

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

This chapter presents data obtained from observations, document analysis, and interviews. As stated in chapter three, this study utilized the constant comparative method of analysis to construct categories and themes. Resulting categories from the observations were used to develop the document analysis protocol (see Appendix F) and the interview questions (see Appendix H).

There are three main sections to this chapter: observations, document analysis, and interviews. Each section features the results of the three data collection methods and details how the data relate to the four previously stated research questions. The analysis of the data will occur in the following chapter.

### Observations

The observations section includes the results and their relation to the research questions. The results are broken into categorical areas including context, experiential learning, communities of practice, and subjective culture. Each category is further broken down into themes.

### *Results*

Observations were recorded using the observation rubric (see Appendix D). The rubric has four primary topics: context, experiential learning, communities of practice, and subjective culture. Each topic is covered in full detail below.

### *Context*

The two participant observers recorded approximately 800 in-game observation hours between October 2006 and January 2007. We recorded our observations in many

virtual locations including towns, inns, and quest sites. Additionally, we documented interactions throughout our time in-game and based on our relations in two different guilds. This allowed us to comment on how rank, time in-game, knowledge, and familiarity with contacts had a direct impact on the interactions that occurred. The wide range of observations contributed to the rich data gleaned from the observations.

### *Experiential Learning*

Experiential learning was observed to occur in many different aspects of the game. There are six themes related to experiential learning that emerged through observation.

*Directions and instructions.* There were numerous instances of one player providing instructions or directions to another player. Early in the data collection phase, my avatar died while doing a quest with a higher level player. The higher level player provided instructions on how to retrieve the body and what to do once retrieved. Since this was the first time I had died, I was uncertain about what to do and was anxious. The step-by-step instructions provided helped me learn an important aspect of the game.

Players also use the general or guild chat lines to ask questions and provide advice to one another. Typically, newer players ask questions and the more experienced players provide their feedback. Questions included how to find something in the game, how to construct something, or player skill development. Early in our research, my research assistant asked a number of questions on the guild chat line. She said, "I apologize for such silly questions," and one member wrote back, "That is what we are here for."

*Demonstration.* In addition to providing written or verbal instructions, *World of Warcraft* players also demonstrate actions in-game. It is common to see more

experienced players acting as a guide for newer players. An early observation occurred in the inn in a low level city during the Hallow's End holiday celebration when one player was showing other players how to use a magic wand. When the novice players tried the wand, the more experienced player helped the novices use the wand correctly by providing additional demonstrations.

Another set of demonstrations and performing functions were observed during one day of observation. One of the challenges of *World of Warcraft* is trying to find certain locations. I showed two people how to move around the virtual environment using the tram system and flight paths available in the major cities. Finally, I helped my research assistant and another player locate quests and how to complete those quests. Demonstration proved to be more meaningful than text or voice directions.

Finally, my research assistant and I quickly learned how to work together in teams. By observing other players' interactions within teams, we learned what to do and what not to do. Early in our research, we partnered with two higher level characters. In our group of four, we learned our roles in the group, how to complete quests, and how to trust one another. While the higher level characters first demonstrated these skills, we quickly learned them in order to insure a smooth operating team.

*Scaffolding.* Our observations also yielded evidence of scaffolding. In one situation, I was working on a quest with a higher level player in our guild. I observed how the player acted as a warrior and a leader. During one quest, the player let me play the lead role and observed. The player provided feedback when I made mistakes and helped me improve my game. As I learned, the player provided less feedback. Eventually I was self-sufficient and was able to lead groups on my own.

Another incident of scaffolding occurred with my research assistant. After joining our second guild, we met up with our guild leader. The guild leader worked with my research assistant to help her learn how to be a more effective mage. He logged into her character, adjusted her screen set-up, and demonstrated how to use certain skills/spells. My research assistant observed and then tried the skills while our guild leader watched and provided comment. This process continued throughout a low level dungeon (a quest that requires a team of five players to complete) until she no longer needed feedback from our guild leader.

*Critical thinking.* Critical thinking and reflection were other tools players used while experiencing *World of Warcraft*. A major component of *World of Warcraft* is attempting and completing quests. Whether doing the quests alone or in a group, the process for completing those quests is similar. When working on a quest, it is common for avatars to die in the process. Dying gives the player or players an opportunity to think or talk about what happened and to strategize methods to be successful.

Every time I died, I reflected on what did not go well, planned a new approach, and tried again. This continued until I succeeded. Because of the immediate feedback given by the game and others (mentors, other players), I learned through doing and through reflection. When in a group, I would consult with other players to determine what went wrong and to devise a new strategy to succeed. Through teamwork and reflection, we learned how to succeed in the game. Furthermore, we learned to apply some of these strategies to other situations in the game.

*Formal training.* When a player joined a guild in *World of Warcraft*, they sometimes encountered formal training or classes aimed at helping new players acclimate

themselves to life in the guild. Some guilds require new members to read rules and information on guild Web sites or go through a training session with a more experienced member of the group. This session may include instructions on completing quests, communicating with players in the game, advancing through levels, or participating in role-plays.

A couple of guilds on our server pride themselves on being heavy role-playing guilds. This means that they require their members to act “in-character” at all times while playing the game. If a player is new to role-playing, a more experienced player will often coach a newer player in the art of role-play. One guild had formal role-playing classes and required all new guild members to complete the classes prior to becoming a full member of the guild. Another guild required its new members to practice role-playing prior to becoming a full member. I worked on quests with one of these new members and he asked me to role-play with him so he could meet his practice requirement for the day.

*Becoming the mentor.* When one has truly mastered something, he or she is able to demonstrate or teach it to someone else. A senior guild member took myself and my research assistant through a low level dungeon (Deadmines). The senior guild member not only showed us how to be successful, she also showed us how to move, attack, interact, behave, use game language effectively, and take the game seriously while still having fun. These skills helped us in similar ways. We both applied the personal and leadership skills we learned to our own experiences leading players through quests.

In another similar situation, I learned how to lead from a higher level player in the guild. By watching him lead and following his example, I was able to guide groups of

players through a different dungeon (Scarlet Monastery) three or four times. His mentoring prepared me to lead, manage quests, build trust, encourage teamwork, mentor, and be successful.

Not only did my research assistant and I learn skills to help us play a certain quest within the game, we were also able to apply those skills to other situations when our mentors were no longer present. Players learn through reading, watching, and practicing skills. By effectively learning certain skills, those who were once the mentees became the mentors for a new group of guild members.

### *Communities of Practice*

Communities of practices were observed to exist through *World of Warcraft* and were the underlying structure of most communication and interactions. Six community of practice themes emerged through observation.

*A common goal.* According to Wenger (2002), members of a community of practice share a common goal, problem, or concern (p. 4). The simple requirement is that they are bound together because they interact and learn together, as well as survive and move forward (Wenger, 1998). The communities of practice in *World of Warcraft* form because members have common short and/or long term goals or challenges.

Goals often included completing a quest, defending alliance lands, or becoming well-respected role-players. My research assistant observed that she became part of a community of practice when she joined a group intent on completing a number of quests together. The group's goal was to practice and work with one another until successful. When they failed, they evaluated what went wrong and tried again.

*The guild as a community of practice.* The second theme that became apparent through observation was that the guild itself was a community of practice. Each guild typically had a common purpose or goal and included members who were willing to help one another with skill and character development. This became apparent when my research assistant and I switched guilds. The old guild had no rules, no participation, no help, no teamwork, and no quest work. There was no community of players working together to accomplish a common goal; instead there were groups of individuals working on individual goals.

The new guild was different. This guild had rules, helpful members, an active leadership, and two common purposes. First, all members were expected to help one another advance by interacting, sharing items with one another, and questing together. Each guild member shares knowledge, information, equipment, money, time, and a sense of humor. Second, through helping one another, the guild's focus was on reaching end-game and successfully completing hard instances and raids. This second goal was only possible if members helped one another and contributed to the guild's success.

*A quest as a community of practice.* In addition to the guild being a community of practice, each individual quest involving multiple players became a community of practice. My research assistant and I participated in a number of group quests where the goal was to complete the quest successfully, gain experience, and/or have fun. One of our first experiences with a community of practice was the first day we played *World of Warcraft*, in which we joined with another player to complete a set of quests. We traveled together, helped one another, talked, practiced dueling skills, and gave each

other items. The group stayed together until we no longer had a common goal, at which point, my research assistant and I parted ways with the other player.

Another example of a quest being a community of practice occurred when we formed a group to complete the lower level dungeon (Deadmines). The group's common goal was to complete the quest, learn how to work together as a team in an instance, and interact with other players. For this particular quest, we had a guild leader demonstrating skills and helping us complete the quest. Each member participated, practiced skills, shared knowledge, developed individual capabilities, experimented, and utilized critical thinking. Once the quest was over, the community of practice disbanded and its members brought the knowledge they gained to the next community of practice they joined.

*Active participation.* According to Wenger (1998), within a community of practice, members must participate. Wenger states that "participation combines doing, talking, feeling, and belonging" (p. 55). The need or expectation to participate and feel a sense of belonging is significant in the *World of Warcraft*. In the first guild I was in, I received a request from a member to make an item for her. I knew I could make the item, but I could not meet her at the desired destination because I did not know how to get there. Accordingly, I was disappointed because I could not prove my worth by contributing to the needs of the guild. I spent the next day traveling to other destinations so if the request arose again, I could actively participate and contribute. The next day, I received another request and this time was able to meet the person and share my expertise with that person.

In another instance, my research assistant and I grouped with another player. Each of us had different skills and was able to use our combined strength to do well in the

quests we were undertaking. We were able to practice our skills, contribute to the group, and ultimately succeed. I felt that I had contributed significantly to this group and learned a lot as a result.

*Sense of team.* People within a community learn through interactions with other members, experimentation, observation, and critical thinking (Leemkuil et al., 2003; Lunenburg, 1998). As indicated earlier in this chapter, experimentation and critical thinking are common in *World of Warcraft*. My research assistant and I observed a number of instances where strategy, critical thinking, and experimentation were utilized during quests. On our first day playing together, we grouped with another person and participated in a difficult quest. We failed a number of times and had to regroup. We discussed what we should do differently and tried it. We were only able to bring limited knowledge about the game, so we had to rely on experimentation to try and overcome our difficulty.

A second observation was a quest with five guild members participating. We were trying to complete a mid-level dungeon (Scarlet Monastery) but had a difficult time doing so. On a number of occasions the group failed and we had to regroup. Using the immediate feedback we received (death), we talked about what we did wrong and devised new solutions for succeeding. We were able to develop knowledge within our group as a result of member interaction and trust. Because we all participated and worked together to come up with a solution, we eventually succeeded in completing the instance.

In another situation, my research assistant and I formed a group to complete another dungeon (Gnomeregan). When we had attempted this instance in the past, the group included individual members playing for themselves instead of for the good of

group. Information and knowledge were not shared, respect and trust were not established, and collaboration did not occur. As a result, the group failed and disbanded. Only when we found group members who were willing to share and help the entire group succeed did the group actually succeed.

*Respect and trust.* Wenger (2002) informs us that knowledge is dynamic and resides in the minds of people. As a result, there must be mutual respect and trust in order for interactions to occur and knowledge to be shared. Trust and mutual respect are the “social fabric for learning” in the community (p. 28). For the most part, as our guild developed trust and respect, knowledge developed as well. My research assistant and I quickly learned which players could be trusted in quests and which ones could not. When looking for a group with which to work, we picked players we knew were strong players and active contributors. This resulted in a successful quest and learning experience.

While most people in the guild could be trusted to work on a quest, there were some members who could not. For instance, there was one player who would always leave the group before the quest was complete. According to the *World of Warcraft* website, it is not socially acceptable to leave a group before the quest is complete unless it is an emergency. While our guild leaders had a discussion with the player about his actions, most people in the guild did not trust him enough to invite him to participate in their quests.

### *Subjective Culture*

Through four months of observations, my research assistant and I observed components of subjective culture existing in *World of Warcraft*. Eight themes emerged through the analysis of observations.

*Social formations and relationships.* Social formations and relationships changed as the player progressed through the game. During the first few weeks of play, my research assistant and I interacted primarily with those of similar rank and race. As a low level gnome, I was hesitant to speak with higher level players and I quested rarely with players outside the gnome race. In fact, one guild member commented on how our guild should only recruit dwarfs and gnomes. He stated, "That is how we started and that is how it should be." This changed significantly as we progressed. Eventually we came in contact with higher level players and differing races more frequently. Additionally, once we joined a guild, we had many more opportunities to work with higher level characters. Early on, these higher level players helped us quest and showed us how to interact in the game. Once we became higher level players, we worked with low-level players and mentored them to become functioning members of the guild.

In addition to the social formations, interpersonal relationships were built inside the game. There were instances where I quested with other players and had conversations with those players. If I made a good connection with a player, I added them to my "friends" list and watched for that player the next time I played. One such event occurred in the first month of play. My research assistant and I connected with another player and spent some time at an inn in a city (Darkshire). We virtually danced, flirted, told jokes, drank ale, and had a good conversation. This event was refreshing

because we broke from serious play, relaxed, and got to know one another.

Afterwards, this person called me “brother” and my research assistant commented on how we have made a friend. This person eventually joined our guild and we have a great relationship with him now.

Once our guild started using a voice-over IP service (Vent), relationships grew stronger. Vent allowed us to talk with one another using voice over IP. It was at this time that I learned who our guild members were, where they lived, what they did for a living, and what they enjoyed doing. Our guild also constructed a website to help build community and connections. The site includes photos, instant chat, rules, a discussion forum, stories, voting, rules of play, expectations, and our mission statement. The site is active and encourages members to visit it often. Vent and our guild website allowed us to have more meaningful conversations and strengthened our social formation and interpersonal relationships.

*Behaviors.* Players learned and repeated certain behaviors throughout the game. Similar to a culture, players learned how to behave according to the norms of the group through positive and negative feedback. For instance, through observation, players learned how to use the general chat line. If the player asked an appropriate question, they likely received a helpful answer. However, if the player used the chat line for inappropriate reasons or asks the wrong question, they were ridiculed or ignored.

The guild also helped players learn how to behave. Unlike the general chat line where people typically did not know one another, players in a guild knew one another. As a result, feedback concerning the appropriateness of a behavior was usually positive. For instance, good behaviors in our guild included friendliness, helpfulness, supporting

one another, and having fun. These good behaviors were reinforced with supportive and positive written compliments, verbal comments, or modeling. Poor behavior was reprimanded quickly and expected to cease immediately. When one member of our guild continued to talk off topic on Vent, my research assistant corrected him and asked that he either stop talking or talk on a different channel.

*Norms and expectations.* As community started to form early in our game experience, so did the group norms and expectations. One of the more prevalent expectations set in the game was to help someone if that person is struggling. Help could be given by assisting the player kill an enemy, providing the player with a “buff,” acting as a shield, or providing some written or verbal advice. In one situation, I noticed a player having a difficult time killing an enemy. I stopped what I was doing and helped that person and as a sign of gratitude, the player compensated me with the resources they were gathering.

Another expectation prevalent in the game was finishing what one started. When a player was invited to join a group, it was expected that that player would stay with the group until the quest was complete. When this expectation was not met, group members often became upset. One guild member was notorious for leaving early until my research assistant had a discussion with him about his behavior. The person initially left the guild for awhile, but once he had time to think about his actions, he came back to the guild. Because of this expectation, I often played long into the night, not wanting to leave the group before the goal was met.

In addition to finishing what one starts, a third group norm was to overcome individual greed when questing in a group. Players who do not need the item were to

graciously allow the needing player to take the item. Two motivations drove this expectation. First, in order for the group to succeed, each player needed to add incrementally better items in order to become stronger. Second, if the needing player was allowed to have the item they need, that gesture would most likely be reciprocated.

Finally, it was expected that guild members greet, congratulate, and say goodbye to one another during game play. When a player logged onto the game, it was custom to extend a welcome and ask how his or her day was going. Similarly, when a player was ready to logout, that player should send a note saying goodbye to the guild. Finally, whenever something good happened to a player, he or she was expected to share the good news with the guild and other members were expected to extend congratulations. Often, when I am in the middle of conversation or a quest with another player, I stopped what I was doing to send a note of congratulations to a player that had advanced a level.

*Game language.* While the server uses English, a different language was used and must be learned. This language used abbreviations and symbols to convey meaning.

Some of the abbreviations included:

LFG Looking For Group  
 AFK Away From Keyboard  
 TY Thank You  
 LVL Level  
 wOOt we Owned Other team  
 BRB Be Right Back  
 NP No Problem  
 ROFL Rolling On Floor Laughing  
 WTS Want To Sell  
 LOL Laugh Out Loud  
 NOOB Newbie (pejorative word for new person who asks stupid questions)

In addition to abbreviations, combinations of letters, numbers, and punctuation could be used to convey meaning as well. Some of these symbols included:

:D Wide smile  
 :P Sticking tongue out  
 :O Shock  
 ^^ Smiley  
 ~.~ Sleepy  
 !\_? What the Fuck!?  
 (>\_<) In pain

To interact with other players in the game, players needed to learn and use the common abbreviations and symbols. Disputes occurred over the use of language in the game, so it was important to understand what others were saying and how to appropriately respond. My research assistant and I both had to ask the meaning of some abbreviations. Eventually we used most abbreviations on a daily basis.

*Gestures and emotes.* *World of Warcraft* built gestures, or emotes, into the game to provide another way to communicate with other players. These emotes provide visual representations of words and phrases. For instance, if a player typed “/dance,” his or her character would dance on the screen and if that player typed “/rude,” his or her character would flash a rude gesture to another player. One could even use emotes to communicate with players in the opposite faction when textual communication was not allowed. An example occurred when I was fighting an enemy. A player from the opposite faction assisted me, but because we could not communicate directly with one another, we used emotes. He saluted (/salute) me and I bowed (/bow) to him. This non-verbal exchange allowed us to show our respect for one another.

My research assistant and I observed and used emotes often when interacting with other players. Players /wave, /thank, /greet, /flirt, /cry, /laugh, /sleep, /salute, /bow, and /goodbye other players as part of their normal conversation. Using emotes was another way for players to interact with one another and provide more meaning to the interaction.

*Roles and role-modeling.* Whether fulfilling a role in the game, a group, or a guild, roles were common in *World of Warcraft* and players were expected to learn them. Roles existed for players in the game, in groups, and inside guilds. Roles changed as players moved from one situation to the next, so it was necessary to understand different roles in varying situations. In order to learn a role, players typically observed other players fulfilling that role in different circumstances.

In the game, a player's role was to be an active participant in the game and a helpful member of a particular faction. This meant helping other players in need, providing advice, and contributing to the economic, social, and political aspects of the game. As an active participant, I learned and taught language, rules, roles, and values. Players typically learned their role by watching other players demonstrate consciously or unconsciously.

Second, players had a role inside a group trying to complete a quest. Each class (warrior, healer, mage) had different roles and each was expected to perform according to that role. During one quest, I learned how to be a warrior from a more senior warrior in the group. Through active mentoring and modeling, she taught me how to attack and how to shield other players. When part of a group, I was expected to play this role. Only when I was on my own could I play outside my role and experiment with other roles.

Finally, each member of a guild had a role to fulfill. Guild members were expected to contribute knowledge, help, and items to the guild and its members. Guild leaders had the additional expectation of running the guild, disciplining unruly members, planning events, and leading by example. As guild master, my research assistant had to ensure the smooth operation of the guild by setting a positive tone, interacting with all

members, coordinating guild events, and recruiting new members. To reduce frustration and for the guild to run smoothly, members must fulfill their role and help others perform their roles as well.

*Rules.* To fulfill one's role, a player must often follow a set of rules. Many rules exist in *World of Warcraft*, which each player must follow. First, there were rules regarding interaction. Interaction rules were especially relevant on the role-playing server on which we conducted this research study. When communicating with unknown players, one was supposed to speak in character. Players using dwarf avatars must interact with other players as if they were dwarves. Role-playing was a learned skill and many guilds provided players opportunities to learn how to role-play effectively. Players who did not follow the role-playing rules were often reprimanded by other players.

There were also behavior rules. Most guilds had rules specifically addressing behavior. Players were to represent their guild at all times and were not to bring shame upon their guild. Players were also expected to be friendly and helpful when participating in groups. Following this rule encouraged prospective guild members to apply for admission to the guild.

A third rule was how to progress inside one's guild. The first guild of which my research assistant and I were a part required us to follow the lead of the guild leaders, contribute to the well-being of the guild, and to fight the Horde. If we proved our worth, we would be considered for promotion inside the guild. Our current guild's rules for progression are based largely on a player's level in the game. As players attained new levels, they earned new rank.

The rules are set in order to create value-systems in the game and individual guilds. These values included respecting and trusting other players while encouraging them to reciprocate that respect and trust. Mutual respect and trust created a positive environment in which to play and learn. Other values derived from rules included being helpful, generous, open, active, friendly, and cooperative. When players valued these characteristics, they created an environment conducive to sharing, interacting, and growing.

*Rituals and events.* The makers of *World of Warcraft* and many guild leaders diligently worked to build a sense of community inside the game. In order to do so, holidays and events were scheduled and players were encouraged to participate. During certain times of the year, *World of Warcraft* had special holidays such as Hallow's End (similar to Halloween), New Year's Eve, Love is in the Air (similar to Valentine's Day), and Noblegarden (similar to Easter). During these times, players viewed a decorated landscape, costumes, new foods and drink, and special games to celebrate the holiday. These holidays were designed to build community and to have fun.

Many guilds also designed guild events open only to guild members. Our guild designed a few guild events to date including a snowball fight. The purpose of this event was to eat, drink, and "beat each other with snowballs." This successful event included emoting, flirting, dancing, and debauchery. Another guild event was the scavenger hunt. Players were given a list of items to collect in the game and the first person to collect all the items won a prize. Unlike the snowball fight, this event did not progress very well because players lost interest in it very quickly. Another guild event was an in-game

wedding of two characters. There was a groom's dinner, the ceremony, and a reception. Players dressed up in nice clothes, exchanged gifts, ate, drank, and had fun.

All of these events were designed to build guild community and allow newer members to interact with current members. The purpose of these events was two-fold. First, guild members had the opportunity to meet one another and have fun. Second, members learned about the culture of the guild and how to contribute to that culture. Through interaction, players learned the rules, values, and expectations of the guild.

#### *Relation to Research Questions*

The results of the observations addressed all four research questions to some degree. The observation rubric was designed to address the first three research questions and observations were recorded that directly addressed all three questions. The information collected from observations will be combined with the information collected through document analysis and interviews to answer the first three research questions.

The fourth research question was also addressed through observation, though indirectly. There were many noted incidents where players were learning subjective culture through experiential learning and communities of practice. The data collected through observation will be combined with the data collected from document analysis and interviews to answer the fourth research question.

#### Document Analysis

The document analysis section includes the results and their relation to the research questions. The results are broken into categorical areas including context, structure, experiential learning, communities of practice, and subjective culture. Each category is further broken down into themes.

## *Results*

Analyses of documents were recorded using the document analysis protocol (see Appendix F). The protocol has five primary topics: Structure, Community Discussion, Experiential Learning, Communities of Practice, and Subjective Culture. Each topic highlights the discovered themes and is discussed in full detail below.

### *Context*

Through play and observation, it became apparent that a number of documents were used by players in the *World of Warcraft* community. Six print or web documents (see Appendix E) are analyzed in this study. In addition, 26 guild Web sites were analyzed using the document analysis protocol (see Appendix F). The wide-range of documents analyzed yielded rich data for the study.

### *Structure*

Two print and web documents provided a foundation from which to begin and continue play in *World of Warcraft*. These documents included the official *World of Warcraft* game manual and the official *World of Warcraft* website. Both documents provided new players with basic information, such as rules of play, the economy, beginning tips for success, and how to interact. The rules included the mechanics of the game, such as installation, billing, controls, visual display, and character selection.

Both documents also provided an overview of the economy. They give new players information about in-game goods, how to acquire those goods, and how to sell them. Once a player acquired goods, he or she could use them, sell them to vendors, or put them up for auction in the auction house. The auction house was controlled by

supply and demand, whereas vendors offered stable prices. When demand was high, players could earn more money by going through the auction house.

There is a science to playing the economics of the game. The *World of Warcraft* website states, “Item durability is an important aspect of *World of Warcraft* that works to stabilize the economy, decrease inflation specifically in high end game, and in general keep prices of player sold items lower than normally would occur with such a feature” (*World of Warcraft Official Website*, 2007). Some players play *World of Warcraft* just for the economic thrill of buying and selling.

Neither document mentions the “black market” economy of *World of Warcraft*, but it exists on outside sites that allow players to buy or sell in-game gold, power-level characters, and to sell items on sites like EBay. Players caught using any of these tools will be suspended from playing the game. Even with the risk attributed to accessing these tools, many players still took part, making the black market economy a particularly thriving one.

Both the official website and the game manual provided players beginning tips for successful play. For instance, the game manual states, “Men and women are equal in Azeroth, so the only difference between the two genders are cosmetic” (*World of Warcraft Game Manual*, 2004, p. 15). This statement was meant to help players select characters they will be with throughout their time in the game. Players were also provided a glossary that contained commonly used abbreviations and words. Simple tips like these were meant to prepare players for what they would encounter once they enter the game.

The game manual and official game website also informed players about the methods available to interact with other players. Players could chat in-game using a number of chat channels, use any number of emotes, send in-game mail, discuss topics of interest using discussion boards outside the game, or participate in a guild. The *World of Warcraft* website (2007) stated, "Use your guild to help each other through the game." Guild members can provide advice, items, money, a trusting environment, and friendly conversation.

*Community discussion.* Nearly every document that was examined had some form of discussion forum for players to interact with one another. The forums were designed for players to interact, post ideas and information, provide help, build community knowledge, access class and profession information, and debate topics. For some players, posting on forums provided them an opportunity to gain recognition. This section will discuss four types of discussion topics found on discussion forums.

The first type of discussion topics was providing how-to information to others in the game or guild community. As the primary function for most forums, how-to sites were prevalent on almost 100% of the Web sites analyzed. Thottbot.com and Allakhazam.com were the primary sources for learning how to complete quests, obtain items, and succeed in the game. Each site relied on users to provide the information and as more people posted, the most relevant information was constantly repeated. In fact, Thottbot.com highlighted accurate postings in yellow so players could easily scan the document for the relevant information.

Another popular topic was instructions on how to role-play, which was on every website for role-playing guilds. The information helped players understand the rationale

for role-playing, its importance, and examples of appropriate role-playing techniques.

While the real learning occurred inside the game, these discussion forums allowed players to obtain basic information and ask questions they might have about role-playing.

Other postings included information on how to manage a successful guild, screenshots of locations throughout the game, maps, guides for leveling quickly, building macros and using them in the game, and recommended game modifications (mods) for improved play. For the most part, more experienced players provided the information either through an initial post or through a response to a question from a less-experienced player.

The second discussion topic prevalent on the Web sites analyzed for this study was rules and expectations. Thottbot.com, Allakhazam.com, WoWWiki.com sites, and guild Web sites each discussed rules for use of their sites, and the guild Web sites also posted rules for membership in their respective guilds. Thottbot.com, Allakhazam.com, and WoWWiki.com each allowed a user to post comments for information or interaction purposes but asked that each user respect other use to the site. As a wiki site, WoWWiki.com had even more detailed rules regarding vandalism, content voting, and deletion of old information. WoWWiki.com also encouraged “noobs” to post by fostering a polite, respectful, and civil environment. The website forums of role-playing guilds often discussed rules about posting in character in the forums, as well as acting in character in the game.

The third discussion topic common to the Web sites analyzed was class and profession information. These forum topics provided players detailed information about how perform tasks and functions related to being a warrior, priest, engineer, tailor. These

thorough topics educated players, provided them an opportunity to share their knowledge, and built the overall strength of the guild by developing competent players. One forum topic called “Lokar’s Rules of Engagement” provided information about how to play certain classes (warriors, mages, priests, etc.) This information was so well-written that other guilds copied it from the original source into their own respective guild forums.

The last discussion topic common to Web sites was general or open discussion. This forum topic was open for anyone to post anything they were interested in discussing. Some of the topics included real-life discussions, personal introductions, applications to the guild, information about Blizzcon and the World Series of gaming, competitive and collaborative story contests, and elaborate character profiles.

### *Experiential Learning*

While experiential learning was frequently observed in the game, experiential learning was less prevalent in the documents that were analyzed. Because experiential learning is based largely on actual experience, only three of the six themes discussed in the observation section will be discussed here.

*Directions and Instructions.* Directions and instructions about a variety of information were ubiquitous in the documents analyzed. As mentioned above, the discussion forums had numerous topics that provide players with information and directions on how to succeed in the game. One guild website declined to use discussion boards and instead employed a wiki. This allowed all members of the guild to actively contribute to the guild’s collective knowledge.

The *World of Warcraft* Game Manual provided step-by-step directions on how to acquire, work on, and complete quests. The manual also supplied instruction on the use of in-game language so the player knows how to communicate with other players in the game. In addition, the manual presented players with information about basic game etiquette. This information provided the foundation for some of the roles, rules, and behaviors that will be discussed under the subjective culture section.

*Demonstration.* While demonstrating actions was rife inside the game, some guild Web sites also contained demonstrations for newer players to mimic. One example common on many guild Web sites was a sample guild application form. In order to join a guild, players needed to apply. The guild leadership supplied a sample application so prospective guild members saw how to fill out the form and what type of information was expected.

Another demonstration frequently seen on role-playing guild Web sites was how to chat or write character profiles in character. As with the sample applications, guild leaders wrote the first character profile or story and then asked all other members to follow suit. This gave players an opportunity to learn more about role-playing and what it meant to be in character.

*Formal training.* Some guilds provided formal classes in role-playing in an effort to teach guild members how to role-play properly. Senior role-players led discussions with new role-players either in game or on the guild website. The new players practiced speaking in-character to one another while the senior role-player observed. As the conversation progresses, the senior role-player provided feedback and would interject to

further demonstrate the art. These formal classes were used to instruct new guild members in the values and behaviors of the guild.

### *Communities of Practice*

Similar to experiential learning, communities of practice existed primarily inside *World of Warcraft*. Consequently, only three of the six themes covered in the observation section will be discussed here.

*A common goal.* Many of the guild Web sites specifically stated their guild's goal or mission statement so all prospective and current members knew the purpose of the guild. One role-playing guild whose mission was to become an elite role-playing guild wrote, "We will be in character as often as possible, will teach others with an interest in RP what they need to know, host events, and do everything we can to improve our own skills" (guild 4). Another role-playing guild wrote, "We hope that by setting an example through our own activities, as well as collaborating with other guilds which share our passion for RP, we will help make ours a server where RPer's may truly feel at home" (guild 5). These two examples highlight the passion role-playing guilds feel about their art and the dedication they have to improving role-playing in *World of Warcraft*.

Other guilds strived to be supportive, work together, and help one another. One guild's mission was "dedicated to testing ourselves by exceptional game play through technical prowess, teamwork, and dedication" (guild H). Another similar guild wrote, "Our primary focus is on working together and helping each other as we level, so that we can meet the challenge of end-game content together under end-game experienced leadership" (guild B). One last guild summed up the team-based approach with its mission statement, "You joined as a team. You live as a team. You work as a team. You

\*die\* as a team. There is no middle ground. You cannot win as a team if you fail as individuals.” All three guild mission statements show players the importance of community and working together to achieve common goals.

*The guild as a community of practice.* The *World of Warcraft* Game Manual (2004) defines a guild as “a collection of players who have joined together to create a mutually beneficial relationship with each other” (p. 145). According to the manual, players in guilds group together, build relationships, offer assistance to one another, and practice their skills together (p. 145). Each player of the guild was responsible for following the guild’s mission, participating, creating and exchanging knowledge, and practicing skills with other players.

*A quest as a community of practice.* All of the documents analyzed discuss the importance of grouping together to achieve the goals of the guild and group. According to the *World of Warcraft* website, quests can be easier and more fun when in a group. Difficult quests actually require players to work together; those players who decide to go alone often fail. The importance of questing as a tool for sharing knowledge and experiences is evident on the many website discussion boards where players talk and interact.

### *Subjective Culture*

Whereas evidence of experiential learning and communities of practice are limited in the analyzed documents, indications of subjective culture were found on nearly every document analyzed. Therefore, all eight themes discussed in the observation section will be discussed here.

*Social formations and relationships.* The analyzed documents discuss community building and guild structure. The *World of Warcraft Game Manual* (2004) stressed how the game was built on community and how interaction played a very important part of the game (p. 142). Players chat with one another using the chat function or the in-game mail system. These tools allow players to discuss trade, quests, or guild formation. Through interaction, players build strong relationships that often turn into real-world friendships.

In addition to the aforementioned tools, guilds also supported social formations and gave players the opportunity to build community. Players in guilds formed a sense of identity and develop a shared mission. One guild wrote that being a part of the guild “requires dedication to playing your character, making contributions to the guild, participating in guild activities, and trust you earn from the guild” (Guild 2).

Nearly all guild Web sites examined had formal rank systems, which rewarded guild members for participating in the guild and contributing to its success. Most guilds had an initial rank for newcomers in the guild. This is designed as a trial rank, meaning both the guild and the player test each other. In addition, each guild had officer ranks. An officer manages the guild and has the power to recruit, banish, promote, or demote players. Finally, some guilds also had ranks for non-participants-players who have not played for a long time or who were disruptive to the guild’s culture. One guild called this rank “Lost,” for those players who have been out of contact too long or for those who have been too “lippy” (Guild 4).

*Behaviors.* Behaviors were seen and recorded during observation, but behaviors were less evident in the documents. Guild Web sites spent a lot of time managing

expectations on how to behave in-game, but how people behaved could not be analyzed using documents. Expectations for behavior are discussed under *Norms and Expectations*.

*Norms and expectations.* The *World of Warcraft* Game Manual and the *World of Warcraft* website both had sections devoted to etiquette and behaviors. These documents provided advice for interacting with other players, gaining respect and trust, working on a quest, role-playing, entering into a trade with other players, and behaving in the game. One pervasive etiquette tip in *World of Warcraft* is regarding helping other players. When a player does something nice, it is expected that another player reciprocate or pay it forward. This means that in the future you should do something nice for someone else as a way of thanking the person who did something nice for you.

In addition, each of the guild Web sites also included statements or rules regarding behavior and play. By reviewing the numerous Web sites, the most commonly stated norms and expectations include:

- Respect all other players
- Help fellow guild members when called upon to do so
- Congratulate fellow guild members when they accomplish something important
- Positively represent the guild at all times
- Do not harass other players
- Act with integrity, honor, and maturity
- Do not cheat

All guild members were expected to follow the norms listed above or face penalty from the guild or outright banishment. These norms were meant to build community and “community is very important to maintaining a strong guild bond” (Guild O).

*Game language.* While playing *World of Warcraft*, players learned the language of the game. Additionally, the use of this language was common on the community documents accessed outside the game. Players were provided formal glossaries in the *World of Warcraft* Game Manual, on the *World of Warcraft* website, and on the WoWWiki site. These documents presented abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols such as:

- Locations      AH, SW, IF, BRD, DPS
- Terms          Aggro, buff, pat, tank
- Actions        LFM, LFG, WTB, WTF, PST, AFK, BRB
- Symbols        :P, :O, ;), ^^

These were also widespread on walkthrough documents (Thottbot.com, Allakhazam.com), discussion forums, and guild Web sites. Players were bombarded with the game language and were expected to learn it through use. Guild mission statements, community documents, pictures, discussion forums, and events included the use of game language. In order to be an active member of the community, every player must understand the language.

*Gestures and emotes.* Gestures and the use of emotes was best observed in-game, but many community documents provide a glossary of emotes for players to learn and use. The *World of Warcraft* Game Manual and the *World of Warcraft* website provided information on appropriate communication with other players including when to gesture or emote. Since some emotes can be offensive or sexual in nature, the documents suggested only using these emotes when respect exists with the player with whom you are conversing.

*Roles and role-modeling.* By examining the community documents for *World of Warcraft*, there were three primary roles players were expected to play. First, players must fill the role of an active participant in the game. This role required players to play the game, interact with other players, and follow general guidelines for behavior. Players were also expected to contribute to the game's social, political, and economic aspects, energetic play, and interaction.

Players fill their second role by being part of a quest or group. Many guild Web sites provided information for specific classes of players. This information was designed to help players learn their role when questing in a group. Two of the most debated roles were those of warriors and priests. Some said the role of the warrior was to absorb hits so other players can attack, while others said the role was to hit as much as possible. Non-priests said the role of the priest is to heal, while some priests said their role was to lead and maintain control. Regardless of which interpretation is correct, each person had a role to fill in a group. When players move into new groups, their roles may change. The community documents discussed how to determine roles through clear expectations and conversation.

Finally, players must fulfill the role of guild member. Most guild Web sites had rules that are designed to build respect and trust among members of the guild. Common themes included contributing knowledge and help to the guild, positively representing the guild at all times, and recruiting only top-notch players. Guild leaders were expected to clearly define expectations so members would know how to contribute, represent the guild, and recruit.

*Rules.* Nearly every guild website included rules of some sort. Two common types of rules included rules for interaction and rules for behavior. Common rules for interaction included:

- Do not beg
- Work together whenever possible
- Positively represent the guild
- Do not use racist, sexist, or harassing language
- Help other guild members
- Congratulate fellow guild members
- Use language everyone can understand
- Do not cheat

Rules for behavior were designed to foster a collaborative and supportive community. One guild wrote, “We want to foster a good group, ‘family’ feeling, and will not defer to name-calling or rude behavior” (Guild I). Common rules for behavior include:

- Respect all other players
- Act with integrity, honor, and maturity
- Have a sense of humor
- Have fun
- Do not excessively swear or cuss
- Interact with other players
- Participate in the game

Heavy role-playing or militaristic guilds were often very creative with their rules. Rules for two such guilds were called “Code of Conduct,” “Official Code,” and “Articles of Justice.” One militaristic guild even had rules for “executing a court martial,” which were used when a player broke one of the “Articles of Justice” (Guild A). Regardless of how formal or informal rules were, they were designed to clearly define the expectations of the group and to create a shared set of values. One guild website concluded, “We take our game seriously, understanding that without commitment, hard work, coordination,

determination, with willingness to listen and learn, that progression and experiencing all the game has to offer is not possible” (Guild V).

*Rituals and events.* To build community and foster interaction, *World of Warcraft* has a number of events and holidays. The *World of Warcraft* Game Manual and website comprised details about these events and holidays on an event calendar and included information about how players can interact with one another and have fun. One of these holidays is called Noblegarden. This event was similar to Easter. During Noblegarden, players dressed up in formal clothes and hide items in eggs. The purpose of this holiday was to “bring communities together to share the joy of life and friendship” (*World of Warcraft* Official Website).

For New Year’s Eve, players shot fireworks, drank, danced, and kissed a fellow traveler. Another event was the Harvest Festival, which is similar to Memorial Day. “Every year, members of the Horde and Alliance set aside time to honor the memories of the fallen and pay tribute to those whose memories are held most dear” (*World of Warcraft* Official Website).

In addition to game sponsored events, many guilds also held events for its guild members. According to the guild Web sites, guild events were designed to bring people together and spur interaction. Some of the highlighted events included weddings, funerals, storytelling contests, meetings, races, dance parties, fashion shows, leveling contests, duels, and snowball fights.

Finally, guilds encouraged members to share their thoughts and personal work with other members of the guild. Some guild Web sites have libraries that include member-submitted photos, videos of important events, comics, stories, artwork, jokes,

histories, and profiles of in-game and real-world players. These items allowed members to contribute to the guild and helped build a sense of community outside of the game.

#### *Relation to Research Questions*

The results of the document analysis addressed all four research questions to some degree. The document analysis protocol was designed to address the first three research questions and data gathered directly address all three questions. The information collected from the document analysis will be combined with the information collected through observation and interviews to answer the first three research questions.

The fourth research question was not thoroughly addressed through document analysis since the question is asking for evidence of learning through experience and communities of practice. Regardless, data collected through document analysis will be combined with the data collected from observations and interviews to answer the fourth research question.

#### *Interviews*

The interview section includes the results and their relation to the research questions. The results are broken into categorical areas including general, guild structure, experiential learning, communities of practice, and subjective culture. Each category is then broken down into themes.

#### *Results*

Interviews were recorded using the interview questions (see Appendix H). The questions were constructed using the results of the observations and document analysis. Potential interviewees were determined using the Interview Selection Criteria on

Appendix G. Twenty-two players were contacted and nine responded indicating their willingness to be interviewed over email. However, only six players actually completed the interviews; the remaining three withdrew from the study. The interview questions were delivered via email. The questions were divided into five categories: general, guild structure, culture, experiential learning, and communities of practice.

### *General*

This category included questions about how long guild leaders had played *World of Warcraft*, how long they had been part of the guild, and why they created and remained part of their respective guilds.

*Length of play.* The interview participants were asked how long they had been playing *World of Warcraft*. The answers ranged from 4 months to almost 3 years. The guild leader who had been playing the longest began during beta testing in the summer of 2004.

*Time in guild.* When asked how long they have been part of the guild that they currently lead, all of the interviewees said since October or November 2006. The Blackwater Raiders server began early October 2006 and the guild leader of Guild V stated, “The guild was created a day after the opening of the Blackwater Raiders server.”

*Creator and member of guild.* The third question had two parts. The interviewees were asked why they created their respective guilds and why they are still members. Guild leader O created his or her current guild because his or her previous guild was banned for not following the rules. She or he made this guild in compliance with the game rules. Guild leader B’s answer is interesting because his or her guild no

longer exists. She or he created the guild to be better than previous guild experiences, but recruitment for the guild did not go as planned.

Guild leaders A and R said that they wanted to make their own guild and they continued because as leaders, they were responsible to stay active. Guild leader A simply wrote, "I made it! :P." Guild leaders C and V created their respective guilds because they were frustrated with past guild experiences. Guild leader V wrote, "In the past I found leadership in raid guilds to be overly demanding and lacking respect for the members. I'm still a member because for the most part, the guild hasn't disappointed me and the members are people whose company I enjoy."

Guild leader B reflected that during recruitment, she or he had three very different groups of people join the guild. One group had a very casual and fun approach, whereas the second group included very experienced and competitive people. The last group included a small core of players who were arrogant and rude. One member of the third group had complete disregard for the guilds norms. During an important quest, this person went "AFK" to go to McDonalds and take a shower. This behavior is considered highly inconsiderate and he was warned about it on a number of previous occasions. Ultimately, the guild failed because there was not a common goal or purpose for all group members to follow and because of inconsiderate members who did not adhere to the guild's expected norms and behaviors.

### *Guild Structure*

Four questions were asked of each interviewee in regards to guild structure. They included questions about guild rules, consequences for not following guild rules, guild organization, and rules for progression within the guild.

*Guild rules.* When asked what rules and expectations members of their respective guilds must adhere to, most interviewees provided very similar answers. Guild leaders C, O, R, and V talked about showing respect for the game and fellow members, having fun, no harassing, and to playing fairly. Guild leader V responded that his or her main rule was “just to enjoy your time without ruining the experience for others.” Guild leader B agreed with these rules but added a couple more. Members of guild B were also required to act courteously and thoughtfully, positively represent the guild at all times, and provide a comfortable environment for all players. The most important rule for guild B was that all members must understand and believe that “improving all of our members improves the guild as a whole. We expect all members to work together and to help each other whenever possible.”

Guild leader A had similar answers but because this guild was a heavy role-playing, militaristic guild, the rules provided were very formal. The guild leader listed off six rules, each of which was also published on the guilds website. First, “you will perform your duties in a quick, effective, and precise manner.” Second, because the guild was militaristic, all members were required to follow the orders of the superior officer without question. “If a member has any problem with orders from a superior officer, they should attempt to complete them anyways and post afterwards in the General’s Office.” The third guild A rule was to always play honorably and uphold the name of the guild at all times. The fourth and fifth rules pertained to role-playing. When talking to other players of the game, players were required to role-play at all times. However, when talking within the guild, players are free to speak out of character. Finally, if guild members had questions or problems about the guild, they must direct them to the Lord

General, General, or Lord Captains. The guild's "Articles of Justice" detailed additional rules such as how to handle mutiny, sedition, larceny, misbehavior before the enemy, contempt, insubordination, and conduct unbecoming.

*Consequences for not following rules.* The fifth interview question asked what happened when guild rules or expectations were not followed. Guild A had militaristic rules spelled out in their "Articles of Justice." Essentially, offenders were court-martialed and an appropriate punishment was imposed after the trial was over. Punishment could include probation, community work, and banishment from the guild. Guilds B and O simply removed people from the guild who did not follow the rules. The leader of guild B said, "I kicked a number of players for severe infractions, but tried to be fair to those with lesser issues, handling it on a case-by-base basis."

Guilds A, C, R, and V all had very similar responses. When members of these guilds did not follow the rules, the guild leader talked with the offender and decided punishment on a case-by-case basis. If the offender continued to ignore the rules, they were asked to leave the guild. The leader of guild R wrote, "Should the problem persist, the offender is removed in order that their lack of attention to the rules does not adversely affect those around him/her."

*Guild organization.* The sixth interview question focused on the organization of each guild. Every guild had some sort of hierarchy with ranks assigned to each member. In addition, every guild had a small core of guild officers to manage the guild and insure that the guild ran smoothly. These officers also were expected to help fellow guild members, answer questions, lead quests, and apply discipline. Guild V and guild A took opposite approaches to guild organization. Guild V took a laid back approach. Guild

leader V wrote, “We don’t have a complicated rank system for the sake of having one. No large meetings. No extra garbage for members to put up with. We try and create a stress-free environment for our members so when they logon to play, they don’t have to worry about such rubbish.” On the other hand, guild leader A had a complex guild structure. Being a militaristic guild, each rank had military ranks like hoplite, dragoon, sergeant, lieutenants, lord captain, general, and lord general. Only by following the rules of the guild, proving worth to superior officers, and serving one’s time, respect, and dedication to the guild could a member move up through the ranks of the guild.

*Rules for progression.* For the seventh question, guild leaders were asked how prospective members could gain membership to the guild and how they could progress. Each of the guilds had an application process where prospective guild members completed a guild application and, in some cases, had an entrance interview. Upon admittance, each guild had a trial period for new members. This allowed both the guild and the new member to determine whether the relationship would work. After approximately one or two weeks, the new member was promoted to a full member of the guild.

Guilds A and V were similar in their recruitment because both guilds wanted members who fit in the guild and who supported the mission of the guild. The leader of guild V wrote, “We take our time with recruitment as it’s a very vital part to a successful, long-standing, enjoyable guild.” Guild leader A’s philosophy was very similar. Because the guild was a heavy role-playing, militaristic guild, recruits must enjoy this atmosphere. As a result, the guild leadership spent a lot of time upfront insuring that new recruits

understood the rules and expectations. Any person who was not comfortable with the guild's environment was not invited to continue.

Progression in guilds B, C, O, R, and V was based on player level, involvement in the guild, compliance with guild rules and expectations, and exhibition of drive to improve the guild. As mentioned under question six, progression in guild A was determined by one following the rules of the guild, proving worth to superior officers, and serving one's time, respect, and dedication to the guild.

### *Culture*

Guild leaders were asked seven questions related to culture. They included questions about guild goal or purpose, values, conflict resolution, roles, expectations, guild activities, and difficulties with guild members.

*Guild goal or purpose.* Each guild leader was then asked what was the goal or purpose of his or her guild and whether members were expected to follow it. Every guild had a goal or purpose but each was slightly different. The goal of guild A was to "Defend the alliance and listen to your superiors on the battlefield. Of course you're expected to follow it. =P." Guilds B and C aimed to reach end-game raiding and participating in organized group quests. In addition, guild C also recognized individual goals and supported individual member pursuits.

The goal of guild O was to make friends and have fun. While the goal of guild R was also to have a good time, they also wanted to create an atmosphere conducive to members helping one another. Guild leader O not only asked his or her members to adhere to the guild's goal, she or he also tried to lead by example. Finally, guild V's goal was to enjoy playing the game without involving personal drama into game play.

According to guild leader V, this goal had been successful since very few people left the guild.

*Values.* When asked what values each of the leaders hold regarding the guild, its members, and *World of Warcraft*, the two most common answers were respect and trust. The leader of guild C wrote, “Respect is above all else, Respect yourself, your guildmates, and the community. The social contract still exists in an MMO and people (particularly younger ones, I think) need to realize that being separated by great distances isn’t an excuse to act like an idiot.” The leader of guild V emphasized this as well, “I find it no different than a drama club at your school, a gentleman’s hockey team, or a walking club for couples. We’re all people, not characters, and the same type of behavior should be exhibited just like it would be expected if we were all in the same room. Courtesy and respect should not be left outside the computer.”

In addition to trust and respect, guild A’s leader also emphasized being the best one can be and working very hard to maintain the guild’s status as one of the best role-playing guilds on the server. Guild B’s leader emphasized the importance of being good, honorable people who have fun. “I value good gameplay as well; a person who runs around like an idiot getting the party killed is not a good thing.” Not acting like an idiot applies not only to questing, but also to interacting with other players in the game.

*Conflict resolution.* Question ten referred to resolving conflict between guild members. Every guild leader said that minor conflict should be resolved between the involved parties, but major conflict required an officer to intervene. It was expected that conflict be resolved in a civil manner. When members were not civil, guild leader O

wrote, “I tell them to shut the fuck up or get demoted or removed. And take it off the guild (chat) channel because I don’t want to hear it.”

Being a militaristic guild, the leader of guild A had a more detailed description. She or he wrote, “In extreme circumstances there will be a triumvirate for an officer disagreement, but if it is less than officer ranking, a court will be held composed of a jury of non-officers and me as the judge. Thankfully, most disagreements were not serious and could be handled outside of the formal triumvirate or judge/jury processes.”

*Roles.* This question asked each leader to discuss what roles guild members were expected to fill. Guild V had no requirements. Guild A expected members to defend the alliance and listen to orders from superior officers. Guild B’s leader stated that guild members were free to spend time as they please so long as they did not disrupt the play of others. However, the guild officers were expected to maintain the guild and encourage its growth. The leader of guild C said, “The only expectation from our guild is to fill the role of an active raider. Show up, show up on time, show up with consumables (potions and the like).” Guilds O and R simply asked members to have fun, be fair, help other guildmates, and “contribute to the overall well-being of the guild.”

*Expectations.* Question twelve asked the guild leaders to detail how guild members were expected to behave and interact with one another. Guild A’s leader wrote, “Respect, respect, respect. On the battlefield there will be Sir’s to higher ranking members, and there will be no questioning their orders. If they say jump over that tree, we expect them to say ‘Only 1?’” Leader C stated that guild members were expected to behave “like they would with any other person outside of the game. Learn the strats

(strategies), play nice, share the rewards.” Guild leaders B, O, R, and V all stated that their guild members must behave respectfully, maturely, civilly, and light-heartedly.

*Guild activities.* Each of the guild leaders was then asked to describe what activities their guilds did as a group. Being a heavy role-playing guild, guild leader A stated that his or her guild held a number of role-playing events. Guild A coordinated large-scale role-playing events in an effort to make it worth the time and effort of all those who attend. Guild B held a few guild events and meetings in an effort to play with one another and have fun. The guild leaders of guilds C, O, and R stated that they did a number of events including raiding, questing, player vs. player (PvP), and instances. The focus of these events was to play with one another and to enjoy the community. Guild V had guild events twice a week and encouraged its members to run instances and compete in PvP. In addition, the guild leader created a number of contests for guild members. Members participated together and the winner earned a prize from guild leadership.

*Difficulties with guild members.* Question fourteen asked what types of difficulties the guild leaders encountered with other guild members. Guild leaders A and V stated that they have very few problems. Guild leader V wrote, “Not to sound all Partridge Family, but in our 4 months I wouldn’t be able to fill one hand when counting the amount of problems we’ve had with members. A couple to three miscommunications have occurred but that’s a byproduct of not having any tone or body language when reading text. But matters are usually dissolved within moments of them happening. We’ve been very fortunate but we believe a large contributing factor is our recruitment policy and hand picking every member.”

Guild B has had a number of problems, which ultimately led to the guild's demise. The guild leader wrote, "Being a guildmaster is like being someone's priest. They (guild members) will constantly look to you for advice and guidance." Guild leader C said that most difficulties arose out of laziness, petty concerns, or squabbles. Some members constantly sought help from the guild instead of putting the smallest amount of effort into whatever they need. Guild leaders O and R reiterated this frustration. The neediness of some members and the unwillingness of some members to help one another were the most common problems in their respective guilds.

### *Experiential Learning*

Interviewees were asked five questions on the subject of experiential learning. Question topics included learning to become a member of the guild, learning to play the game and interact with others, mentoring, formal learning opportunities, and role-playing.

*Learning to become a member of the guild.* When asked how they learned to be members of their guilds, guild leaders A, C, and V stated that they did not learn to be a member of their guild because they created their guilds. However, they helped guild members learn the rules and expectations of their respective guilds. Guild leader O reiterated this, but added that expectations changed through feedback from guild members. The guild officers listened to what people had to say and gave them honest opinions. Although unlikely, rules and expectations can change as a result.

Leaders B and R learned how to be members of their guild through trial and error. Both leaders were members of previous guilds and learned what to do and what not to do through their participation in those guilds. Guild leader R wrote, "Trial and error. I've been a member of other guilds, things that didn't work, or were too rigid. I've tried very

hard to support our players with a fair, flexible system.” Essentially, this guild leader saw systems that did not work. They then applied principles learned from those experiences to the creation of guild R.

*Learning how to play and interact.* Question sixteen asked how each guild leader learned to play *World of Warcraft* and interact with other players. Leaders A and V learned through playing other MMOGs. Both had played a number of games prior to playing *World of Warcraft* and were able to apply what they learned from those games to the new environment. In terms of interacting with other players, guild leader V wrote, “Interacting is part of ones character and comes easily to some people compared to others. The lack of tone and body language combined with next to zero understanding of the people you come into contact with, a positive outlook helps and keeping the assumptions to a minimum also makes things easier.”

The leader of guild C also learned from previous experience, but had an interesting story to tell.

I first gained access to the internet when I was much younger, around the age of 15. I started off on chat sites, and was actually one of those annoying kids who posts to harass people and piss them off, or draw them into debate \*blush\*. It was funny then. I guess as I matured I realized that acting like an idiot online is not the most fun thing a kid can do. You could call that social training for the internet. Some years later I ended up on a website for aspiring writers, where I became a moderator, and that was probably when I came to adopt my view of how people should interact and what's acceptable in a community so far as chat goes. As for learning to play the game, I've been a gamer since about ten years old and most of them come easily to me, particularly RPG games. I played Dark Age of Camelot before *World of Warcraft*, so I suppose you could say that was where I became familiar with the mechanics of an MMO.

This experience detailed how the leader learned through continued experience and how his or her actions and interactions changed over time.

Leader R learned to play *World of Warcraft* in a community of real-life friends. “A real, active support system is very important to the overall enjoyment of the game. Struggling is NOT fun; we try to help when we can and give guildies the support they need to enjoy *World of Warcraft*.” On the other hand, guild leaders B and O learned how to play on their own. Since they both joined the game upon the creation of the server, there were few people to help them. Guild leader O wrote, “Everything I learned was through doing it myself, which is quite hard. I wish I had the help that people get now on the server.”

*Mentoring.* Next, each guild leader was asked whether higher level guild members mentored or showed lower level members how to play the game. The leaders of guilds B, C, O, R, and V all exclaimed that some level of mentoring does occur in each of their guilds. Higher level members who already experienced aspects of the game often provide advice, answer questions, and help with quests and instances. However, lower level players had to be conscientious when asking higher level players for help and be respectful when a higher level player is busy. The leader of guild A agreed with the other guild leaders, but added that mentoring not only occurred when a higher level player mentored a lower level player. “It is not uncommon to see an experienced hoplite (low-level) showing a lieutenant how it’s done.”

*Formal opportunities to learn.* Question eighteen addressed whether opportunities existed for new members of the guild to learn class or profession skills. Every guild leader emphasized that more senior members of the guild helped less experienced members of the guild by answering questions and providing advice. Leader

R stated, “We do try to mentor our lower level guildies. We offer create, constructive suggestions where needed or requested.”

In addition to mentoring lower level guildies, leader V added, “With our great membership it’s just a constant flow of conversations and information. It’s very much an open door policy for any questions someone has. We also have forums set up for new member questions and class specific forums for questions that pertain to their class.”

Guild C had a similar forum setup for each class and profession. However, guild C also relied on the *World of Warcraft* website to provide members with information about each class and profession.

*Role-playing.* Each guild leader was then asked if role-playing occurred and if so, whether opportunities existed for newer members to learn how to role-play. Half of the guild leaders responded that their guilds were not role-playing guild, though they did not discourage their members from role-playing. Being a heavy role-playing guild, guild A had formal role-playing classes for new members. Class participants learned by observing an experienced guild member role-playing. Both guilds O and V also encouraged role playing and their respective leaders were willing to teach incoming members how to role-play. Leader V wrote, “I try and share with people who are new to role-playing some basics and lending the understanding that we all have to start somewhere, to make them feel more comfortable.”

### *Communities of Practice*

The last three questions guild leaders were asked were related to communities of practice. Questions in this category revolved around reflective analysis, mutual respect and trust, and guild knowledge and information.

*Reflective analysis.* When asked whether they discussed quests upon completion to determine if the quest could have been done better, only one guild leader said no. Leaders B, O, and V said that they thought about what happened only if there was a glaring mistake and then tried a different approach next time. Guild leaders C and R took a more reflective approach. Both said they thought about the experiences often and made adjustments the next time around. The leader of guild R wrote, “Oh yes, definitely. And when I do the quest again with friends, an alt, or to help a guildie, I always try to put those considerations into action.”

*Mutual respect and trust.* Next, guild leaders were asked whether they believed mutual trust and respect existed between guild members. Every leader responded with yes, but some with hesitation. While guild leader B wrote, “Not uniformly. Some people are not very good and friendly and such.” Guild leader R wrote, “It is the foundation our guild is built on.” Guild leader C added, “I think that there could be stronger bonds between our current members, but we’ve had many members come and go for personal or professional reasons over the course of the guild’s existence. Because of this, many of the members have only known each other for weeks instead of months, and it often takes time to forge trust, if not respect.”

*Guild knowledge and information.* The last interview question asked each leader whether there was a location for accumulated guild knowledge and information. All the interviewees responded that some level of knowledge and information were stored on their respective guild Web sites, though some Web sites were more comprehensive than others. For those guilds with less information on their website, guild members often

searched for information on Web sites like Thottbot.com, Allakhazam.com, and WoWWiki.com.

Guild A, O, R, and V had forums setup on their Web sites that allowed their guild members to post information about completed quests that had been done, interactions, and advice for other members of the guild. The leader of guild V wrote, “We have forums members are free to use, with a multitude of topics included. Information flows freely and it doesn’t take long to find something out. Usually someone else knows already or knows where to find the answer.”

#### *Relation to Research Questions*

The results of the interviews addressed all four research questions to some degree. The interview questions were designed using data from the observations and document analysis. These questions focused on addressing the first three research questions. The information collected from the interviews will be combined with the information collected through observation and document analysis to answer the first three research questions.

The fourth research question was also addressed through the interviews, though indirectly. There were many noted comments where respondents suggested learning subjective culture through experiential learning and communities of practice. The data collected through interviews will be combined with the data collected from observations and document analysis to answer the fourth research question.