- I have always been an advocate to have the testing process open to members who have at least 7 years on the job. A young officer with minimal experience will most of the times run into issues with senior firefighters; I have seen it firsthand. The testing process both written and oral should be conducted in a way more relatable to your city. Newly promoted officers should be mentored either by a senior Captain or Chief for approximately 2 weeks this would include computer programming, fire ground tactics and knowledge, subordinate training, proper ways to submit multiple alarm, exposure and Form 5 reports.

7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - Most of the knowledge was gained from experience on the job, acting captain, training both from the department and company level. Once promoted an EFD officer has to take initiative to learn a lot of the skills needed to manage a successful crew. The department does offer classes and training however the individual needs to take initiative and build his resume.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - As far as organizational I have seen companies not on the same page mainly because it's a young department. The chemistry has changed and it's challenging to have members stay motivated to train, follow uniform policies, regular firehouse rules and procedures. The operational aspect has to come from a hungry Captain who is willing to keep his crew sharp and willing to keep learning. The officer and crew have to keep an open mind of the adjustments of an ever-changing cultures both within the department and throughout the city and state.

Respondent 11:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Knowledge and a significant amount of experience in all the company level tasks your crew will be asked to perform
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Not well at all. On the job experience is the most effective form of preparation in my opinion.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - You can do really well on civil service exams while only having a vague knowledge of the fire ground. You need more than a good vocabulary in real world firefighting.

5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - There's always gonna be the very low frequency type of incident that we're not as familiar with that will pose some difficulties. I was fortunate to have many years on prior to getting promoted so I had a good idea of most the responsibilities relating to the position of captain.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - Formal training on the everyday computer/documentation duties associated with the position.
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - Not structured, however working under officers who cared about teaching their company members everything they could about how to do the job effectively. Best mentoring program there is.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - Just a general lack of experience in some of the younger officers but not a specific tangible challenge that I've observed

Respondent 12:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - Drennan's 3-day officer class, Fire Officer 1 UCFA, two leadership and communication classes from Kean DFS online, Strategy and Tactics for First due officers EFD.
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Sizeup and communications, strategies and tactics, Department SOPs and procedures and officer admin duties
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.

- The communication aspect to some degree but not totally and covering the material from the books list gives a decent foundation I believe. As for actual department operations, the test did not prepare me, and I believe the seniority component should have a higher weight.
 - I think the written should have more questions, particularly with a section to include admin and procedural aspects of officer duties, not just tactics.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
- Particularly for our department, as a first level supervisor we don't end up in command of a fire or larger incident since chief officers are usually able to be there and take command. So perhaps a test that more thoroughly tests our ability to manage a crew, or smaller incident, would be more appropriate. I don't think my ability to delegate and efficiently organize a crew of 4-5 was properly tested but rather was a skill that was learned on the job. So, I would say the difference is in being tested for what I know should be done, rather than being tested for how I would organize a crew to accomplish the objectives, which may not be easy to test due to the nature of the skill. The actual responsibilities of admin and procedural skills weren't tested. But those are also highly variable by department and hard to test on a standardized state level.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
- Being a younger officer, there were situations where my judgement varied with a senior FF and trying to gain compliance, though it is highly situational and specific based on personalities.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
- Department level Standardized officer preparation classes across tours for the department, to begin changing the differences across shifts. This could be offered to members that act/can act as officers as well as those on the promotional list.
 - Department level Formal training on sop/sog and admin duties, writing the book, incident writing, etc.
 - For the civil service test, weighing the experience component more heavily, and potentially including volunteer time served as well.
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
- Mentoring happened at the company level with the captains I had, but it wasn't structured by the department and was just lucky to be assigned to work under them.

- The department did offer a power point slide presentation for officers, as well as two officer development classes in house.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
- Mishandling of situations as well as varied levels of compliance to orders from members. Some inconsequential and some involved injuries.

Respondent 13:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Man and personality management
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Next to nothing.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Testing is a vacuum and indicates one's study abilities, not competency. Apart from commitment to education, offers no real indicator one who will be a productive line captain.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Paperwork, training logs, red alert responsibilities, NFRIS/NERIS.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - It is difficult to say as you need to have an impartial standard that accounts for the masses to avoid preferential treatment. With that being, I believe internal departmental audits/assessments should factor in to some respect.

7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - Continued mentorship by those that came before me. Nothing official.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - We have seen in the past 18 months the fruits of this question. Newark Ship, Roth injury.

Respondent 14:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - Fire Instructor
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Respect
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Fair reading plenty of books
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - One is real and the other is what they want to hear
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - No
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - More years on job before you are eligible to take test
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.

- No
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
- No

Respondent 15:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Compassion and Sensitivity, Composure, Putting People at Ease
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - To me, the test, didn't prepare me. What prepared me was the leaders that I have worked for.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - It's easy to write down on a test in a calm atmosphere What you would do in an emergency but in a real world, you have to make those decisions while things are happening.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Not really I've had really good captains and really good Chiefs and also really good senior firefighters that prepared me.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - I think some kind of leadership training, especially for the people with less seniority sometimes supervisors have difficulty managing people that have more seniority than they do

7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - Nothing was ever structured. It was more about following in the footsteps of the people you respected that came before you.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - No I haven't.

Respondent 16:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Team management
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Medium
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Some are similar and others not
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Yes
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - Real world
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.

- None
- 8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - No

Respondent 17:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Experience responding to fires and emergency situations.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Fair
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Easier to give an oral presentation / script to a camera or test proctor than relaying critical information to and from dispatch, chiefs, fellow officers, and firefighters responding to or working on fire ground.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - No, though not necessarily caught off guard but a lesson can be learned every shift or at every incident we respond to.
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - It appears to be fair at this time
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.

- I believe the assignment of Acting Captain did have its strengths when given the opportunity to be in the seat.
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
- No

Respondent 18:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Emotional intelligence and self awareness. Decision making problem solving.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - Terrible, it's a memorization test. Experience is two part. I believe the test should require 5-7yrs of line experience for first level.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - Framework is memorized without knowledge of why and when it's implemented
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Disciplinary side and knowledge of city contract and also ordinances
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - Raise the minimum years to test. 7yrs first level. Unless specific burden applies. 14 yrs for chief officer
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.

- None
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
- Job delinquency, preventable injuries

Respondent 19:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None. Promotional test prep and learning on the job only.
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - Multiple years of experience. Having observed and worked alongside multiple quality captains throughout my career has been a big advantage. Everything I do now emulates something I've learned along the way from each and every one of them.
3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - The only thing I feel that's been gained from the civil service promotional process was the knowledge gained from quality reading materials. Nothing about the process helps to prepare a candidate for what they will see and deal with in real world scenarios.
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - The only comparison I can think of would be from the oral exam. Being given a scenario and having to answer immediately is the only similarity to real world. Time moves much quicker in real world scenarios than it does in a controlled environment test.
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - Having worked multiple years as a firefighter in busy and demanding company has helped to prepare me best for duties as an officer. Real world experience, and analyzing those calls after each and every one to learn, has been the biggest

benefactor in my career success to date. There are few scenarios I've experienced as an officer that I haven't experienced during my time as a firefighter.

6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - There should be prerequisites in place for proper training before anyone should be allowed to take a promotional exam. Only needing 3 years of time as a firefighter should not qualify a candidate to be eligible to test. There should be more required courses to better prepare candidates for real world on the job situations and success.
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - Nothing was provided or offered by the department before I was promoted. There have been some optional courses made available, but they should be mandatory for all supervisors at the current time and should be mandatory to anyone in the position to be promoted. All courses should be completed before each candidate is promoted
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - Experienced firefighters do not want to work for or with an incompetent captain. They do not want to work with a captain who has little on the job experience. Being forced to work in an environment like that only builds resentments and does not foster the team environment that an officer should be establishing for their company which leads to success. Hopefully, implementing some courses for anyone looking to promote would give candidates a better opportunity for success moving into a new company and working with a crew they have not yet had the chance to work with.

Respondent 20:

1. What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?
 - None
2. Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first-level supervisor in the fire service?
 - How to gain respect amongst your peers, how to apply leadership techniques in order to get the most productivity out of your crew

3. How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.
 - I believe the exam assisted with the knowledge needed for fireground operations, and also helped develop certain communication skills and confidence
4. In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?
 - The test was mainly geared to on scene fire operations, not much geared towards the 80% of downtime at the firehouse and what could be done to ensure team continuity
5. After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?
 - No
6. What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?
 - None
7. What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.
 - None
8. Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?
 - No

Appendix B

Axial Codebook

Each theme was developed through open and axial coding of responses from 20 fire captains in the Elizabeth Fire Department. Themes emerged both deductively (aligned with the four research questions) and inductively (from patterns observed in the data).

1	Code	Operational Definition
2	LEAD	References to leadership qualities such as communication, emotional intelligence, decision making, composure, and credibility.
3	SUGG	Participant generated recommendations for improving officer development or promotional processes.
4	NONE	Statements indicating lack of preparation, absence of training, or no structured support.
5	REAL	References to real world experience, learning through exposure, or operational repetition.
6	DISCON	Perceived disconnect between civil service testing and actual job responsibilities.
7	PREP	Statements related to preparedness or lack thereof following promotion.
8	OBS	Observations regarding leadership effectiveness or officer performance.
9	NOCHALL	Statements indicating no significant challenges were experienced.
10	CULTURE	References to organizational culture, morale, or intergenerational dynamics.
11	TRAIN	Mentions of formal training programs, classes, or educational pathways.
12	MENTOR	References to mentorship, modeled leadership, or learning from senior officers.
13	ADMIN	Administrative responsibilities including documentation, reports, discipline, and software systems.
14	TEST	Comments specifically addressing the civil service examination process.
15	EXPER	References to years of service, experiential learning, or acting officer experience.
16	TACTICS	Tactical fireground knowledge and operational decision making.
17	DECIS	Decision making responsibilities in supervisory roles.
18	KNOWL	Knowledge acquisition, memorization, or book learning.
19	COMMS	Communication skills and interpersonal interaction.
20	RESPECT	Credibility, authority, and peer respect concerns.
21	PROD	Productivity, performance consistency, or operational effectiveness.
22	COMM	Community interaction or external engagement.
23	CONF	Confidence levels following promotion.
24	TEAM	Team cohesion and company level dynamics.
25	FIREHOUSE	Firehouse culture and daily supervisory challenges.

Appendix C

Axial Code Frequency Table

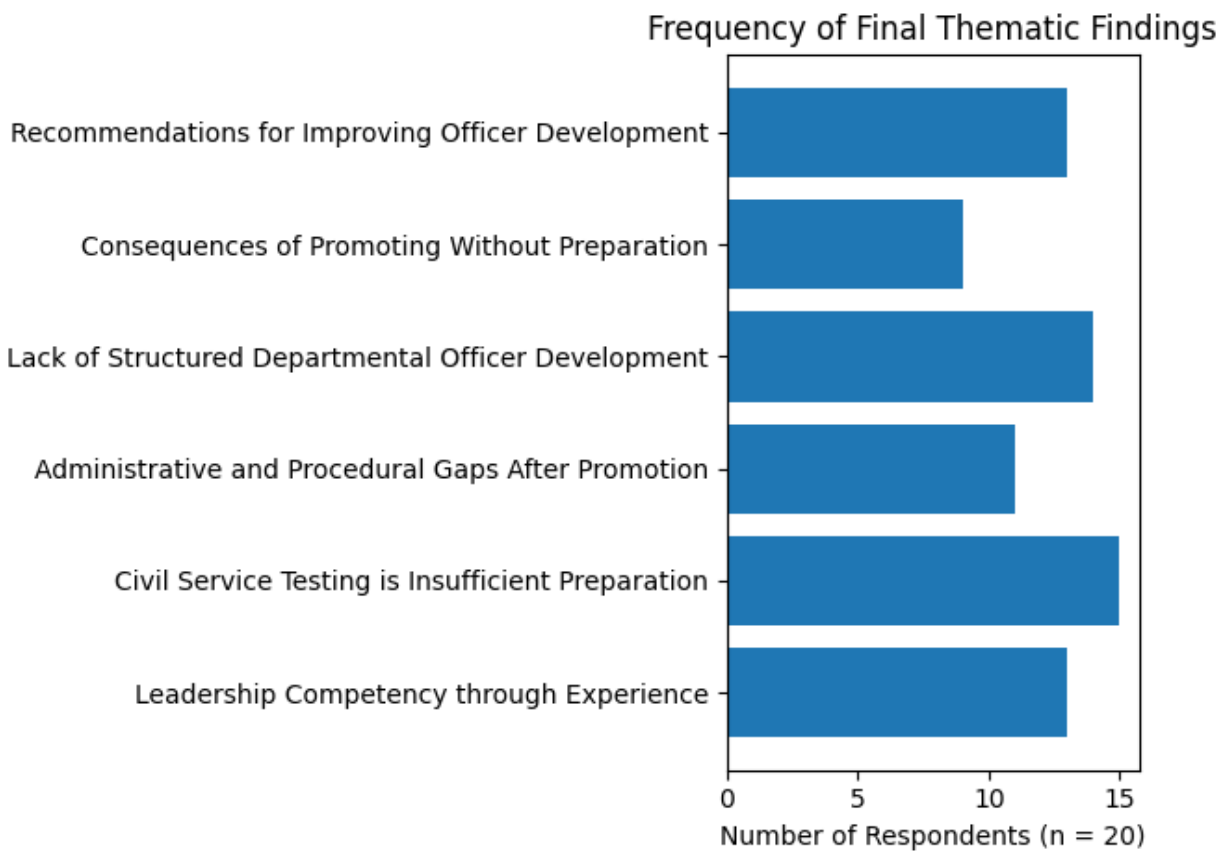
This table summarizes the six dominant themes that emerged from open ended survey responses submitted by 20 fire captains. Frequencies indicate the number of unique respondents whose answers aligned with each thematic code during the qualitative analysis process. Full definitions of each theme, as well as coded excerpts, are provided in Appendix A.

1	Code	Frequency
2	LEAD	13
3	SUGG	13
4	NONE	10
5	REAL	10
6	DISCON	10
7	PREP	9
8	OBS	7
9	NOCHALL	7
10	CULTURE	6
11	TRAIN	5
12	MENTOR	5
13	ADMIN	5
14	TEST	4
15	EXPER	4
16	TACTICS	3
17	DECIS	2
18	KNOWL	2
19	COMMS	1
20	RESPECT	1
21	PROD	1
22	COMM	1
23	CONF	1
24	TEAM	1
25	FIREHOUSE	1

Appendix D

Final Synthesized Themes and Respondent Level Frequencies (n=20)

1	Final Theme	Number of Respondents
2	Leadership Competency through Experience	13
3	Civil Service Testing is Insufficient Preparation	15
4	Administrative and Procedural Gaps After Promotion	11
5	Lack of Structured Departmental Officer Development	14
6	Consequences of Promoting Without Preparation	9
7	Recommendations for Improving Officer Development	13



Appendix E

Survey Instrument: Officer Development Questionnaire

Research Question 1: What core leadership competencies are emphasized in high functioning fire service officer development programs?

- What, if any, formal leadership training or officer development programs did you complete prior to or after your promotion to Fire Captain?

- Based on your experience, what leadership competencies are most critical for success as a first level supervisor in the fire service?

Research Question 2: How do the competencies assessed by the New Jersey Civil Service Commission promotional process align with those emphasized in high functioning officer development models?

- How well do you feel the New Jersey Civil Service promotional process prepared you for your responsibilities as a company officer? Please explain.

- In your opinion, what are the biggest differences between real world officer responsibilities and what was tested during the civil service promotional process?

Research Question 3: What gaps exist between the New Jersey Civil Service promotional model and the leadership competencies outlined in national officer development standards and literature-supported models of effective fire officer performance?

- After being promoted, were there any situations or responsibilities that caught you off guard or that you didn't feel fully prepared to handle? Can you describe them?

- What suggestions would you offer to improve how the department or civil service system prepares future officers for supervisory roles?

Research Question 4: What organizational, operational, or cultural challenges, and their consequences, arise when officers are promoted without being adequately prepared through structured, competency based leadership development programs?

- What, if any, structured officer development or mentoring did the department provide prior to or after your promotion to Captain? If yes, please describe.

- Have you experienced or observed any organizational, operational, or cultural challenges that stem from promoting officers without formal leadership development? If yes, what were the consequences?