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The WoW Factor

Leadership in World of Warcraft as Sociotechnical
Practice

Master's thesis in Science and Technology Studies (STS)

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Abstract

This thesis looks at guild and raid leadership in World of Warcraft (WoW) in a social, technological, and material context. The goal is to look at how leadership is practiced and co-produced by a wide variety of actors (human and non-human) in a social network. Leadership is looked at through how it is designed in the game, and how it is understood by the users. My data material consists of four qualitative interviews and several blog posts. In analysing them, I have made use of the STS (Science and Technology Studies) theories of domestication, scripts, and user-scripts.

My findings include how technology and community together construct leadership in WoW. I have found that where players and leaders find weaknesses in the game's design, they construct intricate systems to help them. This is illustrated by the widespread use of standardized systems for distributing high-value rewards (known to players as loot).

In looking at how leadership is structured, I saw how guilds organized and structured themselves. I found that while guilds followed the game's script of meritocracy, they also sometimes disobeyed the game's design where the social needs were prominent.

Raiding requires many resources, and in order for guilds to continue offering raiding to their members, leaders have taken on responsibilities to facilitate the activity. This includes offering a big and social atmosphere, and material goods and economic benefits.

The use of technologies is prominent among my informants. The player community has constructed set practices of *playing WoW correctly*. By becoming part of the playing community, players are enrolled into these practices, and expected to follow them. Gaining access to a guild requires taking part in these practices, which often are communicated through word-of-mouth. As such, playing WoW is also reliant on acquiring social and cultural capital.

In conclusion, I address the possibility that looking at leadership practices is a way to understand how leadership is learned through the idea that knowledge is learned through social and cultural dimensions in a community. Leaders are mentors more than they are bosses. The leadership is porous, meaning that the boundary between leader and follower is vague as they both move between the roles of leader and follower.

Preface

Having played World of Warcraft for many years, I have been part of many adventures. However, none of them compare to the adventure of writing a master's thesis. While Azeroth is a magical world of fantasy and mystery, the people that have helped me through this process are nothing less than real life heroes.

To my supervisor, Kristine Ask, my deepest gratitude not only for leading me through the woods of the writing process, but also for introducing me to the Science and Technology Studies field, subsequently leading me to apply to the master's programme. You have been a great inspiration to me. To my informants for volunteering and contributing, for sharing their experiences and their love of gaming with me. A big nod to my guild <Furious Wrist>, for being a motley crew that brings me so much laughter and joy, and the occasional headache. To my co-workers at Orakeltjenesten Dragvoll, for being amazing comrades and awe-inspiring people. To Mikkel Berg Strømstad, for guiding me in the bewildered world of leadership theories, and always lending an ear. To my brother, Glenn Guillot, for sparking my love for games and coding, which has enriched my life in ways I never expected. To Pernille Wangsholm and Sean Holloway, for being so kind to proofread so many pages in such a short time. To Janne Merete Balsvik, for making school so much more entertaining. To my boyfriend, Lauri Koikkalainen, who never fails to encourage me through the lows, and celebrate the highs. A special thanks to Marit Kristine Berntsen, my best friend, whose continuous friendship and advice has contributed to my life and this thesis more than I could possibly put into words. You go above and beyond what I would ever expect.

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1 Press Enter to Start

*I would rather hire a high-level World of Warcraft player than a
MBA from Harvard*

- John Seely Brown

With their increased popularity, games have opened up possibilities for simultaneous learning on multiple levels. Online games allow players to go through a variety of social experiences where they build communities such as guilds, where they share and delegate knowledge and authority with others. Researchers suggest that online games are a possible third place for people to improve their leadership skills, as they offer similar organizational experiences to those in real life (Jang & Ryu, 2011), or even a place to acquire leadership skills (Lisk, Kaplancali, & Riggio, 2012).

The above statement by Brown shows how skills people use in playing World of Warcraft (WoW) can be valued outside of the virtual world, also in the work place. While possibly a novel idea, this perspective opens up for studying how games can be contexts for learning new skills, like cooperation, social skills, and teamwork, even leadership. As leadership also occurs in the game setting, we can use WoW as a case to study leadership practices.

My interest in WoW as a site to study leadership, was sparked when I came by a WoWInsider article (Schramm, 2008) mentioning an IBM/Seriosity study on how multiplayer online game environments applies to the business world in terms of productivity, innovation, and leadership. While digital games are often regarded as a fruitless and time-consuming activity, this study showed interest in how organizational and leadership skills valued in the work place can be developed through playing games. As someone who has played games since early childhood and have experience from leadership positions in World of Warcraft, this was certainly intriguing. Thus, my motivation for writing about leadership in an online game comes from my own experiences on developing leadership skills through playing WoW. Additionally, I wanted to show how players become active participants in their communities, and acquire skills that are applicable outside of the virtual world.

So what is leadership? Through the ages, there have been many different understandings of what leadership is. Aristotle believed that leadership was an innate talent, while others, like Adolf Hitler, believed leadership was the ability to move the masses through persuasion or violence. Over time, theories

of leadership have concerned themselves with different aspects of leadership, from characteristics, personality traits, physical appearance, intelligence, and sex. Today, however, leadership may be defined as: “guidance of others in their pursuits, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting, and motivating their efforts; also, the ability to lead others” (Forsyth, 2010, p. 246). This definition explains, in short terms, what leaders do. According to Brown in the opening quote, these skills can also be acquired by playing games like World of Warcraft. However, will leadership in an online game consist of the same tasks? Is leadership in a game setting similar to that in a business setting? Is there any hold to the premise that WoW players learn leadership skills as well as MBAs? To answer this question, we need to look at the leadership practices in an online game.

1.1 Research Question

The IBM/Seriosity study looked at how players learn leadership skills in online games, and compared the players’ skill to a model within leadership theories. In order to see how players learn leadership in an online game, we can start by looking at how they practice leadership. When starting work on this thesis, I already had a hypothesis that WoW can be a place to learn leadership.

In this paper, I will investigate the various leadership practices and look at how technology and community together produce what constitutes leadership in an online game. Furthermore, I will look at what players do with the technology, how they use it, and for what purpose. I expect to find complex and heterogonous forms of leadership, where leadership is constructed between the design and use, using technology as tools. I must therefore look at the different ways the technologies are used in leadership settings. The analysis is based on my collected data material, which consists of both interviews and documents. I will use the frameworks of script, user-script, and domestication to answer my questions. My main research question is:

What is the practice of leadership in World of Warcraft? How do you become a leader in World of Warcraft and what tools do you need?

In answering this question, I will look at several sub-questions:

- What does it mean to be a leader in WoW?
- How do you become a leader in WoW?
- How do leaders organize to handle challenges?
- What do leaders delegate to technology, and for what reasons?
- How are external sources shaping leadership in WoW?

Before going into what players do and when they play and lead, let us first look at the game world they inhabit.

1.2 An Online Fantasy World

World of Warcraft (WoW) is an *MMORPG* (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) set in a fantasy world of magic and adventure much like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series. The game was released in 2004, and is developed by Blizzard Entertainment™. As many other MMORPGs, it requires players to pay a monthly subscription fee to gain full access. Over time, it has become a widely popular game and in October 2010 the game's subscriber base peaked at 12 million (Holisky, 2010). As of November 2014, the game has over 10 million subscribers world-wide (Holisky, 2014) with the launch of the latest expansion pack.

Unlike single-player games, MMOs (short for MMORPG) cannot be completed. It has no "Game Over" and there is no end to the story. Instead, it is an expanding and ever-changing world with new content provided by the designers and through community activities from the players.

Blizzard continuously release new content patches and expansions to keep the game from becoming static. Since the game's initial release, Blizzard has released six expansion packs to the game: *The Burning Crusade*, *Wrath of the Lich King*, *Cataclysm*, *Mists of Pandaria*, and most recently *Warlords of Draenor*. The patches and expansions may contain new areas, new instances¹, changes to game mechanics and *bug fixes*. An expansion will also increase the *level-cap* of player characters and give access to new challenges and new items to improve your character. To illustrate how the game is designed and character progression, I will describe my own experience from when I first started playing the game in the following section.

1.3 Becoming a Hero

Growing up I played many different games, usually with other people. Games were always social to me. My older brother and I got a Super Nintendo as a gift, which we both played for many hours. Mostly, I stuck to console games, and only played sporadically. In 2005, my then-boyfriend showed me World of Warcraft, and let me borrow his account to try it. About a month later, I bought a copy and created an account. I paid the monthly subscription fee and subsequently logged in. After watching the game introduction video, I was asked to join a realm (usually referred to as server). The game world, *Azeroth*,

¹ Locations in-game designed for grouped play, contains the most powerful monsters in the game.

is identical on all servers, except for the player characters that inhabit that specific server.

I went on to create a character and choose a *faction*. There are two opposing factions, *Horde* and *Alliance*. The two factions can simplistically be regarded as the “good” (Alliance) and “evil” (Horde) sides in the world, consisting of different races with different motivations for being in said faction. I chose to make a character in the Horde faction, so I would be able to play with my boyfriend. You have to be the same faction as the people you wish to play with, as the game is designed not allowing characters of opposing factions to communicate or cooperate in groups.

I created my first character, Torstine, a troll (race) and a hunter (class). There are 11 different classes in the game, which can fill different roles. The available roles are *tank*, *DPS*², and *healer*. A tank is heavily armoured and has abilities designed to maintain the primary focus of enemy mobs, and can take large amounts of damage without dying. The role of DPS are damage dealers, and can be melee or ranged, and their role in the team is to take down the monster. Healers negate damage or heal up allies to keep them alive when they take damage. Cooperation and co-dependence between the three roles are one of the key elements of gameplay.



Figure 1-1: Torstine the hunter

When you create a character, it starts at level 1. To level a character you must gain experience points (EXP), which is most commonly done through

² DPS is also an abbreviation for Damage Per Second used as a measure of how much damage is done

completing quests. A quest typically involves killing X amount of monsters or gathering Y amounts of a resource. Reaching the maximum level and gaining the best possible items for your class and role is the most common motivation of a WoW player. Completing quests will also grant you rewards such as items that makes your character more powerful. Gaining more powerful items mean that your character will produce higher damage or healing numbers, or if you are a tank, can withstand more damage from enemy mobs.

One thing to note in the above image is the chat box in the lower left corner. It is one of the in-game channels for communication. By default, it shows you the *General*-chat, which is divided by zones. In addition to that, there are also emotes in the game, where you can make your character do a series of acts like dance, clap, wave, tell a joke or blow a kiss. You can also directly talk to a specific person by sending them a *whisper*, a private message in-game.

While the levelling experience can be understood as solitary from this explanation, it does not have to be. While levelling your character, you can also join Dungeons through a *Group Finder* to complete more difficult content alongside other players. These groups are configured to have one tank, one healer, and three DPS characters. Completing these dungeons will grant your character experience points and character improving equipable items (also known as loot).

When you have acquired enough experience points, you reach the level-cap. In the current version of the game, the cap is set to level 100. Once the character has reached the max level, it can only progress by gaining loot that is more powerful. This can be done first through max-level Dungeons, and subsequently, when being powerful enough, through killing bosses in raid instances. Raids are organized groups of 10 to 30 people, usually in the same guild.

Raid instances represent encounters with some of the most powerful nemeses of the game, but in terms of gameplay, they can be understood as carefully structured problem spaces that require certain strategic solutions. Once a player has reached the level-cap, joined a raiding guild, and acquired powerful enough items, they can participate in raiding. Raid bosses are too powerful to be able to kill alone, so a raid will need anywhere between 10 to 30 players in the group. As a reward for killing these bosses, players receive the most powerful items in the game, achievements, and titles to give themselves addition flair that shows the “world” their accomplishments.

Raiding also requires a certain amount of pre-event preparation; if the guild is facing new content this has to be researched and strategies will have to be

formed. Some guilds develop their own strategies, while others follow guides posted on the internet, often in the form of videos on YouTube or community forum posts by other players. Some guilds will require all the raiding members to research the content and the chosen strategy.

I will explain raiding later, but to understand this social activity we need to understand the social organization surrounding play. Guilds are important to understand, because it is primarily the guild that is lead. This means a quick detour of explaining what guilds are.

1.4 The Online Social Life

One of the defining characteristics of MMOs is social interaction between players and the building of communities. In WoW, the most important community is the *guild*. The official World of Warcraft website Beginner's Guide (Activision-Blizzard, n.d.) describe guilds as “*persistent groups of characters who regularly play together and who generally prefer a similar gaming style*”. Gaming style here refers to the different aspects of the game people prefer playing and how seriously they engage in play. Some guilds are focused on game aspects such as PvP³ or roleplaying, while others focus on raiding.

Any un-guilded player in the game can make a guild. It requires a small amount of in-game gold (the virtual currency) and a few people to sign your charter. To create a guild you can talk to a Guild Master (an NPC) in the major cities in the game. You choose a name for your guild and then receive a charter that has to be signed by five people to be accepted by the Guild Master. The people who sign your charter will automatically be added in your guild when it is created.

Guilds' main function is to make are grouping and raiding easier and more rewarding, in addition to form a framework for social interaction. Being in a guild, grants access to a separate chat channel known as *guild chat* that allows members to socialize. Being social in the game has shown to be a gateway for players to be able to retain expertise on how to play the game (Chen, 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Eklund & Johansson, 2010; Taylor, 2006). Chen (2009a) also details how raiding guilds are reliant on friendship to endure through periods of little success.

Guilds are made and run by players. They form their own rules and organize activities on their own initiative. Players become friends and help each other with levelling and instances. However, Blizzard has designed the game so that only one person can be the Guild Leader. The Guild Leader has the executive

³ Player versus Player, another aspect of the game where players combat players of the opposing faction.

power in the game to add and *kick*⁴ members, as well as create ranks within the guild where guild permission aspects also can be allotted other players. This works much like website and forum administration.

As the game is designed to only allow for one Guild Leader, guilds usually operate with a single primary leader. However, guilds will choose to have Guild Councils, Class, or Role Leaders, and raiding guilds will have a Raid Leader. Meaning there are several ways to organize a guild, as I will illustrate further in chapters four and five.

Often a character is invited or allowed to join a raid group only if he or she meets the raid's requirements in terms of his or her character class in relation to the existing composition of the raid group. This works under the assumption that the player is skilled and familiar with the game mechanics to play effectively. Generally, preference is given to friends or at least non-strangers who (usually) meet the class requirement. Preference is also given to players who belong to the same guild as other members in the raid group.

In raids, players receive items (or gear) and weapons that increase their effectiveness as a reward for killing these bosses. They will often have fancy graphics as well, and upon defeating the final boss, they receive titles they can add to their character name. Both the fancy gear and titles show off to the rest of the playing community that you have defeated the most powerful monsters in the game, and "saved the world".

As we have seen, guilds are social and offer ways of communicating in the game. However, as I will illustrate, raiding requires coordination and organization, meaning players also need an effective way to communicate. This communication occurs both synchronously and asynchronously. Guilds therefore make use of websites, forums, and VoIPs (Voice over IP). This is however, a very brief and incomprehensible account of the myriad of actors involved in raiding. To exemplify I will detail one evening I went raiding in World of Warcraft.

1.5 Raiding in World of Warcraft

Siege of Orgrimmar was the final raid instance during the *Mists of Pandaria* expansion, and consisted of 14 bosses. The last boss in the instance is Garrosh Hellscream. The bosses get progressively more difficult throughout the instance, and having killed them all on the highest difficulty is highly esteemed. Every time a new patch is released with a new raid instance, there is a race among the top guilds worldwide to be *World First*. Many of these guilds have become famous and have received sponsorships from different

⁴ *Kicking* refers to the administrative power to remove a player character from the guild.

companies. They are also well known within the WoW playing community, and if you ask any raiding player, they will immediately recognize the guild names Ensidia, Paragon, or Method.

To be able to kill a boss, you must set up your group with the right amount of tanks, DPS, and healers. Even though you have all your people, you also need someone to be in charge and lead the group. This is commonly the Raid Leader's job. The Raid Leader will make sure that everyone is ready, starts the countdown timer before the pull, and reminds people of things to look out for during the fight. The role of Raid Leader requires both extensive technical understanding of the game, and communication skills for coordinating the gameplay among all the grouped players. They provide the group with an orientation to the encounter and give live direction and just-in-time feedback over VoIP to facilitate.

Defeating these bosses can be a difficult task. To defeat a boss you must find a way to deal with all the different mechanics it has. The primary challenge in *end-game raiding*⁵ is for all the individual players to learn the behaviours of the mobs and respond to them appropriately as a team. There are two types of mobs in raid instances: *trash mobs* and *boss mobs*.

Trash mobs are commonly simply referred to as trash, and they have rudimentary AI (Artificial Intelligence) and are weak compared to the boss mobs. Therefore, they will seldom have good loot to offer players. Boss mobs on the other hand, are more powerful and have specialized attacks that require coordination from the raiding party. The boss mechanics will also differ according to the specific boss and difficulty level.

In order to make raiding somewhat easier, players have developed *add-ons*⁶ that for example give countdown timers to specific boss abilities that need to be responded to in a specific way. To illustrate how all this organization and planning works in practice, I have chosen to epitomize raids from my own guild <Furious Wrist> in the following sections. I will also use these illustrations to generate questions about how leadership is practiced.

1.5.1 A typical night in Siege of Orgrimmar

It was Sunday, September 7th 2014 at 19:45 CEST. Our Raid Leader started inviting all the raiders, members, and trials⁷ in our guild. The previous raid night, we killed 12 out of the total 14 bosses in Siege of Orgrimmar, so the two remaining bosses were to be killed this night. The Raid Leader has to

⁵ End-game raiding refers to raiding content only available to level-capped players.

⁶ Add-ons are small programs made by players to change small aspects of the game.

⁷ Trials are recruits that are currently in the testing phase of their membership in the guild.

choose between friends when he decides whom to bring, and not everyone can join. What is he basing his decision on?

First up this evening is the thirteenth boss, Paragons of the Klaxxi, which I will use to illustrate the facilitation, tactical coordination, and tactical planning of raiding, as well as *wiping*, *resetting* and loot distribution.

Once invited, many of us entered the instance from Valley of Eternal Blossoms. When we entered the portal, we were teleported deep into the Ragefire Chasm below the Horde capital city Orgrimmar. We ran to the boss room, and the twelve of us who were there started clearing the room of trash mobs.

Once trash was killed, Ketku sorted the groups. Certain parts of the encounter required specific tasks to be completed and the Raid Leader appointed specific people to them. At the same time, the remaining members in the raid group were arriving to the boss room. Paragons of the Klaxxi consists of nine different boss mobs that have to be killed sequentially. Only three of the boss mobs are active at a time, and when one of them is killed, the others return to full health, and a new boss mob enters the room. They all have different specialized abilities that need to be handled in different ways; mobs have to be *CC'd*⁸ and abilities have to be interrupted and avoided. All of this is sorted by the Raid Leader before the encounter is started. Once preparations are completed, he does a *Ready Check* that pops up a prompt asking if the player is ready with two options “*Ready*” and “*Not Ready*”. In the preparation to the raid, both the Raid Leader and the players have read up on strategy guides in order to know the best way to defeat this encounter. How are external sources shaping leadership in WoW?

⁸ Abbreviation for crowd control. Refers to abilities used to limits an opponent’s ability to fight, like rooting, snaring or otherwise incapacitate the opponent.



Figure 1-2: Screen capture from a raid with a customized UI

When everyone is ready, a designated player starts the encounter. If we do not succeed and the boss kills all the players, it is called a *wipe* and is both frustrating and time consuming. This is because it can often take at least 20 minutes of organizing to get everyone back again and start a new attempt. After a wipe, it is common for the officers leading the raid to discuss and re-evaluate strategies. The wipe will also cause all the characters' gear will lose durability, which costs gold to repair, because it takes damage every time the character dies. Additionally, wiping can be taxing on players' morale. In what ways is this handled by the leader?

However, when successful and the boss is defeated, you can loot its corpse. The Raid Leader or another officer will then distribute the loot in accordance with the guild's loot policy. In our case a *DKP* (Dragon Kill Points)-system. Players interested in the items can use their DKP as currency to bid. Points are normally earned through attendance. The items can help the guild advance further in the game because it is more powerful than the items already worn by players. I will discuss loot distribution further in chapter four.

Loot has a big social significance in WoW. When applying for guilds, it is regarded as a proof of the player's expertise. This is because a boss will only reward players with a small number of items, meaning players will have to defeat it multiple times in order to get all the desired items. Having these items means that you have proven to be deserving of them through participating and defeating the boss. Thereby showing both loyalty and skill. Gaining access to a guild requires proving social skills and expertise in playing the game

correctly. As raiding also is a complex activity, success is not a given. Some raid nights are more stressful.

Progressing on Garrosh was stressful for our guild. At total, we may have had over 400 wipes on the boss, leading to a very frustrated roster. This led to a lot of fighting on VoIP and in raid chat, especially when wipes were caused by small errors in places that previously never had been problematic. During a 4-hour raid, the morale would drop, and the light-hearted joking would usually stop. Some tried to boost morale by making jokes and trying to lighten the mood, but were quickly shut down by the other frustrated players. They felt the need for quiet to focus on their performance, even between pulls. In order to recover from these poor performing nights, players in guilds need to form trusting and friendly relationships (Chen, 2009a).

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. I have already presented my research question and my motivation for studying this topic. In order for you as a reader to understand the sociotechnical processes of playing a game like WoW, I will use my own experiences from the game to illustrate what *playing* and *raiding* in WoW entails.

The second chapter will outline the theoretical perspectives used in this thesis. In it, I detail Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), interpretative flexibility, script, user-script, and domestication. I also look at how these frameworks open up for studying leadership in WoW as sociotechnical practices. I will then detail previous relevant research on games to contextualize the thesis in how games are social, knowledge intensive and can be used for leadership training.

The third chapter will detail how I gathered my research material and give an account of how I analysed it. I will detail the data collection, interview methods, accounting for my own relationship to the topic and what considerations had to be made, as well as possible weaknesses in my research.

The fourth chapter is the first of three chapters of analysis. In Scripting Organizations, I will look at how guilds structure themselves by either following the game's script or by creating anti-programs. Furthermore, I will look at how players have created intricate sociotechnical systems to build trust and inhibit cheating.

As chapter four details how guilds structure and organize themselves, I will describe the different roles of guild leadership in chapter five. Based on my data material, I have identified five roles of guild leadership: Raid Leading, Social Management, Economic Management, Recruitment, and General

Manager. By using the theory of domestication, I will look at how players have domesticated the roles practically, symbolically, and cognitively.

In chapter six, the final chapter of analysis, I will look at the practices surrounding gaming paratexts. Both chapters four and five will illustrate players' continuous reliance on different technologies, and in this chapter, I will look at how they have delegated to the technology. As a result, leadership is a sociotechnical co-production between players, designers, and technology.

The seventh and final chapter will collect the threads from the previous chapters and present my findings. I will look at how leadership is practiced in WoW and discuss what my findings can tell us about leadership. I will also discuss how having a leadership position is not without its disadvantages. Additionally, I will use the term *affinity spaces* (Gee & Hayes, 2012) to describe how players can learn leadership from each other and the playing community.

In this chapter, I have presented my interest in studying WoW as a case for leadership practice in online games. I have chosen to focus my research on leadership in raiding guilds, as raids can be considered complex collaborative problem spaces that require coordination and organization. As a player and leader in WoW myself, I welcome the acknowledgement from businesses and researchers that online games can be a possible place to acquire various skills, including leadership. While there has already been conducted studies on leadership acquisition in online games, I have chosen to focus on how leadership in WoW is constructed between player, community, designer, and technology. As such, I will look at what practices leadership consists of in WoW, how one becomes a leader, and what tools are needed in practicing this leadership.

In order for you as a reader to understand these practices, I have illustrated raiding and game play in this chapter. This should give you the necessary knowledge to understand the sociotechnical practices of leadership I will discuss in chapters four through six.

In order to answer the research question, I will be using the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the frameworks of script, user-script, and domestication. All of which I will detail in the following chapter. These frameworks allow me to look at how players both read and construct the game and leadership, by incorporating various technologies to aid them where they see necessary.

2 Studying Online Games

Digital games are great examples of the interpretative flexibility of technology, encompassing framings of both despair and possibility. On one hand, digital games are often depicted as a major contributor to violence and aggression in the mainstream media. Online games (MMORPG's), like WoW, are additionally connected to addiction (Ainamo & Tammi, 2013; Griffiths, 2005). The players of these games or “gamers” are viewed as being antisocial, aggressive, and physically inactive boys. Instead of spending their time in the “real world” connecting with people, gamers spend their time mostly in a virtual world. On the other hand, games are also understood as a “third place” for socializing, developing social capital (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006), and learning and improving leadership skills (Jang & Ryu, 2011). Materially speaking it appears that games have the potential for both, but to understand games and their effects we need to look at how they are used. We need to understand games as both social and material.

To illustrate the sociotechnical aspects of guild leadership in WoW, I will use the theories of script, domestication, and user-script as an approach to look at how designer, technology, and users negotiate together construct leadership. As I am interested in examining how designers and players have formed guild leadership, I will also draw on previous research on social aspects of games, online cultures, and leadership in online games. At the same time, I will use the Science and Technology Studies (STS) theories of script, domestication, and user-scripts to discuss the assumptions and negotiations between designer, technology, and user in my analysis.

2.1 Science and Technology Studies

Science and Technology Studies (STS) is an interdisciplinary field that combine elements from multiple fields, such as economy, philosophy, history, sociology, and social anthropology. As a research field, it concerns itself with gaining insight into the processes of how technology and society interact and are connected in what Thomas Hughes (1986) refers to as a “*seamless web*”. Technologies are, in STS, regarded a result of negotiations and controversies between different actors, such as game designers, players, or parents. The user of a technology is ultimately the one that decides whether to use the technology, and as such, we must look at what users think about technologies. As we have seen, digital games are regarded as both something encompassing possibilities for learning, creativity, and as something that creates aggressive and addictive behaviour, depending on who you ask and what meaning is produced into the technology.

When technology and science is seen as something either good or evil with inherent consequences on society, is known as *technological determinism* in STS. In this perspective, technology is comparative to a law of nature and thus will have predetermined effects on society and social life (Berg, 1998) - it takes control of our lives and makes us “ill”. However, this view does not allow for exploring users influence and taking part in technology development through attributing different meanings and varied use. As a counter, STS propose to treat technology as having *interpretive flexibility* (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Interpretative flexibility means, according to Pinch and Bijker, that science or technology are culturally constructed and interpreted by different social groups, thus emphasising use and users as constitutive of technological development.

A good example of how a technology is culturally constructed and interpreted by different social groups, is the study of the bicycle’s development (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). It argued that social groups like women and elderly men gave a new meaning to the high-wheeled bicycle, which at the time was very popular among thrill seeking men, and instead framed it as the “unsafe” bicycle, which in turn helped pave the way for the development of the safety bicycle. This study also illustrates how “*relevant social groups*” also play a part in how a technology is constructed, developed, and designed. This is one of the defining markers in the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) approach. The strength of SCOT, according to Oudshoorn and Pinch (2008), is that its focus is on user practices and forums where user input can be studied. Furthermore, it explores how the boundaries are blurred between design and use and between production and consumption.

Different social groups can construct radically different meanings of a technology, as in the case of digital games. Games can be interpreted in various ways, and while some perceive it as a controlling life-consuming technology, others perceive it as a platform for social interaction and learning. Controversies like this reveal the interpretative flexibility in the technology and as such opens the “*black box*” (Latour, 1987). A black box is a closed system, where the materials and processes inside are unknown because we do not need to know about them, or we take them for granted. Scientific facts, laws, bicycles, and digital games can all be seen as black boxes, because we do not need to understand how they work or how they came to be, to use them. However, to gain insight into how they came to be and how they work, we must open the box and look inside.

From an STS perspective, technology is thus the result of a series of negotiations and controversies. The development process is influenced by what is viewed as the best solution at the time, or by one or more social groups. They construct both the problem and the technology’s purpose. Conflicts arise

when relevant social groups cannot agree on how the technology should be used or developed, and it becomes unstable, like in the case of digital games. Closing and stabilizing these conflicts can be done in two ways: rhetorical closure and closure by redefinition of problem (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Rhetorical closure does not necessarily mean that the conflict is solved through a change in the artefact, but where the relevant social groups see the problem as being solved. Redefining the problem is done through changing other issues than initially presented. Redefining games from something that makes us ill, to a tool for learning and socializing could be a possible opening to study a game like WoW. As previously mentioned, digital games have many open controversies – who plays, when it is played, how/how often/how long is it played and why it is played. While digital games have been a common entertainment medium since the eighties, the controversies are still very much alive. Different social groups still discuss the effects of games, both positive as well as negative. In the same way that cars, smartphones, and the personal computer have changed our lives and the identities we shape, we are still interested in finding out what effects digital games can have. As this paper will illustrate, players and designers have different interpretations and thoughts on how to play WoW, and what leadership in WoW entails. Though I am not using SCOT theory in the analysis, its underlying principle of the active user and users as co-producers is fundamental. In the following sections, I will describe the STS theories of script, user-script, and domestication. These theories constitute the framework within which I will study the sociotechnical co-produced development of leadership in WoW.

2.1.1 Script

To study the relationship between designer and user, Akrich and Latour propose the term *script*. Akrich (1992) call attention to how the designers assume future users, and project certain interests, abilities, and behaviour on those users. This projection is materialized into the design and might be akin to a film manuscript, telling actors (human and non-human) what to do and not do to. The designers' ideas and meanings become part of the design of the technology, and is known as *inscription*. The designers have developed the technology with a user in mind. A user with specific tastes, motives, aspirations, competencies et cetera, and making predictions on scientific, economic, and moral developments. The script is the final product of assumption made about the user. However, as SCOT pointed out, the users are central in defining the technology, and thus the role of users in redefining technologies will change the script. Therefore, we have to “go back and forward between the designer's projected user and the real user” (Akrich, 1992, p. 209). This gives us access to see the user's reactions and how their environment is affected by the introduction of a new technology, which is also known as *de-scriptio*.

Users do not have to use the technology as prescribed though. Resistances to scripts can be illustrated by an example from the 1970s when some cars were designed so that they would not start if the seat belt was not fastened. If the user refuses to wear the seat belt, they may have an antiprogram (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2008). A user who fastens their seat belt is undergoing *subscription*, but if they find a way to start the car without fastening the seat belt, they are performing *de-description*.

By using this theory, I will be able to see how Blizzard as a game developer has imagined the players, and the players' structural and organizational needs. Furthermore, I will examine how the game has scripted guild leadership, and how the designers and players have negotiated and sequentially adapted the game in accordance with what they see is common use.

This theory gives a good framework for studying the producer-user relationship. However, it is not always the case that the script will be understood or followed by the users (Gjøen & Hård, 2002). Because I am also interested in looking at how the players inscribe their own visions about use, and how they interpret the game, I have chosen to supplement my analysis using the framework *user-script* as described by Heidi Gjøen and Mikael Hård.

2.1.2 User-script

Playing an online game is an active and reflexive process where the player becomes part of a social network. MMORPGs are highly customizable. Players do not simply play the game, they also reshape their game experience through creating new content such as programming add-ons, or conducting advanced statistical analysis (Paul, 2011). The question of negotiation also stretches beyond that of interaction and negotiation between people in virtual networks. It is also one of negotiation between human and non-humans.

The players become participants of the game's development and their own experience, and the social nature of the game has allowed players to both share and discuss of their contributions and ideas. They have become co-producers, and as such, cannot be separated as simply users from developers, which is why the framework of user-script is useful in looking at player and leadership practices in WoW.

Heidi Gjøen and Mikael Hård illustrates what a user-script is through how users of the electric car Eljet constructed new scripts. One of the women they interviewed had turned her car into a distinctly female car by naming it *Barbie*. According to Gjøen and Hård, this was neither part of the original script or antiprogram and illustrated how users through creative use, write their own

scripts, and assign new meanings to the technology, adding to the engineered script.

As players become co-producers of the game, I have chosen to utilize the theory of *user-scripts* to illustrate how players have made scripts, additional to the engineering scripts, on *how to be a WoW-player*, *how to be a leader in WoW*, and *how to organize guilds and raids*. As we will see, gaining access to a raiding guild means also having to prove that one has understood the rules of the game and the rules for raiding as understood by the player community.

De-scripting the technology, does not necessarily mean discarding the original script. Often the technology will be used as the script suggests, but the users can create an entirely new script, through the process of domestication. In the following section, I will describe the theory of domestication. I will be using this framework to give a more nuanced understanding of how the technology or artefact is used in order to cover the leadership practices in WoW as detailed as possible.

2.1.3 Domestication

When players buy and play the game, they sometimes go through a process of *domestication*. Domestication is about how users make a technology (or artefact) their own by adapting it into their daily life, through developing routines and symbolic meanings, in a dialogue with the scripted manual. People are not passive in their consumption of technology, they actively think and act in the way they create meanings about how to play, when to play and how much to play. The theory was originally created by Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon, but has since been redefined by Merete Lie and Knut Holtan Sørensen (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2008).

The theory analyses the relationship between the “domesticator” and the “domesticated”, for example when a family acquires a personal computer and uses it in a familiar setting, for example the living room. Family members could change the screen-saver to show a family photo, or stick post-its to the monitor. A technology is not simply a black box of wires and cords, but could be a communication device, a friend and helper, or an intrusion into daily life. As such, there is a symbiosis between the technology’s materiality and the symbolism bound in it. The symbolic meanings, as such, are more than just the technology’s physical manifestation.

While the theory of domestication often concerns itself with the domestications of individual users, I have chosen to use it to analyse how player communities have domesticated guild leadership *practically*, *symbolically* and *cognitively* (Lie & Sørensen, 1996). These three dimensions of the domestication process is from the *Trondheim-model of domestication*

(Haddon, 2007). Practical domestication is how sociotechnical practice is developed, which involves developing routines. The second level is the symbolic, which involves how the users construct the technology's "meaning" and how it is involved in creating identity for the actors. The cognitive level is where practice is learned and meaning is constructed, and focuses on what users think, both consciously and unconsciously, about a technology.

Making technology your own is about the meeting between the script and the user, and thereby shows the flexibility of the technology. Within the technology's flexibility, the users then develop their own scripts in either line with, or rejecting the technology's script. In this paper, I will look at all three levels to gain insight into how sociotechnical leadership is practiced in WoW. All three theories will therefore be of help in exploring how guilds are organized, how leaders delegate to technologies, and how they have become co-producers of the game.

To understand games as social, knowledge intensive, and as a place for learning leadership skills, I will now highlight noteworthy research on games. This will put my research in to context with research on games involving social, material, and leadership aspects of gaming.

2.2 Game Studies

Games have existed for a long time. Humans have been playing games probably since the dawn of time, according to Johann Huizinga (Mortensen, 2009). In his book *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga developed concepts to start discussing and understanding games, and the act of playing. In it, he explores the activity of play and the experience of being outside of the physical world within a "magic circle" (Mortensen, 2009, pp. 9-11). With the introduction of digital games, research on games has grown.

Two schools of thought are generally identified in the game studies community, the *narratologic*, and *ludologic*. The narratologic approach has its roots in studies of texts and literature, and uses narrative theory to analyse games. The ludologic approach has its roots in Espen Aarseth's concept *Cybertext* (Mortensen, 2009, p. 57). This cybertextual approach is based on the thought that the participation of the user is not trivial, and the degree of involvement goes beyond the activity of reading. The main point behind this is that while reading a book requires an interpretive effort, engaging with a cybertext requires something more, as it is a configurative activity - the player has to interact with the story to advance. Gonzalo Frasca introduced the term ludology as a counter to the narrative approach. The ambition of ludologists is to consider games as games, and not as narratives or anything else. In time, game studies have combined the two approaches, and games can now be

understood as both narrative and games as they are played, not as they are read (Mortensen, 2009, p. 58).

As there are multiple understandings of how to study games, there are also many different opinions on how to define a game, and what playing is. According to Mortensen (2009), the most important marker of digital games is that they are completely dependent on a computer to be played. However, there are at least three commonly used, different names given to games that are played on a screen and controlled by a computer: video games, computer games, and digital games. While Wolf (Mortensen, 2009) claims that computer games are a subcategory of video games, because they both use a cathode-based monitor and a microchip-based control unit, the same argument can be made to categorize video games as a subcategory of computer games. To avoid this, Kerr (Mortensen, 2009) uses the term digital games. This term covers all digital games regardless of platform (computer or console) as they are all dependant on a computer-control and cathode-monitor. This distinguishes digital games from analogue games.

Defining a game is difficult, however. Games are varied, and even a particular game can change over time, and have different meanings in different contexts. Mortensen (2009, p. 17) lists different definitions of what a game is; “an exercise of voluntary control systems, in which there is a contest between powers, confined by rules in order to produce a disequilibrium outcome”, or “a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal”. The short version is that a game is something we play. However, she further highlights some important aspects in recognizing a game; rules, arena, goal, and game objects.

Digital games today is a big industry, and have become a big part of our media culture. In recent years, digital games⁹ have emerged as a major leisure activity. According to ESA, 59 per cent of Americans play video games and nearly half of game players are female (48 per cent). Since 1996, the video game revenue has increased from a little under \$3 billion (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2008) to more than \$21 billion in 2013 (Entertainment Software Association, 2014). With the popularity of smartphones and other wireless devices such as tablets, mobile games have also become very popular reaching new markets and demographics.

As such, they have also become part of the emerging field of Digital Game Studies (DGS), which launched their *Game Studies* in 2001 (Fromme &

⁹ In this paper I will be using Aphra Kerr’s term “digital games” (Mortensen, 2009). Video games and computer games are terms that easily are associated with specific platforms; however, they are still digital games, as opposed to analogue games.

Unger, 2012). This is an international online journal for computer game research. Another foundation, DiGRA, which was launched in 2002, has together with *Game Studies* played important roles in establishing research on digital games. In the following sections, I will present relevant research on games, in order to contextualize my own research.

2.2.1 Games as Social

Research on online games has increased incrementally in the last ten years (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). I have already distanced this thesis from the ideas that games foster violent and aggressive behaviour, and thereby showing how digital games also can have positive aspects. As I will be looking at interaction online, I will make use of research on the social communities in games.

In *Play Between Worlds*, Taylor (2006) examines multiplayer gaming life through qualitative ethnographic methods. She describes herself and other players in the MMORPG *EverQuest* (EQ), and utilizes her experiences to illustrate how players participate in complex practices. She highlights the necessity for a social network to be a successful player, and how players support these networks through maintenance and systemization. She also explores the borders between online and offline relationships, showing how game relationships move offline or move over to other games.

To be able to join a social network in a game, a player must acquire *reputation*, as Taylor calls it. Reputation entails being able to show the guild one is applying for, that you have the necessary skills, expertise, and qualifications to be a part of their team. In other words, reputation can be understood as a social capital that a player and their character develop in the time from anonymity to a virtual adulthood, through playing the game. The development of social capital is also covered by other researchers such as Eklund and Johansson (2010) and Chen (2009a, 2009b, 2012). Being able to attain the *expertise on how to play WoW* is dependent on social and cultural capital in a sociocultural process.

Eklund and Johansson explains social norms and the necessity for trust and cooperation among players in grouped content. The social norms can be regarded as part of what constitutes Taylor's reputation, as it refers to acceptable behaviour in-game. *From Tree House to Barracks: The Social Life of Guilds in World of Warcraft* (Williams, Ducheneaut, Xiong, Zhang, Yee, & Nickell, 2006) looks at how guilds are formed and organized. They found that guilds generally were organized to fit their goals, size, and personal preferences. The formal requirements between the guilds would differ between the small purely social guild with friends or online acquaintances and

the bigger more military-styled raiding guilds. Still, they found that guilds, despite formal requirements and goals, would fit the network typology as flexible and dynamic organizations who are connected through communication. There were also differences between players within the guilds. Guilds would often have a core of members with increased access to and more contact with the different nodes in the guild network. The core remains, while the more peripheral nodes, or players, were changed out.

Mark Chen's *Leet Noobs* (Chen, 2012) is an ethnographic recount of Mark and his teammates' experiences as a raiding guild in WoW. He describes the development and necessity for social and cultural capital, and the occurrence of drama in the group. He also found that groups survive these episodes of drama by building relationships, or *camaraderie*, through retaining a coherent group identity (Chen, 2009a).

Another term Taylor highlights, is *trust*. Because players in a guild are risking their "lives" for each other, trust is instrumental in being able to solve problems. Raiding requires immense coordination and cooperation, and trust will assure the group's survival and honour. Eklund and Johansson (2010) also highlight that grouped content is dependent on high levels of trust and cooperation, and as such, the social aspects of the game are important. Trust is also evident in Chen's writings (2012), as it is instrumental in a raiding group. Guilds have socially constructed goals of maintaining friendships and having fun.

Trust is regarded as so important, that players have constructed several systems to inspire trust in the guild leadership, and to assure the group's success. In her accounts of player-produced economic systems, Malone (2009) explains how these systems work as motivational and political cohesion for raiding guilds. The systems are there to assure fair distribution of loot players have created intricate systems where they see that the game's mechanics as problematic. As the systems are guild-specific (meaning you cannot transfer your earned "points" to another guild), players are more motivated to remain in the guild to keep their points.

This leads us into the knowledge intensity of playing an online game like WoW, where the social networks are instrumental in order to learn how to play the game correctly. The playing community makes use of various technological systems, which I will highlight in the following.

2.2.2 Knowledge Intensity of Games

Taylor (2006) illustrates in *Play Between Worlds* the sociotechnical practices of how one *becomes an EQ player*. She also notes how changes in the game's design has resulted in changes in the player's practices. As such, we

understand that online games requires access to a social network to gain the knowledge of the sociotechnical practices.

An example of knowledge intensive practices is the use of *theorycrafting* (Paul, 2011; Wenz, 2012). Through advanced statistical analysis, players have reshaped what it means to be a WoW player and how it is played. Players have developed several *paratexts*¹⁰ (Consalvo, 2009), also referred to as *assemblages* (Chen, 2012; Taylor, 2009), such as *add-ons* and *walkthroughs*. These are player-produced materials designed to improve the playing experience and help other players take part in the sociotechnical practice of *playing WoW correctly*. These material practices are often required to gain access to a raiding guild, and when applying for a guild you must illustrate that you know about, and partake in these practices, which is reliant on players to have cultural capital as they are spread by word-of-mouth.

2.2.3 Leadership in Games

Many guilds will require players to follow specific sociomaterial practices to take part in raiding. Raiding requires a significant amount of coordination, as detailed by Moses Wolfenstein (2010). In his PhD dissertation *Leadership at Play: How leadership in digital games can inform the future of instructional leadership*, he examines how leadership practices in WoW are similar or different from the work of school leaders. He thoroughly details the tasks of raid and guild leadership based on interviews with eleven guilds and fourteen different guild leaders. While the guilds used digital leadership tools in various degrees, he found that all of them were deeply enmeshed in the practice of knowledge development surrounding WoW. Furthermore, he found that leadership in WoW is deeply distributed at many levels, both inside guilds and within the WoW community. Successful guilds are therefore, according to Wolfenstein, powerful learning organizations in a network of connected organizations and individuals. He theorizes that some aspects of leadership can be learned in WoW, but “*skill at the game*” is key to access WoW leadership. To be seen as a capable leader, you must have enough expertise about the game. He also found that WoW could create opportunities for leadership learning otherwise unavailable. By being seen as experts by their peers, good players can potentially acquire leadership positions in WoW, while not necessarily standing out as team leaders in other contexts.

Timothy Lisk, Ugur Kaplanali and Ronald Riggio (2012) conducted a study of distributed team leadership in multiplayer online environments, comparing how leadership was learned in EVE Online and a leadership training software known as INFINITEAMS. Their findings include that MMOs can be a

¹⁰ I will make use of the term paratexts in regards to the different player-produced materials.

possible third place for acquiring leadership skills, and stated that research on leadership in multiplayer games are only beginning to scratch the surface. They argue that the next generation of workers will have grown up using the internet, YouTube and Facebook, and a small, but growing percentage of these will have leadership experience from online groups in games like WoW. In addition, they pose the question of what this experience will mean in the work place, as leading distributed teams is different from leadership in its traditional form.

There is research to back up the statement that online games can be sites for learning leadership, but what is actually leadership in World of Warcraft? How is it shaped by the appropriation and use of game technology?

2.3 How to Study Games

These studies are of particular interest to me, as they look at player and leadership practices, learning through social and cultural capital, material sources, structuring of guilds, and how games can be a way to acquire leadership skills.

As raiding requires a great deal of organizing and coordinating, it requires an authority figure to handle these tasks. Generally, players attain this authority through having attained expertise in class and game mechanics, often by following the usage of various paratexts, in addition to having followed the scripts and user-scripts of the social norms of the game. Consequently, they have been promoted to higher ranks in the guild, and obtained a leadership position. I will therefore highlight research on leadership in online games, in the following section.

In this chapter, I have detailed the STS theories I will make use of in my analysis and given an account of noteworthy research on games, and thereby contextualized my research in accordance with previous research. Before I can move on to my analysis, I will present my research methods and discuss their use. In the following chapter, I will also present my informants and point out what I consider weaknesses in my research.

3 Methods

By the time I started work on this thesis, I had already been a WoW player for about seven years, meaning that I had gained experiences and made observations in the game that would influence my research. I have chosen to draw on my own experiences as a player in my studies, much like the studies of Mark Chen (2012), T. L. Taylor (2006), and Moses Wolfenstein (2010) who based their research on ethnographic and personal experiences.

In order to gain insight into the lives and practices of leaders in WoW, I chose to collect data through qualitative interviews and data analysis of interviews and documents. I conducted interviews with four informants (one interview with each) between October 2013 and June 2014, and in one case, I asked one informant some follow-up questions over email in October 2014. The documents were retrieved between May and October 2014. As my focus is to gain insight into practices related to and meanings about leadership in digital games, my data material can consist of both documents and interviews. Specifically, I am interested in looking at how leadership is practiced in WoW, and how different actors organize themselves and understand leadership.

When conducting the interviews, I tried to focus less on conducting the interview “correctly”, and more on my topic and the people I interviewed, listening to them asking follow-up questions whenever I got curious. While my bachelor’s degree in psychology has given me some practice in research methods and a seminar in interview training, this was still the first time I actually put my knowledge to use in practice. I did not expect that I would master the craft of interviewing right away, but rather become progressively better as I became more experienced as an interviewer.

In the following section, I will detail the process of data collection and designing of the interview guide.

3.1 Data Collection

The interview guide (enclosed) was designed in collaboration with my advisor. I started by laying out some main topics, formulating questions from them, and making follow-up questions. I assumed that many of the follow-up questions would be answered naturally throughout the interview, but added them as a reminder.

The guide started with general questions on age, profession, family and living situation, and what games they played in order to start the interview and make the informants comfortable. From there the guide went on to questions about

how they started playing WoW, how long they had played it, and further questions on their play style. I tried to word these questions to encourage the informants to share stories with me. For example Nathan, who told me long tales on how he started playing the game and made friends in it, and how he still play with the same friends. I asked about their guild, how they joined it, how the guild recruited new members, what the guild required of members and recruits, and how the guild handled the balancing between the online and offline lives. Then I went on to asking them about leadership, what their specific role entailed, how they rose to their position, and what they consider a good leader. To finish the interview, I asked about what types of material and technical tools the guilds would use.

The interviews were conducted over *Skype* and recorded, and in one case, I asked follow-up questions over e-mail. This was mostly because my informants were located in other cities or countries. The interviews lasted from half an hour to a little over an hour, depending on how “chatty” the informants were. However, the fact that some interviews were shorter does not necessarily mean that they were of poor quality. If anything, some of my informants would have short and precise answers and might not have felt the need to embellish, and made follow-up questions redundant. All of the interviews seemed informal and comfortable to me, even though I was quite nervous. This might be because I did not ask questions about controversial or private topics. My impression is that the informants enjoyed having an opportunity to share about their experiences and tell stories from WoW.

As a WoW-player, I have basic knowledge about the game and gaming generally. However, despite me also having leadership experience from WoW, I found myself learning a lot about leadership from the people I interviewed, and feel as I have improved my leadership skills. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note that basic knowledge about a topic is necessary to be able to ask relevant questions. They also mention that spending time in the environment you study can teach local jargon and routines, giving you a feeling of what the informants want to discuss. In the time I was conducting my interviews, I found myself changing my focus on different questions in the interview guide based on experiences in previous interviews. Some of the questions I originally formed proved not as relevant, while less significant questions and digressions lead to the best stories.

The interviews were transcribed as close to verbatim as possible, but in the cases where my informants spoke Norwegian, I chose to transcribe them in literary language rather than dialect. However, I did left distinctive words and phrases, to keep the informants’ characteristics. In order to make the work easier for myself, I chose to leave out sounds of hesitation, repetitions, and disturbances that I regarded as irrelevant. During the transcription, I noticed

how I already started analysing it in my head. While I did not take notes of these thoughts, the process of analysing had started. I chose to focus on finishing the transcriptions, as it was quite a tedious process.

I found a blog series posted on *Manaflask* (manaflask.com) written by Buzzkill (2013), a member of Ensidia, where he described how their guild handled the merger with SK/Gaming during the Wrath of the Lich King expansion. The blog series consist of fourteen different blog posts, thoroughly detailing his perspective on the events that occurred during the expansion. While Buzzkill was not in a leadership position himself, he provides a valuable insight into the leadership processes that took place during the merger and the events following.

Another blog series I found was *Officers' Quarters* by Scott Andrews. It was published on *WoWInsider*, a community run website that posts articles and blogs on different aspects of gameplay in WoW. In this particular series, Andrews answers questions and writes about guild leadership, mostly based on his personal experiences as a guild leader through many years. Specifically, I chose to focus on the posts *Why we lead*, *6 qualities of a successful raiding guild*, *How do we govern? Part 1*, and *How do we govern? Part 2*. They offered perspectives on possible ways to structure and organize guilds, and why people choose to be officers or guild leaders. These posts also had comment sections, allowing readers to add their perspectives, which I found useful in gaining readers' perspectives as well. In order to keep access to these documents, I printed them out. This proved useful, considering *WoWInsider* closed down in March 2015. While the posts are still available, the comment sections are no longer available on the website that is now hosting the content.

In order to analyse the texts, I wrote case reports of them, including particularly interesting comments offering different ideas and perspectives. However, I found different categories when writing these summaries, than when categorizing the interview data. In the following section, I will present my four informants: Nathan, Sadie, Ethan, and Liam.

3.2 Participants

The interviews took place between October 2013 and June 2014. I have chosen to anonymize my informants, by giving them and their guilds different names. Guild names will be marked with brackets (< >). In order to find participants, I posted about my thesis project on various forums, websites, and social media; including *tankspot.com*, *Reddit*, *paragon.fi*, *methodwow.com*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *gathering.org*, and my on blog *torstine.com*. While I did get responses from many interested people, when I messaged them back, few

responded, and some scheduled interviews were cancelled due to unavailability.

My first informant, Nathan <Caverns of Time> was a 24-year-old carpenter living in the Stavanger-area in Norway. He was introduced to WoW through a friend during beta¹¹, and had played with the same people and guild since. He rose to become ranged DPS officer during the expansion Mists of Pandaria, and attributed his promotion to him being knowledgeable about the game. He also highlighted that many of his responsibilities in the game were similar to those in his work, where he had a lot of organizational responsibilities and forms to fill out. He characterized himself as a playful but serious gamer.

Sadie, my second informant was a 23-year-old computer science student from Canada. She was the healing officer of <Emerald Dream>. She played the game on and off for years until finding a raiding guild. She was introduced to the game through a boyfriend, and regarded herself mostly as a social player, because she views games as fun and social. She therefore mostly played games with friends online.

The third informant, Ethan <Demigods> started playing WoW on a private server when he was 16 and was introduced to the game through a friend. He was a 21-year-old Romanian, who was a guild leader in practice while the guild's actual guild leader had to take a break from the game. He pushed the guild to new heights, increasing their roster and improving their performance.

My fourth and last informant, Liam <Reckoning> was a 28-year-old history student from the Hedmark-area in Norway. He started playing WoW at launch and was introduced to the game through friends. Even though he puts considerable amounts of hours into the game and his position as the guild leader, he considered himself a casual player. The guild is very social, and has many non-raiding members. He classified them as semi-hardcore (somewhere between casual and hardcore), as they did not prioritize progress at the cost of social values. The guild was especially attuned to being fair towards all the members, and to treat players respectfully.

At first glance, the informants might look very similar; they are all in their twenties and part of raiding guilds. While they all defined their guilds as semi-hardcore, they had different understandings of what casual and hardcore entailed. For some, being a casual guild meant not raiding at all, while for others it meant not being a progression guild. Being a casual player is often regarded as being specifically attuned to social play, not spending as much time nor having as much game playing skills as opposed to hardcore players.

¹¹ An early test version of the game

My informants' stories are quite different, as they all had different experiences from their leadership positions. None of my informants were on the same server, and Sadie was even on a different continent. However, their stories gave me insight to various aspects of guild leadership and online relationships when I conducted my analysis. The method of analysis will be detailed in the following section.

3.3 Analysis of Empirical Data

I did not start the analysis with any specific theory in mind, but I approached the data material inspired by *Grounded Theory* (GT). In GT the material are not made to fit any predetermined theories or categories. It is a bottom-up framework, in which you let the empirical data inspire ideas and phenomenon instead of forcing your data into an existing hypothesis and framework. I have chosen to interpret it as an inductive method by not following a set of instructions, rather focusing on what is suitable for my topic. As such, I have gone back and forth between theories and my data material.

In GT, you start the analysis by coding, to find empirical and theoretical categories in the data material. This is done by going through the empirical data and make categories based on the themes you find in the text. I did this by writing summaries, or *case reports* of each interview. In the cases where the interview was conducted in Norwegian, I decided to write the case reports in English, thereby also having to translate quotes. When translating the interviews, I tried keeping the characteristics of the informant and their way of speaking in mind to keep the data as close as possible to what the informants said and their opinions.

These reports were split into topics based on what the informants told me. It seemed natural to use some of the same categories across several interviews, making it easier to find similarities and differences in the different opinions of the informants. The themes I found in the interviews were put into the three empirical chapters, based on the themes I found in the case reports. From the case reports, I wrote summaries to each chapter, where the different informants' ideas were unified. During this process, I re-read the interviews to assure I had all the important details and to find good quotes. Finally, I lifted these flat narratives in to analysis.

Even though transcribing the interviews was a tedious experience, the interviews are still a fond memory. Many of their stories caused sudden outbursts of laughter when I was listening through the recordings. I am thankful for having met people that shared their experiences with me. My goal is to retell these stories and give insight into the everyday life of an officer or

Guild Leader, and thereby contribute with research in a field with little previous research.

While I believe my research will give fruitful insights into player and leadership practices in online games, there are also problems with my research. One issue is that I have not considered a gender perspective in this paper. Nearly half of game players are female (Entertainment Software Association, 2014), and in the past year there has been increased focus on female representation in gaming culture. Another limitation in my research is that I cannot transfer the leadership practices from WoW into the work place. Furthermore, my positioning to the hypothesis of leadership learning in WoW is a weakness. I have experiences from being a player and a leader, which can have influenced my analysis. Especially, I have found myself questioning how the leadership in my own guild was being practiced, leading to conflicts, and can partially have been a factor to the guild splitting in December 2014.

I am not looking to make generalizing conclusions based on my data material. An idea within science is to find knowledge that is transferable and true for most people. This generalization is based on ideas of *validity* and *reliability*. Reliability commonly refers to how the research results are consistent and credible, meaning that another researcher would get the same results when replicating the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 250-251). Validity on the other hand, is the idea that the methods used measure what you want to measure. While these terms are commonplace in quantitative research, they are also valid in qualitative research. As such, these ideas can be understood as to what extent our observations reflect the phenomena we are studying, and that another researcher transcribing the interviews would find similar results. This is because qualitative data is situationally bounded, and the quantitative reliability of retesting does not apply to qualitative research. Qualitative data are very much valid. For example, my findings represent knowledge created by my informants and my interaction in the interviews.

Qualitative interviews are characterized by close contact between the researcher and the interviewed. In the interview setting, the interviewer and informant together construct knowledge in their interaction, and the descriptions given by the informant are then interpreted by the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 22-23). Because the researcher has such a central role in the quality of the interview, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) underline how mastering the craft of interview through practice. Furthermore, interviewers who masters their craft will concern themselves less with technique than the knowledge they want to gain. An important note they make, is that focusing too much on reliability can counteract creativity and variation, as interviewers will have different styles, and improvise during the interview.

4 Scripting Organizations

Anyone can create a guild, as it only requires a small amount of in-game money and five signatures from other players. While this system is quite easy to fathom for most players, what kind of instruction on leadership does the game give? According to Andrews (2012) a successful raiding guild is stable, consistent, goal achieving, accountable, efficient and has a leadership that inspires loyalty and confidence.

In this chapter, I seek to find what leadership is and consists of in WoW. That means having to look at both how the design is scripted (Akrich, 1992), and how players incorporate their own scripts (Gjøen & Hård, 2002) into the sociotechnical construct of leadership.

I have chosen to illustrate scripting and de-scripting of guild leadership through examples of loot distribution and organization of raids and guilds. By looking at how guilds organize and structure themselves (ranks), and how they distribute high-value items (loot), we can gain insight into how hierarchies and reward distribution are scripted and de-scripted by both the game and the players. The two categories were chosen because the limitations and adaptations of them were prominent themes in my informants' description of guild leadership. Loot Distribution is covered in earlier research by Taylor (2009) and Malone (2009) which I believe highlights the importance of this aspect of guild leadership and players' reshaping of the technology. Ranks is based on descriptions from my data material, illustrating how players have both followed the script of guild leadership in the game and developed user-scripts on how to structure a successful guild.

The goal is to find what limitations and flexibility are embedded into the technology, and equally important, how players have reshaped leadership through constructing user-scripts.

Despite the game's script having the hierarchic structure of one person in charge, players have developed a myriad of different practices on running guilds and sharing responsibilities, as I will illustrate in this chapter. In the following, I will give examples of both democracy and hierarchies with modifications from my data material. With this, I hope to illustrate how these leadership structures are user-scripts developed by players.

4.1 De-scripting Guild Leadership

Above all the officers, is the Guild Master (GM), also referred to as Guild Leader). WoWWiki (2005b) and Wowpedia (2005) both describe the Guild

Leader as a player character who is the head of a guild. They have administrative control of the guild's operations, including giving ranks, privileges and adding and removing guild members. The official *World of Warcraft website Beginner's Guide* (Activision-Blizzard, n.d.) explains that “*guilds have rules that their leaders can adjust and modify to give the guild structure and purpose*”. It sounds simple, but the role of Guild Leader is vastly more complex. The Guild Leader takes on many roles and responsibilities, and these will vary between guilds because individual guilds will choose to organize themselves.

The design of a technology communicates its ideas of correct use. During the design process, ideas of use and the users will be inscribed into the design and materialized. In the following section, I will look at how leadership is organized in the scripts and user-scripts in the guild hierarchy.

4.1.1 Ranks

A guild will typically have ranks with different titles and privileges within the guild. The predefined ranks in the game will allow higher-ranking members to manage players in the guild (inviting/promoting/demoting) and access to the guild's bank. Promoting players to a higher rank will often be a sign of the guild leadership regarding that player as loyal and trustworthy. By analysing the game's script and the user-scripts of ranks, we will see how guild leadership is understood within this hierarchy.

A Guild Leader will seldom run their guild completely alone. He or she will appoint officers to help him- or herself with the various tasks of running a guild, but it is up to the Guild Leader how he or she chooses to delegate these tasks. In this section, I will show how players have developed new scripts by choosing to organize their guild differently despite the game's script of having one Guild Leader.

The Guild Leader can create ranks within the guild and decide what level of member control the different ranks have. By member control, I refer to inviting, promoting, and demoting members, guild bank permissions, and setting notes on members. However, the administrative control like changing the rank permissions and disbanding the guild, still remains solely with the Guild Leader. The bank permissions are especially interesting. The guild bank is where both members and leaders store valuable items. Therefore, access to withdrawing items and money from the bank is restricted, so that new untrusted members do not “steal” them. The engineering script of these controls are flexible, allowing the guild leadership to decide the level of access and control among guild members and officers.

Blizzard has given the players a suggestion through default ranks, with trust and hierarchy being the dominant themes. The default ranks of Officer and Veteran can be understood as ways of suggesting that the Guild Leader can delegate tasks and responsibilities, as well as rewarding loyal members for their contribution to the guild through giving them extra benefits, such as additional access to the guild's bank. The *World of Warcraft Beginner's Guide* (Activision-Blizzard, n.d.) explains how defining the guild ranks and structure is entirely up to the player. It also explains that you can “*move people up and down the totem pole depending on how they're doing in your guild*”. “How they're doing in your guild” can be interpreted to the Guild Leader as how a member is performing, in accordance with both social norms and the sociomaterial practices of playing WoW *correctly*. With this, the engineering script implies that players that exhibit prosocial behaviour, trustworthiness, and expertise should be promoted to higher ranks. As such, the rank system can be interpreted as a meritocracy, where players are promoted when they have *earned it*.

When interviewing my informants, I found that loyalty, expertise, social capital, and trust all were factors that significantly influenced their promotions to officer. As Nathan explained:

I've been in the guild longer than most. I think I've been in the guild longer than almost everyone who are leaders now. I was from Vanilla¹², so I kinda know the guild and how the guild works. And I know most of the people, so I'm like in the core of the guild. [...] I know people, and maybe they like me. [...] And I know how to play, and I know most of the DPS people do. I've played almost all the classes.

We see here that Nathan, not only has acquired trust within the guild, but also has exhibited loyalty, social capital, and developed expertise outside of his own character class. According to Andrews (2010), both loyalty and knowledge about the game are core factors when choosing officers in a guild.

Another aspect of the ranking system is how the technology limits control to anyone lower in the hierarchy, meaning an Officer can only promote and demote, or kick members of lower rank than themselves. From this, we see that the guilds are a construct of the game's code. However, as I will illustrate in this chapter, guilds are also partly social constructs with norms. While the game itself dictates capabilities, restrictions, and hierarchy, social constructs

¹² Vanilla is what many players call the initial released version of the game.

developed in accordance with this show us how guilds are more than just hierarchies.

In cases where the Guild Leader goes away for long periods, guild members and officers have limited ways of controlling the guild. The code only allows for one guild Leader, even though there may be many second-tier “officers” who are socially as important as the Guild Leader. Officers have many of the same powers, and as illustrated by Nathan, many would have been an integral part of the guild for a long time. They may act as Guild Leaders in spite of the game’s code and categorization. Ethan, who took the reins of his guild when their actual Guild Leader had to take a break from the game, illustrates this:

I started being guild master because the guild master had to move, from his apartment, and he would not log in for one month I think. And I just took the lead, I wasn’t officially the guild master [...] everyone knew me as their leader

While he never was given the rank of Guild Leader, he took on the responsibilities and led the guild successfully, and was regarded by the members as the Guild Leader. Nathan through this illustrated both the need for a guild to have a Guild Leader who is present, and how some players take on roles and responsibilities that they see need filling.

While giving the players a suggestion of ranks, Blizzard has still left the system flexible to the players. Despite the scripted meritocracy, the game offers guilds a customizable tool with which they can structure their guilds according to their needs, regardless of whether they have previous experience with or knowledge about leadership.

However, the flexibility is often used. For example, Liam decided to structure his guild <Reckoning> as a democracy. He had taken the role of the decision maker, but still sought council from both officers and members in the guild. An example of this is when the guild was in the progress of changing raiding days. Liam created a poll, allowing everyone to suggest days, and the majority ruled. Meaning the days that received the most votes subsequently became raiding days. Liam would also include the entire guild, social and raiding members alike, in developing their vision. Towards the end of the Mists of Pandaria expansion, he made a survey to allow everyone to give their opinions on the guild, events, management, and what they want for the guild in the future.

<Ensidia> also chose a different hierarchal leadership structure. As one of the leading guilds in the world, their strategy was always aligned towards competitiveness and excellence. When they formed from merging the guilds

<Nihilum> and <Curse/SK Gaming> (Buzzkill, 2013) the Guild Leaders decided on having a triumvirate of Guild Leaders, and reset everyone else's ranks to then promote class leaders based on performance. <Nihilum> had previously been a strict hierarchy with one Guild Leader:

Nihilum was a dictatorship. There was one man above all, and everyone under Kungen had to either obey or hit the road

The change from one leader over to many was part of the merger where Kungen from <Nihilum>, Mek, and Mackzter from the <Curse/SK Gaming> chose to share the responsibility of guild leading equally. While they follow the script of meritocracy, they have however created an additional script by having three Guild Leaders. The game's code does inhibit certain controls, but in terms of social ranks, the triumvirate were equal leaders.

Through this, we can understand the system as both limiting and flexible. The ranks themselves are inherently limiting because of the core hierarchal system. The consequence of this we find in cases where guild members are left unable to take control of a guild when the Guild Leader is absent (World of Warcraft Forums, 2012). The function where members can "dethrone" a Guild Leader after 30 days of inactivity has a weakness, which allows a Guild Leader who logs on once every 30 days will remain the Guild Leader, and the guild members are left powerless. Because of this, Blizzard has introduced a service where players can petition them to appoint a new Guild Leader if the guild Leader has not logged in to the game in 30 days.

The flexibility becomes clear in how the players in my cases have taken a hierarchal system and reshaping it into a more dynamic one, such as Ensidia with its three Guild Leaders, who were regarded equally as Guild Leaders by the members in the guild, and shared in all the responsibilities of Guild Leading.

All of these cases are examples of the diverse possibilities of guild structures. While they are technically strict hierarchies, their social constructs of the guilds are less strict, and illustrates players' various desires and views of guild leadership. They have developed a supplementary user-script by using the technology differently and viewing Guild Leadership differently, and the distinction between developer and user becomes more unclear. Guilds are more than just hardcoded mechanics they are social constructs with norms. Players value the social side of the guild in addition to the purple pixels they gain from raiding. They have successfully followed the game's script, both of acquiring social and cultural capital and building social networks, thereby gaining friends and forming a guild together.

The guild hierarchy structure can be seen as a way that the players can delegate to the technology. The rest is left up to the initiative of the players, and how they want to run their guild. Seeing as guild can serve several functions, this flexibility from the game, allows the users to script their own social constructs involving cultural symbols and meanings. They create new meanings and new conditions for use through domesticating it.

In this section, I have highlighted the limitations and flexibility of the rank system of the game. The game's script tells the player that guild leadership is hierarchal and that there is only one Guild Leader. The players on the other hand, have developed a myriad of different ways to enact leadership through different social structures despite the game's design. They have illustrated a different understanding of how leadership in guilds should be conducted and have therefore chosen to run their guilds differently, by having democratic leadership like in the case of Liam, or a triumvirate as in the case of Ensidia. In the following section, I will look at the game's design in regards to loot distribution – a topic often heavily entrenched with drama. I will analyse the game's script and its limitations and flexibility, and thereby finding the user's script, based on my informants' statements.

4.1.2 Loot Distribution

Loot is the term used by players to describe items and equipment that drop from mobs, and raid bosses offer the best possible equipment for one's character. When a boss is defeated, it only drops a handful of items for the group. Consequently, several players in the raid group will therefore compete over various items. As such, the items are considered as very valuable and thereby often associated with “drama” – the player shorthand for conflict.

As a result, players have developed several systems to distribute loot in a way they consider fair. They often base the fairness of the distribution on players' contribution on factors such as attendance and performance. I will in the following sections detail and discuss loot distribution methods, and argue how these methods are user-scripts.

Malone (2009) detail five main choices for setting loot distribution: *free-for-all*, *round robin*, *master looter*, *group loot*, and *need before greed*¹³. The most common choices for loot distribution in raids are *Master Looter* and the very similar *Group Loot/Need before greed* systems.

In *Group Loot*, items will appear in a window where players can *roll* for the items. They can roll *Need*, *Greed*, *Disenchant* or *Pass* (WoWWiki, 2008) and

¹³ In the *Warlords of Draenor* expansion, Blizzard added another loot mechanic called *Personal*, where ever player has a personal chance of loot off of each boss, not affected by rolls or other players (Wowpedia, 2008).

the item is awarded to the one with the luckiest dice roll. *Master looter* requires one person in the party (the person that is set as *Loot Master* (WoWWiki, 2008)) to assign items to players.

As the *Master Looter*-system only allows one player to loot, this system can be vulnerable to *ninjalooting*. *Ninjalooting* is when players take loot that they are not entitled to according to the game's social norms (WoWWiki, 2009). To safeguard against this, many guilds make use of the Master Looter system. The guild leadership will choose a person regarded as loyal and trustworthy (often an officer) to handle the task of distributing loot, and assign him or her as Loot Master.

Guilds will commonly detail their loot distribution method on their websites within their policies, thereby making the system transparent for both members and prospective recruits. Additionally, this gives members and recruits insight into the decision making process, giving them an indication of what is required to receive items. From this, we see a starting indication of a user-script on how material goods should be distributed in a fair manner.

All of my informants used the Master Looter system, although in various ways. Liam, Nathan, and Ethan all described their guilds' loot system as *Loot Council*. WoWWiki (2006b) describes that in a Loot Council, a group of individuals decide who gets the item. The council can consider several factors, such as attendance, performance, size of upgrade, and attitude.

My informants had slight variances in loot distribution systems; they were similar in principle as they mostly focused on the same factors. However, I will be using the case of Nathan's guild <Caverns of Time> to illustrate how these player-produced systems are in face user-scripts.

<Caverns of Time> based loot decision on who was most "deserving":

If an item drops then a lot of people will link things they want to switch, usually there's a lot of people. Then we have to basically figure out who deserves it most, and who has higher attendance, who received the most gear, and who it works the best for.

Through this, we learn that <Caverns of Time> uses Loot Council in which they review factors like attendance, size of upgrade, and the amount of items the players previously had received. This illustrates that being part of the Loot Council requires a fair amount of expertise about class mechanics, items, and *theorycrafting* (which I will explain further in chapter six). Additionally, it

suggest time-consuming discussion among the council, and registering all of the items distributed.

This gives us an insight into the user-scripts developed by players surrounding loot distribution. In this specific version of Loot Council, the guild has made a policy of how to bid for items, as well as how different factors affect the actual allotment of said items. Which begs the questions, who is the Loot Council, and how do they discuss who is most “deserving”?

In the case of <Caverns of Time>, the Loot Council consisted of the Guild Leader and the various Role Officers. According to Nathan, the discussions took place in *Officer*-chat, meaning that only the officers were able to witness the discussion and the regular members were not. While this implies that the system lacks transparency, members could always question the decision and receive an answer. From this, we see that as the system requires trust in the council, it is also encouraged through explanations when members would question it. The council recognized the need for trust and transparency in their system, to assure members that favouritism or cheating did not occur as a way to avoid conflict.

From this, we see an intricate system developed surrounding the use of a simple mechanic coded in the game. Through recognizing the need of a fair distribution system, they have created systems to signal trust, transparency, and fairness. The need for transparency in successful guilds is supported by (Andrews, 2010, p. 25). Additionally, we see the distinct need to avoid cheating, or breaking of the rules. As such, guilds choose to have someone who has already attained a certain level of trust within the guild to handle the task.

The <Caverns of Time> Loot Council gives items based on whom it will be most beneficial for in terms of power:

If you link on an item that could be an upgrade for you, but it's not the best. There could drop an item from the next boss that's better. Then we have to watch out. Therefore, there's a bit of research on different items, like trinkets and weapons. So it's Loot council, we sit and discuss who gets the loot.

In Nathan's case, the Loot Council members have to be knowledgeable about what items works best for their players, again underlining the need for research into all the specializations' theorycrafting. This further underlines the need to be knowledgeable about game mechanics.

The game's design gives little instruction on optimal items for each character or spec. It gives suggestions in the *Dungeon Journal* by listing all possible items for your class and possible specializations, but players will have to sort to research both inside and outside the game to figure out their best possible items. <Caverns of Time> require their players to read theorycrafting. Furthermore, the Role Officers are required to be knowledgeable about the character classes pertaining to their role. This is where the widespread use of paratexts (chapter six) becomes visible in the production and sharing of expertise in player communities. Role Officers will often inform players where to find the information about their best possible items, and guide them to better performance.

This example is also an illustration where the expertise of the officers outweigh that of the player, as the officers will advise the members what items they should bid for and keep track of what items individual players need. This further underlines the expectation of how Officers need to conduct research, again showing us the user-script developed that players need to be knowledgeable about items and class mechanics, even outside of their own class. This expertise also reinforces the hierarchic structure of the guild, where power and knowledge are connected and reinforce each other illustrating how social and cultural capital are woven into the expertise. Officers are people who have vast expertise, not only in their own class, but also in several player classes. Understood from this, officers need not only to acquire expertise in their own class, but also all the classes they look after.

Summing up, in the <Caverns of Time>'s Loot Council we see several user-scripts developed. In this case, we find two consistent themes generating the development of the user-scripts, namely knowledge and trust. Trust is deeply embedded into the guild's culture by making the bidding, loot policies, and distribution transparent and open for questioning. They recognize the need for this to avoid drama and accusations of favouritism. Furthermore, they choose to promote members that are considered trustworthy core members, thereby endorsing the players' need to trust their leaders and the system. The user-script of knowledge production is evident as well. Players are required to conduct research into class and boss mechanics to be allowed to join the guild's raids. Players are expected to spend time outside of the game, and officers even more, so they are able to discern what items are appropriate.

There are other examples where Loot council also was used, but in different adaptations. <Reckoning> used it only when the players saw it needed – as a backup when players could not reach an agreement on who they thought should receive the item. <Reckoning>'s Loot Council also included one of the members, thus creating openness and democratizing the knowledge. They must also have some overview of which classes an item is optimized for.

Because this system only was a backup, most of the time it was unnecessary. The implication of this is that <Reckoning> is a guild with little loot drama.

The functionality of the Master Looter is to assign items to players, or allow players to roll for the items. It is easy to use; the Loot Master right-clicks the item and chooses to either *Assign* or *Request Roll*. However, as we have seen loot is not a simplistic matter.

WoWWiki (2006c) lists several loot distribution systems, not only Loot Council and DKP (as described in chapter one). From this it becomes clear that players have developed several user-scripts (Gjøen & Hård, 2002) on ways to distribute loot depending on their own needs. Even within my own sample, there are variances within the specific loot system, illustrating how guilds customize the loot system to their own needs. However, it is striking how the systems in their core are based on the same ideas of knowledge and trust. All the guilds require some level of knowledge among both their members and even more so from their officers. Officers are in addition required to research all the classes they are responsible for, as well as attempt to transfer that knowledge to the players and keep track of the players to make sure they bid or roll for the items they should.

While the informants did not specifically talk about trust during the interviews, a lot of the subtext when they were describing their guilds and their management involves trust. Thereby proving that trust as a user-script is deeply embedded into guilds' social culture. Because all the guilds prefer the *Master Looter* mechanic to *Group Loot*, even when players roll for loot, shows us that players feel the need for someone they trust to distribute the loot fairly, to avoid *ninjaing* as much as possible. *Group Loot* is regarded as insufficient by players. A guild will have no way of getting the item back from a player who has *ninja'd* an item. Therefore, they choose to use the Master Looter system, where a person whom the guild has trust in, will be responsible for distributing the loot.

Andrews (2010, p. 94) writes:

In the entire history of MMO gaming, no single issue has caused more drama than loot. Loot drama is the leading cause of players dropping out of raids, players turning on each other, players leaving guilds, and guilds ripping themselves apart.

From this, we learn why so much attention is devoted to the loot distribution in guilds. Clearly, loot is at the core of players' desires and motivation for playing, thereby validating the amount of time players use devoted to developing and implementing these systems. The game has allotted for

flexibility so that players can choose to develop their own methods of sorting loot. Players have recognized a weakness in this system, thereby turning to the master looter system when they organize raids, as evidenced by my informants. The players have in turn created intricate systems like Loot Council and DKP surrounding the master looter system to distribute the loot in a way they regard as fair, where loot is distributed based on attendance. Where the game developers have made a tool allowing the players to distribute loot in a myriad of ways, the players have developed policies and rules governing the loot system, to address possible problems with attendance and motivation within their guilds, to assure the guild's success in raids and assuring their members' compensation. We have here seen how central loot is in raiding guilds, and how important it is to them, when they create different user-scripts on how to distribute it fairly.

In this chapter, I have explored and analysed the scripts of ranks and loot distribution in WoW. I have explored the limitations and flexibility of the script and found the user-scripts developed, and thereby found how players have reshaped the game by having different forms of leadership structures. Although the systems of loot distributions vary, the same themes occur across the systems. Knowledge and trust are clearly illustrated in the systems players have produced, and also illustrated in how players are promoted to a higher rank in the hierarchy – those who prove to be knowledgeable and trustworthy, are offered a promotion. This also enforces the idea of trust; members are able to trust that the officers are knowledgeable, and that the officers are there to help them improve their character.

By using the theory of user-scripts, I have explored how users' realities and roles are defined, and how these are related to engineers' scripts and the technology itself. We see that separating the players from the designers is difficult, in what has seemed to become a co-production in the game's design. This is exemplified in how players form their guilds and reshape a hierarchical system to allow for a democratic leadership, how they create complicated rule based systems to inspire trust and sort valuable virtual items.

As a whole, we see a clear trend of how players have taken ownership of their guilds and moulded them into how they feel guilds should work, both in how they construct ranks and distribute loot. Furthermore, they create policies and sanctions encompassing all of these facets, thereby scripting their own identity of play, as well as an identity of guild community. Knowledge and expertise become concentrated into a power circle within the guild leadership. The officers make up a powerful knowledge core available to everyone in the guild. Within this core, they also assume different roles, which I will illustrate in the following chapter. In it, I will explore different leadership categories I

have found within my data material, and analyse them using the theory of domestication.

In chapter 6, I will go on to describe gaming paratexts, which encompasses add-ons, walkthroughs, and theorycrafting, and show how these all are scripts produced by players, and how these are co-productions with the game developers. No matter what loot system is used, the common denominator is time spent. Raiding is an investment of time, and players expect to be rewarded for their time fairly. This, combined with the need for trust among players to assure fair distribution, is the basis of the players' production of these systems.

We have seen that leading in WoW means knowing enough about the game to be seen as capable of leading. Furthermore, it requires a fair amount of social and cultural capital both to safeguard the guild's roster, and to gain access to the material sources needed. One noteworthy finding is how guilds make use of material sources to inspire trust from members, and prevent cheating within the leadership.

5 Domesticating Guild Leadership

As we have seen in the previous chapter, leadership in WoW is not readily apparent from the game's design itself. It is the result of sociotechnical practice and use of different technologies. This chapter will highlight five categories of guild leadership: Raid Leading, Social Management, Economic Management, Recruitment, and General Management. These categories are a result of attempting to identify different practices among guild leadership positions, based on my data material.

In order to analyse guild leadership practices, I will be using the framework of domestication as described by Lie and Sørensen (1996), and Sørensen (2005). Domestication describes how users adapt to technologies, in contrast to scripting, and looks at how they domesticate a technology regardless of its manual (script). In their work with domestication, they have made a framework for looking at how a technology is domesticated *practically*, *symbolically*, and *cognitively*. Practical domestication relates to actual use and implementation, symbolic domestication is about the symbolic meanings a technology is given, and cognitive domestication looks at what knowledge is required, and how it is learned, in order to use a technology.

I think that these five categories of leadership are a result of a process of domestication of Guild Leadership. The categories, or roles, are not only confined to the Guild Leader him- or herself. In this chapter, I will show how the guild leadership will often span across various dimensions and are both shared and delegated among officers in the guild.

Looking at the domestication of leadership is interesting, as it will let us see how leadership is shaped through practice, social meanings, and acquisition of knowledge pertaining to the different roles. My aim is to illustrate that leadership in WoW not learned from the game's design itself, but a consequence of becoming part of learning organizations known as guilds. Now we will look at how leadership is domesticated symbolically, practically, and cognitively. In the following section, I will describe and discuss the role of Raid Leader.

5.1 Raid Leading

This section will describe the role of raid leading, and identify the different practices that is involved in this leadership role. By using the framework of domestication, I will illustrate how this role has been domesticated at the practical, symbolic, and cognitive levels.

Raid Leading is a very specific leadership role that often occurs separate from the other guild leadership tasks. Both Wolfenstein (2010) and Andrews (2010) highlight how raid leading and guild leading encompasses very different tasks, and that leadership in WoW is deeply distributed over many levels. The Raid Leader has the highest authority during raids, and the Guild Leader will defer to the Raid Leader on all matters during raids. This illustrates how the raid situation differs from the day-to-day guild life, and how the guild leadership trusts in the Raid Leader's expertise.

Based on his ethnographic study of leadership in WoW, Wolfenstein (2010) described and sorted the leadership tasks into the sub-categories of synchronous and asynchronous leadership. Synchronous raid leading tasks include preparation, facilitation, and cool down. Asynchronous tasks include research and planning, and advanced preparation. These tasks also include sub-tasks and micro-tasks. As these tasks are intricate and is difficult to list in an understandable way in just text descriptions, I use the following table, based on Wolfenstein's (2010, p. 139) visual representation.

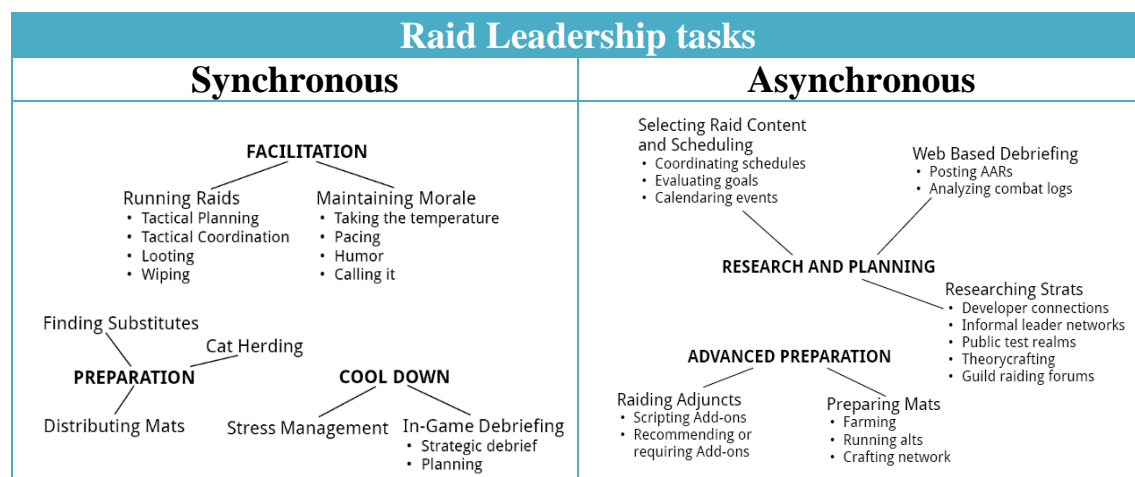


Figure 5-1: Raid Leadership tasks

Figure 6-1 shows five different main tasks of raid leading; *Preparation*, *Facilitation*, *Cool Down*, *Research and Planning*, and *Advanced Preparation*. Within these tasks, there are sub-tasks and micro-tasks, which I will explain briefly in the following.

The synchronous tasks occur during, or shortly before or after the raid events. When a raid is about to start, the Raid Leader will invite all the players and sort them into different groups. This, in addition to making sure everyone shows up on time, is referred to as *Cat Herding*. During the raid, the Raid Leader will continuously provide the players with different buff items, such as flasks, potions, and food (Distributing Materials). In the course of a raid, the Raid Leader will often have to switch people around (as in the example in

Chapter 1, An atypical night in Siege of Orgrimmar, where a player was replaced), referred to as *Finding Substitutes*.

Leading a raid will also require the Raid Leader to facilitate the players. This is done through making a plan of action for the group, including explaining strategies, assigning different roles and performing Ready Checks. Furthermore, the Raid Leader will call out tasks, and place visual markers in order to coordinate and communicate clearly. If the pull is unsuccessful, the Raid Leader will call out a wipe. If they are successful in killing the boss, the Raid Leader will then start the loot distribution process, as explained in chapter 4.

As I illustrated in chapter 1, keeping morale high in the group is important in order for them to continue playing together. This is, according to Wolfenstein (2010), one of the Raid Leader's responsibilities. This includes keeping a good pace, gauge the players' mood, and try to make everyone feel welcome. Due to the players only communicating by VoIP and text, this has to be done without the use of body language.

After a pull, or after the raid has ended, some choose to spend the time to *Cool Down* and reflect upon the events that occurred. This helps players to manage the stress of raiding and debrief, which can occur using voice chat, or different chat channels in-game.

Asynchronous tasks take place outside of the raid events. The Raid Leader is in charge of scheduling raids, choosing raid instance (and bosses to kill), selecting a strategy for the group to use, and web based debriefing. In my interviews, I found that <Caverns of Time> chose to make use of the in-game calendar in order to schedule raids. Their Raid Leader made events in the calendar and invited all the raiding players to said events. At raid start, the Raid Leader would then use the invite-function in the calendar, to invite all the players that had previously accepted to the event. <Emerald Dream> chose to use an add-on that would invite players in the guild based on their rank, instead. The important part is how such paratexts, like calendars, are key in facilitating the job of a Raid Leader.

The Raid Leader will choose the strategy that their raid team will use for specific bosses. This is something that often happens outside of the game, where the Raid Leader will look through different available strategies in videos and forums on the internet. Once a strategy has been chosen, the Raid Leader will inform the guild by posting it on their own forums. Some players also choose to research strategies through playing the PTR (Public Test Realms) where Blizzard has made future (unreleased) content available for bug testing by the players.

Web based debriefing occurs after raids, and is a way for players to reflect on the raids. Some guilds will also link to, and discuss “After Action Reports” (AAR), as Wolfenstein calls them. Players will often call them “Logs”. By using these, players can see everything that happened during a raid. Debriefs will also contain a summary of one evenings events. Nathan and his guild posted debriefs on their forums after raids:

It lists the bosses, and what was done well, what was done badly, what we should improve on. It’s the Guild Master who writes it. A bit of funny things that happened during raid.

This is a way for the guild management for communicate to the players what is expected of them, as well as giving them commendation on what they did well, as well as giving them pointers on how to improve their performance. When players can review performance after the fact, they can also compare themselves with other players. They can see specifically what they need to improve on. Consequently, performing well becomes a way for proving that they should remain in the guild – or “pulling their weight”. Players who do not perform well enough will subsequently no longer gain access to raids.

Advanced Preparation concerns itself with acquiring the different buff resources required for raiding, and the usage of different add-ons. The buff resources (food, flasks, and potions) can be crafted by players, or purchased on the auction house. In order to craft the different resources, many players create *alts* (alternative characters) to have different professions¹⁴ (crafting resources require different specific professions). Guilds will also require their players to use certain add-ons. In my sample, <Emerald Dream>, <Reckoning> and <Caverns of Time> all required their raiders to have a form of *Boss mod*.

Wolfenstein gives us some insight into the practices of raid leadership, and how intricate and knowledge intensive they are. The Raid Leader has to keep up to date on game mechanic information, in order to correctly device a plan of action for their raids. Additionally, the Raid Leader needs to have knowledge about loot, in order to be in charge of the loot distribution. I consider these the cognitive aspects of domestication of the Raid Leader role. The role is knowledge intensive, it demands the Raid Leader both in and outside of the game, in order to research, plan and prepare for raids. They also need vast knowledge about raw game mechanics, both about character classes, and about the enemies they battle.

¹⁴ Professions are in-game trade skills that allow crafting of various types of items.

The practical tasks of raid leadership more clear, however. The Raid Leader has to invite and kick people, distribute materials, sort group, assign tasks and roles, and explain strategies. Furthermore, they give on-the-fly instructions and make adjustments as needed. This also illustrates the need to learn quick decision-making skills, and the need for communication skills.

The symbolic meanings of raid leading is important in regards to conserving and fostering the sense of community in the guild group. Maintaining morale and post-gaming reflection are examples of how the guild leadership work towards fostering a sense of community also during raids, thereby acknowledging the importance of good player relationships to recover from poor performances, as supported by Chen (2009a). As previously mentioned, the Guild Leader will assume no authority in raids, making the Raid Leader the highest authority. However, in cases where the group is in danger of being disbanded, I found that the Guild Leader would step in:

I passed into the raid leading because my raid leader was kinda having an issue with vocal aggression and he was getting really annoyed really fast, and it was just a bad environment for everyone. I didn't want to lose him, because he was a friend, so I just told him "OK dude, you just have to step down a bit, I'm going to do it for you. You don't have to get annoyed so much. I'll take care of it".

In this case, Ethan made an executive decision to save the group from possibly disbanding caused by the environment the Raid Leader was creating. Illustrating that guild leadership can be stressful and in some cases the role will be assigned someone else, to assure the health of the guild.

From this section, we can see how Raid leading has been domesticated in practical, symbolical, and cognitive terms. While it is quite clear that the Raid Leader has to perform a series of practical tasks, such as scheduling raids, inviting players, running the raids, and distributing materials, we also see domestication in symbolical and cognitive levels. Symbolically, Raid Leading has to do with ensuring the sense of community and a friendly atmosphere. On the cognitive level, we have seen how the role of Raid Leader is knowledge intensive, and deals with having to learn game mechanics, and transfer this knowledge to the guild members. In the next section, I will go on to discussing the cognitive, symbolic, and practical levels of domestication in social management within guild leadership.

5.2 Social Management

In this following, I will describe the social aspects of guild leadership and use the theory of domestication (Lie & Sørensen, 1996; Sørensen, 2005) to analyse the information I have gathered. Taylor (2006) points out that MMOs are social in nature, and Eklund and Johansson (2010) consider MMOs as social spaces where human interaction is important, stressing how previous research has shown that the social aspect of gaming is important. Based on this, I consider the social management of guilds as very important.

Many guilds describe themselves as a “group of good friends” (Williams et al., 2006). Implied in these words we find that the guild regards themselves as a social and friendly community. Being friends can also mean that they play other games together; both Nathan and Liam mentioned that people in their guilds would hang out and play other games together as well. This illustrates the idea of community they create in their guilds, and the bonds they form.

In some cases, player even take on additional roles within their guild. Sadie had appointed herself as the unofficial social officer in the guild:

I think I’m well liked in the guild, because I joke around and bring a lot of the fun. So I feel like I’ve assumed the role of social officer I guess. I don’t organize anything, but I talk to people a lot, and people whisper me all the time, confiding in me and just telling me they appreciate me.

Sadie here indicates that she contributes on a higher level than regarded as the norm. She has attained a level of trust among players in the guild, becoming someone they confide in. Chen (2009a) details how trust is forged through maintaining friendships and having fun. It would seem from this that Sadie has gained this trust through socializing with other players in the guild over time.

In order for players to earn this trust, they need to acquire social capital, as highlighted by Bainbridge (2010), Chen (2012) and Taylor (2006, pp. 35-36). Taylor has named this social capital *reputation*. Gaining reputation means that you have learned both how to be a WoW-player, and how to *be*. The game has certain norms for appropriate social behaviour, and a player’s reputation will affect their chance of gaining access to a guild. Nathan illustrates this:

We want to take people who actually can play the game and won’t make a fool of themselves. We research the person a little, like stuff he’s done previously. There’s a lot on the net, incredibly much.

Nathan here shows us how applicants for their guild will be researched online before accepted. That way they can assure that the player is social and does not have a history of causing trouble. They were especially concerned with looking into applicant's history of social behaviour.

The game's design is centred on social play. Being in a guild will give the player benefits that improve their gameplay experience, in addition to many aspects of the game only being available to groups. With many guild being "a group of good friends", we see that guilds think being friendly and social is important. As such, we can understand how guild leaders through domestication have developed a symbolic meaning of how being a good guild equals being friends, and that the community is important. All of my informants described how their guilds were social, and that they were friends outside of the raid situation, illustrated by how they also played other games together.

As we have seen previously, being friends is crucial in order to recover from a poor performing raids (Chen, 2009a). However, some guilds will value the social network over raid progression, such as Liam of <Reckoning>. He valued the community so much, that he would violate the Terms of Use for the game:

For some time I've been running a friendly lottery for the guild where people could win different prizes by buying tickets with gold in-game. All of the gold went into a pot divided to three winners.

Liam arranges social events, like lotteries to increase the member participation in the guild, and in turn creating cohesion. This illustrates how the practical and symbolic levels of domestication are connected. The practical tasks are directed toward the symbolic meanings. If caught Liam faces possible banning from playing the game by the Blizzard Game Masters¹⁵, as this is in direct violation of the Terms of Use. However, Liam clearly prioritizes building group cohesion and community, recognizing its importance. He would also work to incorporate new members, and especially tried to avoid the guild forming sub-groups like cliques.

I also found that guilds have several tools for being social; guild websites or forums are one of the main communication forms outside of the raid itself. Nathan told me how their guild had a thread where members would post all kinds of different funny pictures or gifs, completely unrelated to the guild or

¹⁵ Game Masters are Blizzard employees who oversee servers to solve problems, disputes and sometime punish people for disobeying the Terms of Use (WoWWiki, 2006a)

raid setting. Having a website or forum, will often cost money but is expected in the WoW playing community (Andrews, 2010). Liam had also created a chat group for previous and current guild members on WhatsApp¹⁶, also allowing players to communicate outside of the game's setting, thereby decreasing the distinction between the game life and personal life.

Players build social networks inside the game (Chen, 2012, p. 40), and will sometimes take these relationships out of the game, and in to the "real world" (Taylor, 2006, p. 54). Both Sadie and Liam explained how their guilds occasionally would have social meet-ups in real life, meaning players would have to travel across countries. Ask (2007) has also described how players cross the barrier of the online into offline, by organizing meetings in real-life. The social networks formed through these "offline" meet-ups would also aid in conflict solving in-game (Andrews, 2010, p. 179), as members would deepen their friendships.

5.2.1 Managing Conflicts through Friendship

Loot distribution is one of the major causes of conflict in-game. Once a player is max-level, it is the only way they can improve their character, and as such there is a lot of competition over these items. As an example: in the DKP loot system, the player with the highest amount of DKP will often receive the item. In my guild <Furious Wrist> we will occasionally see that players will either choose not to bid for an item to save their DKP for later, or because the item in question is not *BiS* (Best in Slot).

In some cases, the officers will force an item on someone and then deduct them DKP for it, which previously happened in my own guild. The player became very unhappy with this decision, as he did not want said item. The Raid Leader then told him why, and that he did not have a choice in the matter. The officers here prioritize the long-term goals of the guild, in order for them to easier defeat bosses.

Another source of conflict can be people not adhering to the social norms. As Sadie explained:

We have had someone kicked previously, because he was spouting hate speech about Islam and Muslims in guild chat.

<Caverns of Time> were very opposed to bullying:

¹⁶ WhatsApp is an application for smart phones that allow sending messages, videos, images and sound over the internet free of cost

But there's never any bullying. Cause, for example, you know [player name removed], and he's very against stuff like that. I'm very against it. There are never nasty things like that being said, it's only like funny things.

These are example of how players perceive the social environment as important, and will not tolerate bullying or people acting outside the social norms. Anyone not following the social standards will be removed or blocked.

While Sadie detailed that the guild's social norms included jokes of sexual character, it also included jokes of less political correct topics, such as religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. This illustrates how some guilds allow "offensive" humour, which I also found in Ethan's guild <Demigods>, where all jokes were acceptable regardless of severity, even if people were offended:

I: I'm just going to tell them to suck it up and deal with it. I can't really force people to try to not be funny. [...]

E: So you would say that there's no joke that's not allowed?

I: If you say it right, then no.

Sadie made an interesting comment on how she had felt picked on by a guild member, and talked to a fellow officer about it. They had explained to her that she was not being picked on, but rather treated as "*one of the guys*". This is something that Eklund (2011) also highlights, that many female gamers fight for the right to be treated equally. However, one could ask the question whether being treated as "one of the guys" is equality. Sadie did not appreciate this treatment even if it was intended as a form of inclusion. Considering women make up 48 percent of game players, should the social norms be adjusted to favour equality over "being one of the guys".

From this we learn that some guilds will have a harsher environment with a mentality of "if you can dish it, you can take it"-attitude, in addition to still being stuck with a stereotype that games are mostly for men. While <Emerald Dream> maintained a limit of what they allowed, <Demigods> did not. Thereby showing us that guilds will have different practices surrounding their social norms and how people should be treated.

In this section, we have seen how players regard guilds as social and friendly. The guilds require social management to build friendships and cohesion, as it is necessary to be able to continue raiding. They portray themselves as being good friends, and bring these friendships into other games and into real life.

The guild's leadership reinforce these social ties through offering competitions with in-game rewards, training the members to become a stronger team. If the guild leadership did not offer these social events, they might struggle more with retaining their roster. That would mean that the members would have fewer opportunities to form and maintain their ties, and could in turn mean the death of the guild mainly due to the stress of unsuccessful raiding.

Symbolically, they put a lot of value into the community. In order for them to achieve a friendly, social community, they organize events in both real life and in-game, occasionally even violating the Terms of Use. For a guild to be able to provide this, they need inter-human skills like communication, especially in order to solve conflicts. Players also make use of other tools, such as VoIP, forums, and phone applications to stay in touch outside of the game, strengthening their social ties. These social ties are important in order for them to raid, both to stay in the social network, and to endure the less successful raids.

Players that do not conform to the guild's community will be removed, to assure that the environment stays friendly. Chen (2009a) highlights how a coherent group identity and shared social incentives are crucial for a team to succeed, which players have recognized through their norms, values and practices. As such, we can understand how guild leaders through domestication have developed a symbolic meaning of how being a good guild equals being friends. In terms of practical and cognitive domestication, they are very much embedded into the symbolic meanings of the community, where acquiring social and cultural capital (cognitive) and planning events and competitions (practical).

Raiding requires more than just being friends, however. It also requires having a VoIP service, website, in-game materials, and gold. These things are normally supplied by the guild. As I will show in the following section, being a good raiding guild also means being able to offer a financially stable guild that can support raiding.

5.3 Economic Management

As I illustrated in chapter one, raiding requires resources. While guilds will vary in what they specifically offer, most guilds will offer a few basic amenities such as flasks, food, and potions. As these things deal with managing resources, I have chosen to call it Economic Management. This section will look at the different guild leadership tasks in relation to managing resources.

A guild will have its own bank, which can store items and in-game gold. Gold can be donated to the guild bank by individual players in the guild, or be earned through completing challenges together. The Guild Bank will often be stocked with gems, enchants, food, flasks, potions, and other items that can be of interest to the guild members. The guild's gold can be used for allowing guild members to repair their gear. This function can be enabled and disabled by the Guild Leader. Repairing gear is costly, especially in large raiding guilds, and will quickly drain the Guild Bank gold. Nathan's guild <Caverns of Time> explains this:

We have guild repair to everyone who raids. Full guild repair. Which is taken advantage of. [...] It's always on, yes. Unfortunately. It's very open for everyone, except for the guild repair. Therefore, a lot of money goes into it.

<Caverns of Time> spends a lot of money on their players. In addition to allowing their members to repair their gear indefinitely, the items in the Guild Bank are available to everyone in the guild. Because the Guild Repair function always remains enabled, their players exploit it, also repairing their gear after non-raiding activities. This illustrates guilds' need to be financially secure.

To make sure the Guild Bank has enough money the Guild Leader makes use of the in-game *Auction House* (AH). The AH is a market place where players can sell and buy different in-game items. If used well, a lot of gold can be made on the AH, and has subsequently become its own aspect of gameplay, known by players as "playing the AH". Sadie mentioned how <Emerald Dream> earns gold for the guild by selling kills of end-game bosses to random players in-game.

This shows us that being a raiding guild also means having a secure guild economy. Raiding costs a lot of money because of repair and supplying members with materials such as flasks, potions and food. Being able to offer this means that you are a successful guild, which I think can be understood as a symbolic domestication of guild leading. The guild has enough expertise about the server and the market, and through this earns enough money to finance raiding. As an example, <Furious Wrist> raids will usually consist of anywhere between 20 and 30 people. One night of raiding will usually average around 1.000 gold per person, which then adds up to 30.000 gold in just one raid night. Illustrating how expensive raiding is.

In order for someone to successfully play the AH, they need to acquire knowledge about in-game items, the server's economy¹⁷, and relevant add-ons to use. This expertise also includes knowledge about what days and times are optimal for buying and selling items, in order to make more profit. I consider the aforementioned expertise and knowledge to be a cognitive domestication of guild economics. In practice, players need to sell, buy, farm, and craft. Which in turn is also time consuming.

From this, we see that through being financially secure, guilds can offer raiders the benefits of free gear repair and materials for raiding. By offering this, they promote themselves as a serious raiding guild, being able to provide for their raiders, thereby becoming an attractive guild to join. This is also a very attractive benefit of a raiding guild as individual members as a consequence no longer need to spend time farming, crafting, and playing the AH themselves in order to have enough gold to raid. As such, making being part of a raiding guild easier to combine with their everyday life. In turn, this is also something that will make the guild more attractive to prospective members. As we will see in the next section, promoting the guild is also a part of guild leadership, in order to recruit members.

5.4 Recruitment

In this section, we will look at how guilds recruit new members, and how they promote their guilds in order to gain attention from prospective members. This is often a continuous task, as members will take breaks, go on vacation, stop playing the game, or join another guild. Therefore, guilds will always have the need for extra people in the roster.

Promoting the guild is often done both within the game, and on various websites. Ethan and Liam both explained how they would spam an advertisement in the public chat channel in-game, and update several internet forums and websites. These forums or websites are common resources known among raiding members (normally through word-of-mouth). The most common ones are the official World of Warcraft Realm recruitment forums, *WoWProgress* (a website that tracks raiding progress), *MMO-Champion* and *Wowhead* that are community run resource websites with forums.

Posting about the guild in these various channels requires knowledge about the guild, the roster, the server community, and different classes. Prospective applicants may ask questions, and the recruiting officer will have to answer these. Once an application has been made, the guild leadership will also have to review it. Many guilds will require an applicant to link to logs, to review

¹⁷ As servers are populated with different players in various amounts, and the value of items being reliant on availability, every server will have very different economic markets.

how the applicant has followed the user-scripts of expertise, and become a good enough WoW-player, in order to be accepted to the guild. This illustrates the need for expertise about different character classes among the recruiting guild leadership.

If an applicant is accepted, they will normally go through a trial period. This is a period where that player is allowed to raid with the guild, and the guild leadership will subsequently review their performance. If the player proves that they have the required expertise, they will be promoted to member and gain all the benefits of being a raider in the guild (including materials and repair during raids). On the other hand, if an applicant “fails their trial”, they will be demoted or kicked.

While some guilds choose to have a separate person in charge of recruitment, many Guild Leaders take on this task themselves. I found that some Guild Leaders spent up to 12 hours per day in-game spamming public chat channels and chatting with possible applicants, showing how this is a time consuming activity. I understand this, as well as reviewing applicants, as practical domestication. Additionally, so is posting advertisements on various websites and forums. Symbolically, we can see that having a big guild is viewed as positive among players, because it signals that this is a secure guild with many active players. Because the guild is social in nature, it is expected that a guild also will be social, where you will gain many friends and have people to play with. As such, a guild will have to be large enough to have enough active players to be attractive for prospective members. In terms of cognitive domestication, being in charge of recruiting, as we have seen, requires in-depth knowledge about the guild, the roster, character classes, and the status of the server.

Ensuring a stable, social guild requires more than recruitment. You also need a day-to-day manager handling all the daily tasks and keeping the guild in line with its vision and policies. In the following, I have attributed these aspects of guild leadership into a General Manager role, and will look at how it has been domesticated.

5.5 General Manager

All organizations regardless of size, structure or location has a leader that performs tasks aimed at developing the organization’s vision and implementing policies to allow that vision to be fulfilled. The Guild Leader, as I will describe further in this section, not only creates the guild, but is also the person who decides the guild’s philosophy, vision, and mission statement. As such, the Guild Leader can be understood as a General Manager of the

guild. In this section, I will describe the general day-to-day tasks of the Guild Leader.

In WoW, the organizational structure will often be hierarchal, having officers with specific responsibilities below the Guild Leader. We have seen that guilds can be run both as dictatorships, and as democracies (chapter 4). However, knowing the hierarchal structure does not equal to know what the Guild Leader does. Liam of <Reckoning> told me what the Guild Leader role involves:

As Guild Master, I'm the one sitting at the top, and have the final word in every decision and set the course of the guild. But we have a very democratic guild. I'm not a dictator that overrules everything and everyone all the time.

While not all guilds are as democratic as <Reckoning>, many Guild Leaders use their officer corps as a council to discuss new policies with, for example when deciding new rules. Especially in the loot council system, this requires the officers to agree on who should receive an item of loot.

In a way, the officer corps along with the Guild Leader shape and direct the vision and philosophy of the guild together. The Guild Leader will in addition to the responsibilities of directing the guild's vision and policies, also have to handle the day-to-day managing tasks. For both Liam and Ethan, this included being available for members, answering questions, promoting and demoting members and officers, making executing decisions, writing and updating the policies and making information available to the members both in-game (by updating the "guild message of the day") and on the guild's website or forums. These are all practices involved in being the Guild Leader, sometimes taking up a lot of time as Ethan explained. Liam, on the other hand, only spend about an hour per day on these tasks. This illustrates how different guilds and different Guild Leaders domesticate this practice differently. In order for them to perform these tasks, they mostly require inter-human skills in order to communicate clearly with their members and officers, which in turn is required to attain the guild's symbolic visions and goals.

The role of General Manager is very symbolic. It revolves around maintaining and adjusting the guild's vision and goals, and assuring that the guild members stay informed and attuned to the same vision and goals. This is attained through various practices that are difficult to put into concrete terms. Overall, it requires inter-human skills, in order to communicate the shared abstract ideas of the guild, and its identity. In the next section, I will discuss my findings and present finding not within the roles I have described.

5.6 Only Five Roles of Guild Leadership?

In the previous sections, I have described the roles of Raid Leader, Social Management, Economic Management, Recruitment, and General Manager. In analysing my data material, I have identified domestication on the cognitive, practical, and symbolic levels within the different roles.

My informants also detailed additional tasks they performed in their positions as officers or Guild Leaders. This leads me to believe that leadership in WoW is distributed at many levels, like Wolfenstein (2010) also details. While the different officers are delegated specific responsibilities relating to specific roles and raiding, as both Sadie and Nathan explained, they also helped with other aspects of Guild Leadership, such as recruitment and social management. While the Raid Leader is normally the authority during raids, they also had sub-task responsibilities in assigning their specific role tasks. Additionally, they helped in the cat herding, both making sure people showed up on time, as well as moderating players' behaviours during raids. Furthermore, they helped with recruiting, answering applications, and reviewing applicants. Thereby illustrating how the lines between the roles are blurred, and that various parts of the roles are shared between the officer crops.

In the role of General Manager, I described how the Guild Leader would be the one that shapes the guild's vision and goals. This also includes decided a set of rules, or *policies*, for the guild. However, I found that this is something the Guild Leader does in collaboration with the officers. Liam also allowed the members to voice their opinions by allowing them to vote on changes on their forums, illustrating their level of democracy.

As we have seen, WoW is a social game by nature. Players become part of a diverse community, not only within their own guild, but also on the server. In order for players and guilds to maintain their reputation, they need to adhere to the social norms among the playing community. In some cases, guilds will merge or collaborate, as we saw in the case of Ensidia. This requires the guild leadership to be diplomatic in order to form alliances with other guilds.

In turn, this requires the leaders of each guild to agree on rules of conduct and develop strategies for how they should assemble raiding groups while ensuring that players stay happy. These alliances are not necessarily explicit or official, as I found when Liam told me <Reckoning> had never been part of an alliance, but another player in the same guild explained how they previously had a form of alliance with another guild. Both guilds had struggled with their roster size, and thereby developed a practice of helping each other out. The players already knew each other from being in a previous guild together, and made use of this social network in order for the guilds to arrange

raids. This illustrates both the need to make and maintain social networks within the game, but also how important it is for raiding guilds to assure raiding for their members. As raiding is their foci activity, not providing members with raids will be detrimental to the guild, risking that members will leave and join another guild.

This illustrates also that the players' loyalty will be fleeting. If a guild cannot provide them with raids or the necessary resources, they risk losing players to other guilds that do. If a guild cannot offer the sociomaterial resources regarded as standard in the playing community, the guild will ultimately fail in becoming a successful raiding guild. This includes having players and leadership with expertise on multiple levels, social and cultural capital, inter-human and communication skills, and a social, big, and friendly community that also raids.

We see that guild leadership is centred on laying the path for raiding, and assuring that the guild keeps raiding. They have delegated responsibilities to individuals in order to keep the leadership from burning out, as illustrated by how time consuming some of the roles are. In analysing my material, I have come to understand the leadership in WoW as complex, knowledge intensive and symbolic practices. The processes of knowledge are clouded, making it difficult to make concluding remarks on what leadership means in WoW. However, we have seen how the different roles have been domesticated cognitively, practically, and symbolically. The different tasks are shared and delegated, blurring the lines between the different roles.

A recurring theme in both the previous chapter and this is the need for various material sources. In the following chapter, I will look at how leaders in WoW have seen the need for help in their roles, and thereby delegated to technology to help them with the complex tasks of guild and raid leading.

6 Gaming Paratexts

In chapter one, I illustrated raiding through examples from raids with my guild <Furious Wrist>. In these examples the use of strategy and add-ons were used in the raid setting. The use of these types of technologies and material sources is what I will look further into, in this chapter. In order for us to understand leadership in WoW, we must also look at the technologies leaders use, and what role the technologies play.

The term paratext was originally used in relation to books and literature. It has since evolved into also describing items surrounding digital games, like box art, walkthrough, previews and reviews of games (Consalvo, 2009). As such, this term can be used to describe different user-generated tutorials, modifications, and analyses. Consalvo (2009) explains how players develop cultural capital by playing the game and gaining knowledge of the game, sequentially sharing it with fellow gamers. This information will be shared through different mediums like forums or YouTube videos.

Based on my data material, I have divided paratexts into three categories; add-ons, walkthroughs, and theorycrafting. Add-ons are traditionally understood as small pieces of software that players add to their game. I have chosen to broaden this understanding to include software using in adjunction to the game (such as VoIP). While there does exist paratexts in relation to *World of Warcraft* in addition to these three categories, they were not mentioned by my informants. Nevertheless, these examples are cases that illustrate the co-production between players and developers, and how leadership is delegated to material sources.

Through domesticating the game, players develop different practices in relation to both the design and meaning of the game. This chapter will show examples of how players have negotiated the meaning of the game through domesticating it, understanding its script, and creating different understandings of “correct use” through making user-scripts and resisting the game’s script. If a player wants to raid, both the game’s script, and the players’ user-scripts set requirements for them. In this chapter, I will show how players, exemplified by my informants, have understood and rewritten the morality and materiality of the game and the paratexts.

Chen (2012, p. 39) tells us how using add-ons and extensions have become a common practice among players. While I am mostly interested in looking at how this shapes leadership in WoW, the use of paratexts are so common that the line between player and leader sometimes will be blurred.

Most of my informants detailed that in order to raid with them, some add-ons were mandatory. Chen (2012) also explains how guilds will require the usage of add-ons and external web resources, such as theorycrafting, from their raiders. Through looking at these examples, the practice and the actors, we can learn of the dynamic processes of play between the system, developer, design, politics and the player, practice and community. In the following section, I will describe and discuss the technologies known as add-ons.

6.1 Add-ons

An add-on is a *modification* (mod) created to improve a player's interaction with the game (WoWWiki, 2005a), from cosmetic modifications to added functionality. Taylor (2009) tells us how mods not only add polish to the interface, but also radically reconfigures play. They can do work for us, monitor our play, automate actions, provide key information, and facilitate mundane and complex actions. Taylor (2009) here describes a type of add-on commonly referred to as a *Boss Mod*. These types of add-ons give timers, countdowns, and warnings on boss' specialized abilities. In turn, players can adjust their play according to what is happening. I will in this section use the Boss Mod as an example to illustrate how leadership has been delegated to technology in the raid situation.

A Boss Mod provides key information from boss encounters, giving timers and visual and audible notifications in the player's UI (Taylor, 2009). Some Boss Mods, such as *Deadly Boss Mods*, will give you some guidance on how to play the game by giving you messages like "*Move away from other players!*". The purpose of this type of add-on is to give the player short and easy-to-understand information about what is happening "right now" so they can adjust their play accordingly – like moving away from other players. <Reckoning>, <Caverns of Time> and <Emerald Dream> all required their raiders to have a Boss Mod. Nathan illustrated the requirement:

You have Deadly Boss Mods or BigWigs. That's really the only thing you need. Otherwise, you can have whatever add-ons you feel like.

From this, we see that guild members are mostly allowed to customize their UI themselves, as long as they conform to the requirement of having a Boss Mod. None of the guilds mandated the use of one or the other, just as long as they used one.

Ethan, on the other hand, did not require his raiders to have a Boss Mod, saying he trusted the members in his guild. The guild used VoIP software, so that the players could call out (for example) "I am the bomb". However, he

implies a certain level of competence among his members, that they are able to distinguish this information without the use of an add-on. While the information is visible without the add-on, the information is buried and the add-on translates it to the player (Taylor, 2009).

Boss Mods are an example of how leadership has been delegated to technology. By having messages pop up on every members' monitor, the Raid Leader no longer has to notify the raid group about everything during a boss encounter or keep track of where everyone is standing.

Boss Mod add-ons are interesting tools for players. While it is technically speaking possible to play without it, Taylor (2009) explains how the Boss Mod becomes an autonomous agent and argues how it can be regarded as an extra member of the raid. This actor status is given because of how it calls out party valuable information – if you are the bomb, it will shout, “You are the bomb” to the other players. At the same time, it will give a noticeable warning to the player in the middle of their screen.

From this, we can see a user-script appearing, where guilds mandate the use of a Boss Mod to aid their members in raids. It is widely embedded into the player community that you have some form of Boss Mod add-on, especially in the raiding community. In aiding every member's play, this frees up the Raid Leader's resources to focus more on the other tasks of raid leading.

Guilds will detail the use of a Boss Mod in their policies, showing us how players reshape their game experience by constructing detailed policies surrounding their gameplay. Blizzard has always allowed the usage of add-ons, as long as they do not conflict with the Terms of Use. Blizzard has thereby left the shaping of the game experience up to the users themselves, allowing them to domesticate and shape their experience of the game world.

Another add-on that should be mentioned is VoIP software. All of my informants' guilds used some sort of VoIP software to allow the entire player base to be able to communicate both during and outside of raids.

An especially interesting note is that despite Blizzard offering players a VoIP service in the game itself, the playing community does not make use of it. This might be due to several factors. First, the game itself was released in 2004, however the in-game VoIP feature was first added in 2007 (Hecht, 2007), meaning that many players had already been socialized into the practice of using other VoIP software. Second, the feature had to be manually enabled by players to be used. Third, as the in-game VoIP was connected to the game itself, it thereby did not support the players' needs when they decide to play other games together. As Nathan pointed out:

But generally, the guild is a pretty nice guild, really. It's very social. If you like to sit and talk on Skype or TeamSpeak, then it's a guild for you. There's about 5 to 15 people that stop by every day, and are there almost all day, just talking.

Nathan here illustrates how guilds use their VoIP not only for raiding, but also for social interaction outside of playing games at all.

The aforementioned factors, in addition to assumptions among players that the in-game solution has poor quality and reliability, is what I believe are reason to why players, and guilds, have chosen to continue using the external VoIP services. They recognize the need for having means of voice communication outside of the game in order to foster social belonging, despite possibly having to pay a subscription fee. This example illustrates a conflict between the game's design and the users' needs. This is also an illustration of how Blizzard's game developers often recognize players' needs and incorporate functions players find in add-ons and supplementary software into the game, which has happened on multiple occasions (World of Warcraft Forums, 2013)

To understand how add-ons play part in guild leadership, we have to look at the sociotechnical contexts they are employed. Using VoIP is mandatory in all of my informants' guilds, and almost all of them require their members to use a Boss Mod. In my opinion, these are illustrations of how guild leadership have delegated tasks to technology. In the case of Boss Mods, they free up resources for the Raid Leader. VoIP on the other hand, has become an actor in the role of Social Management, facilitating the need for a locale for players to socialize across games. These practices are so commonplace, that they are required. Players are required to use specific add-ons, and guilds are required to offer a means of voice communication. Consequently, the WoW community have constructed user-scripts where raiding in the game cannot be done without the use of add-ons.

Here, I have explored how add-ons can be regarded as user-scripts that show us how players reshape their game experience. Through domesticating the technology, they have become co-producers in the game. They exchange knowledge and experiences over the internet, and produce small programs that affect their gameplay in ways they perceive necessary. Sometimes they catch the eyes of the designers who implement the functionality into the game, showing us how we cannot analyse the game, without also analysing the co-production from players.

In the next section, I will explain the use of walkthroughs as a paratexts, how they are a form of co-production from players, as well as how they have become part of a user-script where guilds require the use of them.

6.2 Walkthroughs

Another commonly used paratexts in WoW are walkthroughs. Walkthroughs are player produced forums and videos on how to play the game. For example, they can offer suggestions on how to complete boss encounters by showing and explaining how the entire encounter works, and offer tactics to counter special boss mechanics. In this section, I will detail the types of walkthroughs and discuss how they are part of a considerable co-production from players. In addition, I will look at how this practice is related to leadership in WoW.

While the game offers some advice on how to play your class through the *Core Abilities* tab in the character's spell book, it offers very little aid in what gear, gems and enchants to choose for your character. The game also has a *Dungeon Journal* listing all the bosses in both Dungeons and Raids, their abilities, and indicators next to abilities that are of high importance. These features was added in the expansion *Mists of Pandaria*, and players are still accustomed to using other online resources such as forums, guides, and videos. These have gained many users over the years, and can have emerged from players' need to have some reference to gain thorough understanding of how their classes work, both in raw numbers and how they should play.

Before engaging them in battle, players will have to research bosses. My informants had some expectation from their raiders to research the fights beforehand, although in various degrees. <Reckoning> and <Demigods> thought of it as an advantage, while <Emerald Dream> and <Caverns of Time> had made it mandatory. Nathan explained:

We've stopped explaining tactics before engaging a new HC¹⁸ boss. If you join the guild as a trial, and you haven't researched it, don't have a flask and don't have food, then you'll be instantly kicked. [...] Because preparing and being there when we raid... because we only have two days per week.

In this quote, Nathan explains some of the common practices of running through a strategy before engaging a boss. His guild has however chosen to save time by requiring their members to research these strategies beforehand, in order for the raid to be more effective. As such, we see the negotiation that has happened in this guild, where they try to balance the game around their life. Because the game continues to get new content for players, it has no defined end, and therefore no limitation of how much time should be spent playing. While they required their players to research fights beforehand, they had limited their raiding time to two days per week, so they also allow for time

¹⁸ HC is shorthand for heroic, and refers to a specific difficulty level of raiding

spent on other real-life responsibilities. Furthermore, they regard their time as valuable and short, meaning the “little time they have” to raid as implied by Nathan, should be spent efficiently, to be able to attain and sustain their goal of being a progression-focused guild.

One of my informants, Sadie, detailed that one of her responsibilities included having to organize cool-downs in accordance with encounters:

I should have some insight into all the healing classes and how they work [...] I also have to sort raid cooldowns for fights [...] I should be updated on healing changes and how all the classes work

Sadie here illustrates that her role as Healing Officer demands researching not only encounters, but also specific class mechanics and changes. In addition to this, she explained that part of her position entails having to help players who struggle with playing their class correctly.

To do this, many players use internet guide tools such as Wowhead (www.wowhead.com), Icy Veins (<http://www.icy-veins.com/>), Noxxic (<http://www.noxxic.com/>), and Elitist Jerks (<http://forums.elitistjerks.com/>). These are websites where players who have researched classes thoroughly, recommend talent choices based on raw numbers and calculations. Many websites also offer encounter guides and videos to help players understand boss mechanics and offer a possible strategy for other players to use.

This can be regarded as a user-script developed where user have perceived a weakness in the engineering script: the game has not given enough direction on how to play their class, and where high-level players who have conducted research, share their knowledge with the rest of the player community. Even though the game has implemented features trying to guide players both in how to play their class and how to defeat bosses, they try to let players figure out for himself or herself how they wish to play or how they want to defeat a boss.

This illustrates how there is a divide between the game’s script where Blizzard’s philosophy is to allow players to play the way they want to, and the user-script is telling you the correct way to play. Bosses can be defeated using different strategies, and the game is trying to allow players to find the way that works for them. However, when looking the trend of researching class and fight mechanics on the internet, we cannot ignore how it is common in society today to “Google it”. Researching on the internet has become so common, that we have created a verb for it by using the name of one of the most commonly used search engines (google.com).

In turn, we see that leaders make use of these tools to guide the members in how to play WoW, thereby teaching them about these resources and their value. Consequently, as leaders can direct players to these tools, it frees up their own resources, not needing to be as expert in all game and class mechanics, but rather learn the locations of the various expert guides. Players are thereby enrolled into the sociomaterial practice of using walkthroughs.

In this section, I have detailed the usage of walkthroughs and how they are used by players, and showed how leaders have developed a user-script to guide others in both how to play their class and how to defeat the raid encounters. Guides on class mechanics are usually the result of theorycrafting, which I will detail in the next section.

6.3 Theorycrafting

Theorycrafting is, according to Paul (2011), “the search for the optimal set of strategies with which to play WoW”. This is done through statistical analysis and mathematical modelling with the purpose of finding the underlying formulas that govern the game. Through this statistical analysis, players have become co-producers of the game. I will also discuss how playing the game involves learning expertise through the sociomaterial practice of researching theorycrafting, and look at how this shapes leadership in WoW.

The term was originally coined by the *StarCraft* community, as a portmanteau of *StarCraft* and *game theory*. *StarCraft* is another game franchise developed by Blizzard, but has since also become an emergent practice of WoW Players. The *theorycrafters* seek to find the best strategies to maximize player effectiveness, usually measured by DPS. The emergence of this practice has fundamentally changed how the game is played. Another result of this practice is that it has broken the barrier between players and developers, because players seek to find the underlying mechanics only accessible to developers. This in turn has reshaped the relationship between the players and designers, where theorycrafting from players can help developers find bugs in the code.

Online games in general offer a multitude of ways to play, however, theorycrafters have developed a specific way to play based on the theoretical potential of the game, according to Paul (2011). As a result of the players continued experimentation and analysis, Blizzard implemented *Training Dummies* in the following expansion *Wrath of the Lich King*. Thereby acknowledging the players’ wish to analyse the game mechanics. Even though Blizzard seldom release the exact formulas governing the game, they have stated that theorycrafting helps the developers find bugs in the code (Paul, 2011).

However, this practice is in direct opposition to the thought that games can be played in many different ways. Blizzard's ideology highlights, that players should feel that they make meaningful choices instead of following the standard "*cookie cutter builds*" (Ghostcrawler, 2011). That is predetermined character customizations based on theorycrafted information. As opposed to freely developing a unique and personal build. Theorycrafting is still a norm for WoW players, especially those who raid (Paul, 2011). This practice is also prevalent in my informants; Nathan talked about tasks he performed in relation to the game:

I use time on researching too, because I need to see. Not everyone are honest on the forums on what bosses they don't need, so if there are bosses they don't want to join in on. Therefore, I check if there are things that they would have needed there. And I use some time on researching everyone, I *sim* them too.

Here, Nathan tells us that, not only does he have to look into every boss' possible drops to make sure that the players he is responsible for have a chance to get the items that are optimized for them. Furthermore, he also *sims* all the players he is responsible for. *Simming* is used by players to reference using the tool *SimulationCraft*. This tool is available on a website (<http://simulationcraft.org/>), used to simulate a characters' optimized DPS based on their specialization and gear. This way, they gain an estimate of how much damage they should be doing compared to what they actually do in-game. This is part of what players refer to as theorycrafting.

However, there is no tool in-game that displays people's DPS over time. Therefore, most players use an add-on to monitor damage. They are often known as *Damage Meters*. These meters can also track things like threat, healing, and deaths, thereby becoming a powerful tool to measure people's actions during encounters.

During *The Burning Crusade* players developed raid tracking through a tool called WoW Web Stats (Paul, 2011). This tool is similar to the AAR mentioned in chapter five. It tracked everything that happened during the raid, and thus players began to move towards statistical analysis and experiment to find the optimal way to play the game.

As players have a way of measuring and analysing performance in the game, they have to also defend their position in the raid group, and play in accordance with the accepted theorycrafting. For the guild leadership, this means checking the members' performance in relation to theorycrafting, and give them feedback on it. Additionally, the individuals' performance will tie

in to the guild's success. Being a successful guild is often associated with killing bosses at a good pace. If individuals underperform, this will drag the guild down. Consequently, leaders need to know how to use these tools, and where to find them in order to instruct members to use them.

Theorycrafting can not only be regarded as users reshaping gameplay, but also as co-production with the developers themselves, where they take part in the discourse and allow for the players to voice concerns and apply changes to the game when bugs are found.

6.4 Materiality in Games

In this chapter, I have explored how players have developed different user-scripts through paratexts. The game's script asserts attendance, social ties, and expertise. The continuous additions to the game demands players to spend time playing it, to form social bonds and learn how to play the game. Players have however developed different understandings of intended and correct use. To be allowed to raid, you must become a good enough player. Becoming a good player means continuously rearranging and reassembling a network of objects, such as theorycrafting, walkthroughs, and add-ons, through adding new resources into the network.

Players have developed and programmed advanced systems to allow them to de-construct aspects of the game, through for example theorycrafting and the usage of damage meters. In accordance with guides and forum discussion on classes, all of these tools together give players a chance to gain knowledge outside of the game on how they should optimize their character and gameplay. The user-script further underlines the demand of time spent on the game. Raiding players are required to be online for raids, usually 3-4 hours several days per week, in addition to researching theorycrafting and *sim* (as Nathan explained) to gain the expertise required to raid. Sadie and Nathan both touched on how it is required of their raiding members. Sadie explained:

It's expected that they come prepared with flasks, pots and whatnot, and that they have the required add-ons and stuff. We use Mumble, and we prefer everyone to have a working mic, just because it's an easier way to communicate. We also expect them to follow the current theorycrafting on how to gem, enchant, and play their class.

Nathan embellished a bit more on what it means to "know how to play their class":

Read up on Elitist Jerks, view videos, really. Play the class a lot, know the rotation. [...] But it's really just reading up on forums. You have those who calculate everything, so forums are the best place to actually read up on your class.

Elitist Jerks, as Nathan mentions here, is one of the major theorycrafting resources for players. It contains forums where players discuss different mathematical equations in their attempt to find the “correct” way to play the game. While the game itself does not require players to have full understanding of the game mechanics and offers only a basic explanation, many guilds will still require a level of understanding beyond that of the game itself. This is supported by Wenz (2012) who found that guilds will evaluate recruits based on the theorycrafting available. This was also illustrated by Nathan, where they expect their players to follow the common practice of theorycrafting, meaning that new recruits will have to exhibit their expertise in their application, to be accepted to the guild.

Additionally, as Chen (2009b) has found, expertise development in WoW is reliant on player's development of social and cultural capital within the game. Expertise is thereby socially depended, because the usage of the different paratexts is spread by word-of-mouth within guilds. As we know, being accepted to a guild requires that you show a certain amount of expertise about the game, thereby reinforcing the game's social nature. It relies on the player to have developed social and cultural capital through playing the game, making friends, and thereby learning the “expert practice” defined as the common accepted correct way to play the game. This illustrates that players have decided on the correct way to play, though the process of domestication. Consequently, when applying for a guild, players will be reviewed based on whether they have gained the expertise on how to play WoW.

I consider these user-scripts. Theorycrafting, installing certain add-ons, and following walkthroughs is regarded as the “correct” way to play one's character. It requires players to devote extra time to the game, without actually playing it – as a form of meta gaming. Leaders have to spend additional time gaining expertise outside of their own character. They have extended to the time use script of the game, where they expect players to also use time outside of the game itself to learn how to play it correctly. Therefore, the players do still follow the script of the game, but have added to it. In order for leaders to save time, they instruct members to follow these practices, being a source of information and guiding them.

My informants mentioned the game and research taking up a lot of their time, Sadie and Nathan both expressed how their real lives got in the way of them fulfilling the expectation of them as Role Officers. As Role Officers they have

to gain expertise not only on their own character, but all the characters they also are in charge of, thereby extending the user-script of time use, and the game's script of expertise. Not following the user-script will often lead to the exclusion from groups and guilds (Wenz, 2012).

Theorycrafting reshapes the ongoing design, add-ons shape the way the game is played through changing the look and feel of the game, and by making hidden information more visible.

When analysing the game's scripts, we see how the players have negotiated them, and created their own user-scripts, through the process of domestication. We cannot analyse the game without acknowledging the user production in the various systems of gaming paratexts. Players acquire expertise within a larger social context, so we can say that the development of expertise is a learning through socialization, and by adapting to the norms and practices in different guilds. Officers become a core of expertise and power, guiding the members in retaining expertise. Consequently, combining the social and material into the everyday life of players through the practice of sharing expertise. We see a complex set of relationships between the player and their software, in addition to a collective use of software and production of group practices. Being a good WoW player means not only being able to use paratexts, but also to navigate socially so that they learn about the common practices, in a changing online community. Leaders have mastered the user-script of expertise through socialization, and been rewarded with promotions.

The following chapter will summarize my findings and discuss them in a larger context of leadership, thereby answering my research question of what leadership practice is, how one becomes a leader, and what tools are necessary for leadership in WoW.

7 Leadership in MMOs

In this thesis, I have looked at how players practice leadership in online games. This has been illustrated through different players and my own experiences and understandings of World of Warcraft. When I began working on this thesis, I was surprised to find that it consisted as much about technologies and the social community, as hierarchy. I have done this by studying how guilds organize themselves in their pursuit to complete the game's challenges, and how and what they choose to delegate to technology in completing challenging in-game problems. As such, I have also looked at how players over time have become co-producers of the game, developing both norms, morality and sociotechnical standards of *how to play WoW* and *how to lead in WoW*. Additionally, I have looked at how players take ownership of their leadership roles, taking on extra responsibilities and requiring more of themselves and each other.

The game's script makes it so that the best items and most difficult challenges are only available to large groups of players, namely raids. For players to be able to join these raids, players have made use of organizing groups into raiding guilds. My informants were all in leadership positions in raiding guilds, and while these guilds can seem similar, their practices are vastly different. <Reckoning> and <Caverns of Time> highly valued having fun and socializing outside of the game's context. They would meet up in real life, and used their VoIP and even their phones to stay connected while not playing. <Caverns of Time> also focused on high progression, even though they categorized themselves as a very social and friendly guild.

In chapter four, I analysed how my informants have constructed different ways of organizing their guild. The game's code enforces a strict hierarchy with only one Guild Leader, thereby giving players a script of having a single Guild Leader and a council of officers to help. However, I found that in some cases, players reject the script and form their own social hierarchy systems around the code, as in the example of <Ensidia>, who had three Guild Leaders. It has become evident, that my informants did not regard the hierarchy and democratic leadership as mutually exclusive, even if the Guild Leader was never elected by the players.

My impression is that players regard raiding in a guild as very serious business, and as such have constructed intricate rules and systems to assure trust within the communities. They form different laws and regulations on proper behaviour, raiding, and loot distribution, also embedding their guild identity into these. Regardless of the level of seriousness in their raiding, they

would all describe themselves as *social* guilds, meaning they all valued and acknowledged the game's script of being social. People not adhering to the scripts of proper behaviour will be removed from raids and guilds, and denied access to new guilds.

Because of a perceived weakness in the game code, players have devised multiple possible ways of rewarding loot to those "most worthy". Becoming worthy will often be reliant on attendance (time spent on raiding with the guild). In order for players to trust in the system, leaders have used open tracking systems allowing everyone to see that loot is distributed fairly. A boss will only drop a few out of many possible items when killed, meaning players compete for said items. From this, we see that players have constructed user-scripts in both organizing guilds in democratic hierarchies and distributing valuable items fairly. Even more so, players have programmed and developed systems and add-ons in order to aid them in this organization, delegating tasks to technology. It is interesting to note how players trust these programs to be fair and not tampered with. On the other hand, if someone within the guild leadership were caught cheating, they would likely be kicked from the guild (for not adhering to the social norms embedded into the game's culture), or the guild would lose a great deal of their members. An interesting thing to note is how players do not trust each other even when in a guild, and use technological systems to foster trust. If a guild truly were a group of friends, would not trust be included in those friendships? Illustrating that while players say that they are really good friends, the competition and "winning" is more important than the friendships, and that the friendships are only a tool for continue the competition.

Running a guild seems to require both a lot of time, and resources. Providing their members with food, flasks, potions, and gold to repair their items, is regarded as standard procedure, as I illustrated in chapter 5. Being able to offer these things to their members, gives the impression of being a stable, wealthy, and successful guild, with players that have expertise about the game in order to "*play the market*". Running a raiding guild also requires people to organize events, especially raids, as well as handle recruiting new members, following up applicants and trials, handle disputes and conflicts, and general day-to-day management.

As players have found these tasks to be too time consuming for one individual, they have delegated them to different positions as well as sharing some general responsibility for them all. I chose to divide these tasks into five different roles: Raid Leading, Social Management, Economic Management, Recruitment, and General Manager. In my analysis, I illustrated how these different roles have been domesticated *practically, symbolically, and cognitively*. It showed, not only how leadership in WoW is distributed, but

also shared with deep symbolic meanings. In order for a guild to raid, they need a roster, and acquire this through supplying their players with a stable community, promoting themselves as wealthy, friendly, and knowledgeable.

Gaining access to raiding guilds require, as I showed in chapter six, acquisition of social and cultural capital to illustrate to the guild that you have understood the different sociotechnical practices that is part of being a WoW-player. In my data material, these sociotechnical practices were shown as researching game mechanics, reading walkthroughs and theorycrafting, and using the different add-ons the specific guild requires. We can see that players have constructed various practices for play. All of the experience gained, is known by Taylor (2006) as *reputation*. Reputation is built through playing the game and is of your character's history. In order to be accepted to a raiding guild, prospective members will usually have to write an application. In many ways, this application can be compared to a job application. The applicant has to point out and refer to previous guild and raid experience, knowledge about their role in the raid environment, how to perform their job, and what makes them worthy of the position. Gaining this expertise is done through both playing the game, and researching it, demanding players to spend time also outside of raids to conduct research on boss encounters and their character class. A guild will spend several hours at the time, several nights per week, raiding, and they will expect their players to be up to date on all the latest information. However, spending time on the guild will also validate their membership, and be regarded as loyalty and investment into the guild. In turn, this might grant them a higher rank in the guild hierarchy.

Additionally, I found that guilds require their officers to have expertise beyond that of their own character - they also had to have more extensive knowledge about game mechanics, roles, character classes, and various online resources. As such, officers are sources of expertise for members. Resources that are often learned about through word-of-mouth and officers often serve as useful guides for member in finding them. Another interesting finding is that, while Blizzard do not give vast insight into the game mechanics code, they occasionally participate in theorycrafting discussion, and implemented tools in-game for players to experiment on. Thereby showing how producer and user work together in changing actively changing the game.

During my interviews, my informants were highly positive to the different aspects of gameplay and leadership. Additionally, due to the media centring the attention on games to negative influences, it is easy to sympathise with the desire to tell positive stories about games and community. My informants would not detail conflicts that arose from their gaming habits, or conflicts in-game.

7.1 The Other Side of the Coin

An important aspect to remember is to avoid technology optimism and regard games as solely positive influences in our lives. Being a player in an MMO is time-consuming; raiding alone will require players to spend several consecutive hours online several days per week, according to the guild's schedule. Players will also have to spend additional time on the asynchronous tasks, such as researching their class and boss mechanics, and as we have seen, Officers and Guild Leaders have to spend additional time on the game. Nathan and Sadie both detailed that their responsibilities took up a lot of time, and that they felt they did not have enough time to attend to their officer duties. Nathan says he uses more time on the game while offline than online:

I would say maybe 5 hours per week. An hour per day almost.
To see, keep account and write down, logs and such.

Ethan told me the recruiting took up the majority of his time in the game, and described his time as Guild Leader as the most stressful time in his life. He spent at least 12 hours every day in the game. Scott Andrews (2007) also highlights the pressure of leadership positions in games:

Serving as an officer is a stressful, thankless job and everything you try to accomplish is just setting yourself up for more abuse. Combined with real-life pressures, it can really wear you down after a while, I've had some dark moments as a guild leader when I've thought about stepping down and giving it all up. And sometimes I find myself wondering why I've stuck with it for so long.

The pressures of leadership in WoW is also illustrated by Eklund and Ask (2013), where one of their informants had put off quitting the game for some time, because he felt conflicted about leaving his friends. This raises another interesting point, that people in games who might never have seen each other and only interact through a computer over the internet, regard each other as friends. While we know that social interaction and gaining cultural and social capital are integral in gaining access to a guild community, it also shows that the players are reliant on forming friendships.

Despite the pressure of being in a leadership position, players often feel honoured and willingly take on the job. Players care about the community they invest in, and want and contribute to help the guild to attain its vision (Andrews, 2007). The friends made become too important, and individuals make sacrifices for the greater good – for the guild to succeed. “We lead, because we are afraid of what might happen if we do not” (Andrews, 2007).

The game's engineering script does not impose this pressure on players blatantly, but over the years, players have come to expect that a successful guild offer both benefits, and a big, social roster. Through domesticating guild leadership, players with leadership positions are expected to donate time and effort to the guild to assure that it continues to be successful. However, WoW has little instruction on how to become a good leader.

7.2 Learning Leadership from WoW

As we have seen, the game does not have many ways of directly learning leadership in-game. When joining random groups in dungeons and raids the game's code will automatically promote one experienced player to leader. As such can be regarded as a form of leadership training. However, in my personal experience, I have seen that having experience completing an instance is not equal to having skills in "leading the pack" so to say.

When playing the game, it is positively enforced throughout the game to be social. You gain items that are more powerful and experience from killing higher difficulty monsters that require groups. During the loading screen there are tips encouraging prosocial behaviour such as "*If you enjoyed playing with someone, put them on your friends list!*" and "*Being polite while in a group with others will get you invited back!*" It is also profitable for players to be in a guild - guild members gain perks such as faster travel time and more experience while levelling.

While not directly teaching leadership, the game does teach you that prosocial behaviour is profitable. Therefore, one could say that World of Warcraft teaches leadership on an inter-human level, where players take care of each other, share expertise, and build a positive community. During my interviews, I asked my informants what they considered good leadership. While they phrased their answers differently, their answers were surprisingly similar. According to my informants, a good leader is calm, fair, listens, takes on their responsibilities and leads the pack, it someone people can confide in and trust, and is a positive influence on the guild's community. They value diplomacy, communication skills, and trust. Respect is earned through exhibiting expertise and loyalty, and has to be maintained over time by continuous contribution to the guild.

Leadership in WoW is delegated among the different leadership positions, occasionally sharing some of the more general tasks. However, they have also chosen to delegate some tasks to the technology in order to inspire trust and avoid cheating. In other words, they need help from the technology in order to provide a desirable environment for players. Becoming a leader in WoW

also means having acquired enough expertise through material sources, access to which is dependent on social and cultural capital.

As I initially proposed in the beginning of the paper, could leadership experience from WoW be relevant in the work place? We have seen that the game itself does not teach leadership, but rather that leadership is practiced in an interaction between players, paratexts, and the game. Players, and leaders, share expertise within the playing community. As such, we can regard the playing community surrounding WoW as an affinity space (Gee & Hayes, 2012). Especially some aspects of the affinity space concept are relatable to what we have seen in this paper. The playing community is open for everyone that wish to take part in it, newbies, and experts alike. The content is transformed through interaction between the community's members, and developing knowledge, both specialized and generalized, is encouraged. Leaders in affinity spaces are not "bosses", but rather resources to knowledge. The border between leader and follower is porous because leaders often participate as members, and members often become leaders. In affinity spaces, leaders are enablers of people's learning and participation. This very much describes what I have found in leadership practices in WoW. Officers are resources for members, guiding and mentoring them in becoming WoW players. The goal is to help people make better choices, and organize in order to make new and better choices together. Individuals may have different reasons for accepting a leadership position, but at the core, they do it for what they consider the greater good. They want to assure the group's success. This returns us to how WoW, and MMOs in general, are social games where players build communities and friendships, for better or worse, working together to reach their common goals.

This thesis is largely concentrated on leadership and player practices in WoW. However, my initial hypothesis was that one could learn leadership through playing WoW. Studying practice is not directly transferable to being able to say that you can learn leadership by playing WoW. However, one can argue that knowledge is the result from interactions of humans (Yearley, 2005). Telling us that one learns through social practice, thereby illustrating how the sociotechnical practices of leadership in WoW can be regarded as a form of learning leadership. Players collaborate, organize, and become friends. These are desirable qualities in work environments. While they hone their skills in a virtual world, they can also be applicable in the "real" world.

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9 Glossary

Add-on	A user-created program that modifies the user interface of the game
AH	Auction House, an in-game trading fora
AI	Artificial Intelligence
Alt	Alternative Character
Azeroth	The world in which World of Warcraft takes place, consisting of Kalimdor, Eastern Kingdoms, Northrend and Pandaria
Boss Mod	A type of add-on that gives timers and notification on specialized abilities
Buff	Helpful spell on your character that increase your attributes, affecting performance
CC	Crowd Control, a way of inhibiting mobs temporarily
Class	There are 11 classes in the game; warrior, paladin, hunter, rogue, priest, death knight, shaman, mage, warlock, monk and druid. The class determines what roles the player can perform
DKP	Dragon Kill Points, a currency used by some raiding guilds to allocate loot
DPS	1) Damage Per Second 2) descriptive term of the damage-dealing role in the game
Dungeon	Areas within the game that require 5 players to cooperate as a team to complete
End-game	Activities that requires being max-level. Mainly raid dungeons
EXP / XP	Experience Points, gained from killing mobs and completing quests
Faction	A group of allies sharing the same ideology
Game Master	Blizzard employee employees who oversees servers
Guild	Semi-permanent in-game community composed of multiple players
Guild Master	A player in charge of a guild, having the highest rank

GM	1) Guild Master 2) Game Master
Healer	A role a character can fill, meaning they will negate damage or restore health to friendly player characters
Instance	In-game location designed for player groups. Contain some of the most powerful monsters. “instanced” from the rest of the game world, allowing grouped play without disruption from other players
Item	Common term for equipment
Kick	Removing someone from the raid group or guild
Level-cap	Maximum level a player character can reach
Loot	Items or money you get from mobs or containers
Loot Council	A method for guilds to distribute loot in groups
Macro	Small programs or commands made inside the game performing functions existing within the game
MMORPG / MMO	Abbreviation for Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game / Massively Multiplayer Online Game
MOB	Abbreviation for Monster Object
NPC	Non-player character you can encounter and interact with
Officer	A rank of member within a guild with similar privileges as the Guild Leader. Part of the guild’s leadership
Paratext	Any type of user-created resource, product, video, or program
Progression	The newest and most challenging game content available as released by the developer
PvP	Abbreviation of Player versus Player
Quest	Assignments or missions that reward money, equipment and experience points
Raid	The most challenging in-game areas, requiring large teams of 10 or more players to complete
Reset	1) The act of resetting a boss encounter allowing to restart it without having to wipe
Strategy	Refers to a group’s strategy to defeat a boss encounter
Subscription	Monthly fee to get full access to the game content

Specialization	A concept where players choose a set of skills and talents for their character according to what role they wish to fill
Tank	A role where a character is intended to soak heavy damage from a boss and deflect its attention from other group characters
Theorycraft	The practice of maximizing a character's abilities through calculation of game statistics
Trialist / Trial	New recruits in the guild that are on a trial period
UI	Abbreviation for User Interface, the display from which a user controls their avatar
Vanilla	A term commonly used by players referring to the original version of the game, before any expansions were released
VoIP	Voice over IP, software that allows multiple users to communicate by talking over the internet
Wiki	An online article can be accessed, read and modified by users
Whisper	A private message to a player
Wipe	When all the players in a raid group die on a boss encounter

10 Appendix

Interview guide

Introduction about my project and myself (and myself as a WoW-player), I'm interested in what you think about leadership, and your experiences from WoW. Anonymous.

BACKGROUND:

- Age
- Family situation/living situation
- Education/work
- What games do you play?

WOW:

- **When did you start playing WoW? How did you start playing? How were you introduced to the game?**
- **How much did you play last week? (at the most/least)**
- **How would you characterize yourself as a gamer?**
 - o Hardcore/casual?
 - o What do you play? (character, class, role)
 - o What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses as a WoW player?

GUILD:

- **How would you describe the guild? (size, hardcore level, social, tone)**
 - o What does the guild rules entail?
 - o Guild bank, loot system?
- What is the recruitment process like?
- What do you expect of a guild member? (theorycrafting, forums)
 - o What is expected of a raider? (add-ons (dbm/big-wigs), gearing, spec, attendance)
 - o What do you enforce on the raiders? (valor caps, best pots/mats, geared alts)
- **How does the guild handle RL commitments?**
 - o Does many people know each other IRL?
 - o Do people talk about IRL stuff?
 - o Is it a topic of conflict?
 - o Children, work, other commitments?

LEADERSHIP

- **What does your role in the guild entail?**
 - What are your assignments?
 - What does the game/guild demand of you outside of raiding?
 - Do you spend time doing WoW-related things even if not logged in? How much?
- **How did you become a GM/Raid Leader/Role Leader in this guild?**
 - What was your first experience in a leading position like?
 - What have you learned since then?
- **What do you think makes a good leader? / What do you think defines a good leader?**
 - What do you think it takes to make a group work well?
 - What do you think makes a group perform well?
 - Do you think you are a good leader?

TOOLS

- **What kind of tools do you use?**
 - Calendar, forums, add-ons
 - To help with loot distribution?
 - To help with recruitment?
 - To help with organizing events?

TO FINISH:

- Anything else you would like to add?