

Guilds in World of Warcraft: A Community of Practice

Yong Ming Kow
UC Irvine
ykow@uci.edu

Ruy Cervantes
UC Irvine
ruy@uci.edu

Satyajit Das
UC Irvine
satyajid@uci.edu

Dwight Lee
UC Irvine
dwightl@uci.edu

Joel Ossher
UC Irvine
josshe@uci.edu

Abstract

Guilds in World of Warcraft are analyzed as a form of Community of Practice (CoP). Four dualities: participation vs reification, identification versus negotiation, local versus global, and design versus emergent, were observed. However, there are dynamics within and between guilds that cannot be explained by principles of CoP. For example, there are reasons that players join or leave a guild, and transfer between guilds. According to CoP, “*identity served as a pivot between the social and the individual,*” yet there exist a space between guilds, where individuals have distinct intensions not conferred by a situated identity. Using Activity Theory, we explained the phenomena using a multi-level analysis, and not just within the middle level. We argued that within the context of inter-community research, CoP needs to be reframed by addressing intentionality of human actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) are taking the shape of new computerization movement in virtual communities. Brown and Bell [3] observed that multiplayer games are one of the most collaborative and popular computer-based applications, with appreciative audiences all over the world. They also feature new and surprisingly complex forms of online social organization, making these environments something of a giant social laboratory of collaboration and development. In this paper we describe the diverse activities of collaboration in the guilds of World of Warcraft in the frame of Community of Practice.

This analysis adopts Wenger’s definition of a community of practice (CoP) and examines it within a massively multiplayer online game - World of Warcraft. CoP provides a sound structure to understand social characteristics of WoW. In specific, CoP provides a structure to understand groups in WoW, called guilds, and their evolution within the game. However, there are certain dynamics of guilds that cannot be explained with the framework of community of practice. We will explain in these shortcomings and show how a social historical perspective could overcome them.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 World of Warcraft

2.1.1 General Description

In World of Warcraft (WoW), each player will log on into a server with thousand other players. At any moment, a server hosts approximately 1600 players [16]. There are hundreds of WoW servers around the world. There are more than 10 million active subscribers worldwide, including 2 million in Europe,

more than 2.5 in North America, and approximately 5.5 million in Asia [2]. World of Warcraft is currently available in seven languages.

2.1.2 Basic Game play

In the game, players activities include questing and battlegrounds in addition to crafting, chatting with friends, and trading. Each players create a character with distinctive skill sets, thus collaboration can help to mitigate each others weaknesses. These incentive of grouping is one of the reasons that promotes formation of guilds. An alternative to grouping with guildmates is pickup-groups (PuG). However, these groupings are highly random and with people of different personalities, pleasant game play may be disrupted. Guild provides a consistent collaborative environment.

2.1.3 Guilds

Anyone can setup a guild in WoW. Typically it takes one player to register and in-game signatures from nine other players. Anyone can quit a guild and join another any time. However, one player cannot join more than one guild at a time.

2.1.3.1 Types of Guilds

The guilds can be categorized into three main types that will be discussed in this paper: *startup*, *casual* and *hardcore*. The three main parameters that characterize them are age of the guild, commitment to the guild and maturity of the members.

A start up guild is one that is newly formed, at times with players who know each other outside the game, or with strangers. The members of this guild are mostly lower levels, and their activities are ad-hoc in nature. This category of guilds is characterized as having the least set of rules and norms of conduct in place. A casual guild is typically the one whose members coordinate and perform group activities only a couple of times a week, often on the weekends. The tone of the group is calm and the player interaction is often very relaxed. A hardcore guild on the other hand performs group activities four to five times or more a week. The group is very organized and highly driven to perform many raids and players are pressured to perform well. A great deal of commitment is expected of the members with high frequency of participation in raids and dungeons.

2.2 Community of Practice

A Community of Practice is, “in a nutshell, a group of people who share an interest in a domain of human endeavor and engage in a process of collective learning that creates bonds between them: a tribe, a garage band, a group of engineers working on similar problems” [19]. CoP consists of a content domain, a group (community) of persons interested in this domain and a shared practice to increase the effectiveness of each member in the domain [18](p. 27). They are set apart

from other communities by a special kind of practice, forming a joint enterprise with a mutual engagement to develop a shared repertoire of knowledge and competences (Wenger 2000, p. 208). In 1991, Wenger and Lave described a CoP in terms of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) [20]. In 1998, Wenger extended the definition of a CoP, emphasizing identity and describing it in terms of tension between four dualities [17]. These concepts are described in the following sections.

2.2.1 *Tension between Dualities*

In CoP, the dualities exist as tension between complimentary elements. Each element is defined in the sections below.

2.2.1.1 *Participation vs. Reification*

Wenger's framework of CoP is based on the idea that the participation/reification duality is the foundation of the negotiation of meaning within communities. Negotiation of meaning can be understood as the permanent process by which members negotiate the meaning of their common activity. This continuous interaction historically and contextually grounded gradually leads to the development of the group identity and is core to this emergence [17].

In this process, participation is a social process corresponding to the identifiable commitment of individuals into the group. It includes action and connection and is thus a direct determinant of the achievement of the task(s) by the members who are doing together.

Reification is both a process and the result of a process, by which community members give sense to their experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thingness". [17](p. 58). Reification is thus both connected to the construction of objects and the projection of meaning that result in the 'excessive concreteness' [17](p. 59) that emerges when: 'We project our meanings into the world and then we perceive them as existing in the world, as having a reality.' [17](p. 58). Reifications can serve as 'proof' of the existence of this community – and are thus contributing to identity building and consolidating the relationships between members.

2.2.1.2 *Identification vs. Negotiation*

"We identify with a community and conversely recognized as a member of the community" [17](p. 191). Identification is providing experiences and material for building identities through an investment of the self in relations of association and differentiation. Negotiability refers to the ability, facility and legitimacy to contribute to take responsibility for and shape the meanings that matter within the social configuration

2.2.1.3 *Local vs. Global*

Many communities of practice co-exist together. These CoPs in turn form a larger, global community of practice, all which share a common ground or goal, although less specific. Each of these communities of practice have specific needs and requirements.

These may not be shared by any other communities of practice, and may be even be harmful to other communities. Thus, it is impossible to design a single structure that can satisfy every CoP. In fact, if a structure like this is imposed, it will be harmful to CoPs within a larger community. In the development of communities of practice, local and global

restrictions must be considered together. As best stated by Wenger, "no community can fully design the learning of another, and no community can fully design its own learning" [17](p. 234).

2.2.1.4 *Designed vs. Emergent*

As with many designs, the actual output is different than planned. In software, buildings, research projects, there are always unexpected issues that arise, causing results to stray from the expected. Communities of practice are not an exception.

Like any group of people, a CoP requires a structure to be able to coordinate and move towards a common goal. However, behavior and responses to design often emerge that are not intended. These newly emerged characteristics now must be incorporated into the structure of community of practice.

"Practice is ultimately produced by members through the negotiation of meaning. The result is that, as an emergent structure, practice is at once highly perturbable and highly resilient" [17](p. 233). In this duality, the tension exists in the fact that you must have structure in a community for it to function properly and in an orderly manner. This designed structure will inevitably create emergent behavior (that is not a result of the design) that must be incorporated into the design of the structure.

This duality explains the response (actual outcome) to a design, and the fact that design is produced and manipulated by this response.

3. DATA

In this section we will present observations of three different types of guilds: start-up, casual, and hardcore. Our objective is to compare the practice and organization of the different guilds.

3.1 Methodology

We did a case study on development of casual guild [8] [13], and participant observation and ethnographic interviews. We adopted a different way of studying each type of guild. Considerations include accessibility to users and depth of data.

For casual guild, we are able to directly observe guild activities because we have access to an established casual guild and know people who played WoW. The established guild is situated in the pacific, thereby comprises mostly of Australian, New Zealanders, and some from US, EU, and Singapore. The private guild comprises of US and EU players. In total, 4 in-depth interviews, multiple ad-hoc interviews, and sixty hours of observations were made.

Direct access to a hardcore guild is not practically feasible, since they are for members only and one has to pass through a process of selection. To gain access to them and collect our data we relayed to an American hardcore WoW player, that here on we will refer as our "informant." He was playing World of Warcraft for almost two years. In this time he formed part of one of the top ranking guilds in the US. We interviewed him extensively and conducted observations when he went on line. We also analyzed videos from Hardcore Guilds raids that its members capture when playing. In addition we studied the public on line forums that two different guilds have on the web.

These forums serve as means of communication among members the same guild.

3.2 Facets of a Guild

For the sake of clarity before proceed to our case studies we must say that casual and hardcore guild share two commonalities. Firstly they share a sense of socialization. And secondly they support progression in their members. In a casual guild, the former is stronger, while in a hardcore guild, the latter has more prevalence. These two dimensions are critical to the cohesion and dynamics of guild activities.

In a guild with strong socialization, members are expected of understanding and tolerance to other members. For example, if other members are not available to help them, they should gracefully look for strangers as alternatives. Also, members sometimes chat about their families and recent events. Therefore, the environment is less stressful and demanding.

In a progression guild, guild members raise their expectation of themselves and others. They wanted better items and wanted to their guild to be among the best. The latter is judged online in some website based [15] on the number of raids they successfully completed and rare items gained. Additionally, they also expected more of others, in terms of skills, frequency of participation, and consistency.

By varying the two facets, guild norms and how they carry out their activities can differ significantly. In some ways, the two are inversely related. The more guild policies and demands were enforced, the less accommodating a guild becomes. However, the more accommodating a guild is, less is imposed on the performance of its members.

3.3 Casual Guilds

3.3.1 Start-ups

Start-up guilds have few to no maximum level players. They are also relatively quiet with less participation. Most of their members were questing individually or work in small ad-hoc groups. Furthermore, few in the guild can help them with difficult quests due to limited number of higher level members.

Guild sizes in WoW average around 16.8 members. This implies that start-up guilds form the majority of guilds in World of Warcraft [14]. From Dunbar's assertion, they would not have any cohesive activity that demands the time for being a group. In fact lower level players can choose to remain individualistic as a netizen commented in a forum:

"WoW is incredibly solo-friendly - you never need to group to get to level 60, and even some endgame content is accessible such as the PvP Battlegrounds."

3.3.2 An Element of Trust

Why do players then join guilds before level 60? A possible reason is the trust that a guild offers.

Linnex sent a message to the whole guild, "Can anyone disenchant?"

"I can," replied Jordy half a minute later.

"Mind if I send you a bag full of greens to be disenchant? :P"

"What do you need for 69 items?"

"Nothing."

Disenchanting magical items in WoW transforms them from useless items into shards, dusts, and other magical ingredients. These ingredients are worth as much or more than the original items. However, giving them to a stranger can be risky in that you may not get it back. In this case, it's a perfect scenario to look for someone you already know in a guild.

To a player known as XEngineer, guilds offer faster upgrades of items, which are the most important element of the game:

"Get gear for your level... mainly weapons... the faster you kill something the faster you get more done."

Even within the exchanges and opportunities you can get from a guild, it's driven by a reason. XEngineer reason was that it provided the ability to gain experience faster and ultimately level up faster.

Trizter's purpose is different. Trizter belongs to a guild of 66 players. He is the highest member at level 64. In fact, they do not raid, he is not the leader, and he's just *"helping the low guys out."* In fact, it takes people like Trizter to keep a non-raiding guild going. To have a sense of belonging, higher level guild members help out the lower levels and bond people.

3.3.3 Establishing Culture

After items, hunting, and knowledge, another consideration for setting up and joining guild is the environment that it offers. As one guild master, DragonKin, explained:

"I could not find a guild that had a real feel to it. Especially one for adults. No begging, no stupid time wasting issues and most of all a friendly respectful environment for people to cooperate together... So I started one."

DragonKin is not alone, we met another player called Reindoor, whom explained why he has not joint a guild even though he is nearing high level contents:

"Just haven't found one I like yet, decent casual guilds can be hard to find."

Today, DragonKin's guild has become a stable guild of 188 members. Many of its members have characters that have reached the maximum level in the game and can go into high level content. However, this has not come easy as he recounted:

"It was very very hard for 6 months... (when it first started) everyone was welcome, I had no choice, was either that or fail... At an early stage the people in the guild are very important."

It was only after a while did Dragonkin feels comfortable enough to start enforcing guild policies to improve the strength of the guild. However, he still invited anyone to join the guild. It wasn't until the guild topped 100 members that he began to change the strategy:

"Start to be tough on members that are idiots and removed them. I had more members, and the goods one left for nicer guilds. So I chose to get rid of these members."

At the last stage of a startup guild's development, a structure within the guild emerges. There are clear policies and other players begin to help with daily management:

“When I set up a recruitment system and good officers to run the show. This is when we could choose who we wanted or not.”

This continued until the operations are normalized into a clear and efficient system:

“Strong organization. Good reliable recruitment policy, which in turn requires less disciplinary involvement. Also keeps all the good people in. People now want to join us. So we pick who we want. Very important to say that we have the same values as day 1: To be respectful.”

The values of DragonKin’s guild echoed from Chemistri, who reinforced its value:

“And then the guild takes me on hunts and lets me keep all drops ... so I sell a lot in Auction Houses,” Says XEngineer

“How nice.”

“Well we do rock!!” said Chemistri, who companied XEngineer in some of his hunts.

When the culture is established, members of the guild automatically reinforce their beliefs and practices. Since DragonKin’s guild is a mature guild, members are expected to be polite. This expectation is enforced by several members when one broke the rule:

Stormsend, “Ding! 70!” Stormsend reaches the maximum possible level.

Several members, “Gratz Stormsend!” “YAY” “gratz” “gratzx” “well done”

*Then Domina lashes, “GRATZ on you ding.....” blah blah blah” *yawn*.im just so excitedzzz...”*

Some greetings continues for a while, until Restoric commented on Domina, “I hate that message Domina”

Domina did not get it.

Restoric, “no, really i really think is ... You know you don’t have to say anything when some one dings ... so if you are going to say something why don’t make it something nice.”

Domina, apologetically, “dude its a jokeyou get so many dings that you have to make it funny or it gets boringso its staying”

After several exchanges, Wisserhoof, an older and respected member, tried to reconcile the differences.

“Hmm missed that comment, yes i agree not great form. Sorry, but I think we’d all agree 70 is a big deal not only for the player but for the guild... hmm missed that comment, yes I agree not great form. Anyway u said it was a joke, that’s cool. But please be a little more thoughtful next time☺”

In WoW, getting to level 70 takes a lot of effort and time. It was estimated by experienced players that it would take 14 straight days of relentless playing to level a character to level 70. For a casual gamer, it would take months. In a matured guild, such comments are not acceptable by most. In the example, Domina did not totally agree with the group and said she will talk to DragonKin. Nonetheless, it is a clear example of culture at work.

3.4 Transformation from Startup to Raid

Two things are unclear. One, how does high level contents mitigate the formation of the last stage within a guild. It is possible that the need for more organized activities helped the guild to develop clearer and more efficient systems. Or do mature guilds develop an appetite for high level contents? Since DragonKin’s guild started raiding soon after it became fully matured, these two events were hard to uncouple.

However, we can identify activities related to this crucial stage. In the cities, we can often hear recruitment calls for players who are over level 65. An interview was conducted with the caller:

“Not enough 70s?”

“Nah... need more ... wanna start kara but need more attuned people first” (Attunement refers to a series of quests or items a player has to obtain before one can join a Kara raid)

“Oh I see ... what qualification?”

“At the moment we’re just looking for anything or anyone that will join... “

“How many 70s do you have?”

“Two at the moment.”

Such recruitments are common. In 30 minutes, eight recruitment calls were heard.

Casual gamers reportedly play 2-3 times a week, mostly on the weekends. Casual guilds are large, appearing to have around 200 members and wide range of memberships. There are typically few restrictions. One criterion might be that a player must be 18 years old and mature. Another might be that the new members must have a certain skill set to fill in a shortage within the guild, all which do not enforce heavy demands. The number of maximum level players in casual guilds varies, ranging anywhere from three and up. Guilds are central to raids because even to casual gamers, raids are non-trivial affairs. Raids includes: (1) Organizing a time where everyone meet and have enough time to complete the session, (2) Synchronizing mods so that players have access to key information and are able to communicate through voice, (3) Building understanding and team work, and (4) Ensuring all participants are fitted with some of the best equipments.

Members of casual guilds raid a couple times a week. There is typically one member leading the group through battles and each member of the raid is very aware of their role and does not step out of the role. Items that are dropped during a raid are divided among the group. Although there is a fairly complex mechanism for deciding who gets what items, members are fairly relaxed about this issue.

“I’ll probably get something good sooner or later, but it’s annoying when you get nothing after a few raids.”

During a raid, mistakes are accepted and ways to improve are discussed. The feeling during a raid is fairly intense. In addition, although there is an obligation to complete a raid with your guild once you have started, this too was not extremely strict.

During a raid we participated, we are allowed to play as a member in the raid because a player needed to take a break. Although some discontent and mumbling was heard, the raid group did not seem to care. In fact members of the raid "winked" at us for healing them!

3.4.1 Virtual-Real World Dichotomy

Throughout the game, there are reasons to believe that many gamers chose a casual guild to balance the activities between the virtual and real world. Jessika recently graduated and started work. She no longer found it possible to keep all three high level characters:

Jessika, "Hehe I have like...3 bigger chars so... I have a 70 priest and a 64 warrior."

"Is this your only guild though?"

"Oh yeah! My others aren't guilded"

"Why not?"

"Because I don't have a lot of time to play anymore and when you're a holy priest... people always want you for something"

"I was running Kara but just took up too much time"

"Yeah just started full-time after finished university"

Change of life in the real world required a shift in roles in the virtual world. Not only did Jessika feel pressured by work, her boyfriend, who has been playing with her, was quitting the game. That made her rethinking about her continuation in raids as well.

3.5 Hardcore Guild

3.5.1 Motivation to be in a Hardcore Guild

Around elite status, some players began to see their goals reaching beyond what their guild could offer. They wanted more things from the game, and were willing to work hard for it. Players trying to move to the next stage of playing reportedly played 3-4 hours a day. However, such intensive demands may not be reciprocated in casual guilds. Without equal rigor from their guild mates, there is a limitation to what they can achieve. Therefore they began to negotiate leaving the current guild and joining a hardcore guild.

A hardcore guild are formed by players that want to advance faster in the game, and hence have a commitment for playing more time and skill to be more successful at raiding. From the experience of our expert informant, having "standardized procedures" and a "good management" was a key for guilds to be successful on the game. Managing members to get into raids is somewhat of a logistical challenge. Twenty five members of the guild, sometimes more, had to be online at a specific time and have the next four hour dedicated to the raid. Most of the guilds solve this challenge by setting up fixed days and times for raiding.

Hardcore guilds on the other hand, raid almost every day and have a much smaller number of members, usually between 40 and 70. Being in a hardcore guild gives the member the opportunity for more "raiding." In the words of our informant:

"if you enjoy the raiding part of the game, then you need people that is dedicated as you are."

Successfully completing a raid required a great amount of skill from each individual and coordination from the whole group. Hardcore players want to be with people that can perform at the same level they do, and are really committed to it, that "do well in the game and want to spend all the time playing."

Raiding, being the most challenging part of the game, seemed to be the greatest sources of satisfaction and motivation to continue

playing. Our informant would say that he "liked other parts of the game, but raiding the most." This was the main reason that he had to seek into a top guild.

3.5.2 Moving Guilds

Our informant was disappointed with the performance of his second guild, to which he had been member for nine months. He would feel that they were not willing to raid as much as he wanted. Also the level of skill among the members was uneven. This made successfully completing guilds a rare event.

Referred by a friend, our informant approached to one of the Top 100 performing guilds in the US that we will refer to as "Olympus." After talking with the admissions officer of this guild, our informant decided to quit his old guild and enter into the recruiting process of the new one.

3.5.3 The Admission Process

The admission process into a top Hardcore Guild is quite stringent: a strict set of requirements must be fulfilled in order to apply and afterwards, candidate members must perform a series of tests. The requirements are resumed into two: dedication and be really good at playing a character. Other requirements are that one must have the appropriate gear and "experience" points, all of which can only be gained through extensive playing of the game.

Once the requirements are cleared, a period where the new "recruits" are tested comes into play. In the case we examined this period was close to a month. During this period candidates will demonstrate their abilities and commitment. Recruits would be taken into action and the officers and guild master would rate their performance. After this period of testing, the candidate becomes official member of the guild, and he or she would be consistently taken into the raids.

Despite this stringent period of admission, hardcore guilds experience a great of turnover in their members. As our informant expressed "people cannot sustain that level of playing that much." People constantly leave the guild for various reasons: getting bored of the game; the demands of other roles in "real life" do not allow the players to devote enough time for continuing in the guild, or even personal problems with other members. This way, hardcore guilds would be always will be recruiting.

3.5.4 Structure of the Guild

Given this turnover many guilds disband within months. Those who last longer have a strong "core group" that remains throughout the life-span of the guild. This core group is formed by the Guild Master and his Officers. The Guild Master is the person that first started the guild and retains the privileges of allowing people in and out of the guild. He also tends to be the person that organizes the raids and plan the strategy for them. There is one Officer for each class of players whose main responsibility is to take the complaints and requests from their "subordinates," solve some, and take the most important ones to the Guild Leader. If this structure was not in place, Guild Leaders would be overwhelmed with the quantities of requests from the whole guild.

The hierarchy in Hardcore Guilds is quite strict. The new members of the guild tend to not express their opinions. Officers

would have more flexibility to speak, but they would never comment on problems of the guild in a public forum, and would handle them in private with the Guild Leader. This hierarchy allows the Hardcore Guild to maintain a good amount of discipline during the raids, and the actions of the members tend to reinforce this structure.

3.5.5

The organization of a group of 25 combatants to complete a raid requires a great deal of strategy. The decision of which strategy to follow during raids falls on the "Raid Leader" role, generally taken by the guild master. The Raid Leader has the responsibility of finding in advance of a raid, information about the instances, and decides the specifics of the strategy to follow once there. The role of the officers is to watch that these strategies are followed by their subordinates as dictated by the raid leader.

3.5.6 *The Loots*

There are two main types of systems for allocating loots of a raid. The first type is point based systems: each action performed is counted before hand. The second kind of looting system is based on value judgments made by the officers.

In DKP (Dragon Kill Points) systems, all actions of each combatant are measured from the combat logs and this gives certain points to each user. The resulting points can be used then to buy something from the loot. DKP are in theory an objective measure, but in practice many economical factors make it prone to be exploited.

On the other side we have merit based systems, where looting officer would do a value judgment of the performance of each combatant and the needs of the characters. This system is more straight forward and much less complicated than DKP. Although as our informant said there "could be a little bit more drama" is more expedited and allows the guild to "move on." For this reason it seems to be preferred by many of the top hardcore guilds.

The merit based system requires a great degree of trust in the looting officer of the guild. This trust is developed over time, when he grows a reputation of being a fair person, with clear judgments.

A fair looting system is vital to keep a guild together. The loots are the most visible structure for rewarding players for their time investments. The items make their characters "look cool," and make them more powerful.

3.5.7 *Identity*

In hardcore guilds there is a large sense of identity. The social stature inside of the game would be very high if one belonged to a top performing guild. As our informant said "you feel part of something special." and are held in high regard from other players.

However the identity of a hardcore guild depends heavily on the success they have raiding, they are very tight together. And this becomes very evident when hardcore guilds start to have

problems, and lower their performance. People swiftly start to leave, because as our informant said "there is less of an attachment to the group and is more the attachment to the accomplishments."

Also, the attachment that an individual has to the guild is not very high. He or she knows herself not indispensable. The guilds are small, raiding all the time, and there is always a line of people trying to join. Although, there is a sense of group, there is the feeling that if one leaves, one would be easily replaced. The sense of friendship that is found in less performing guilds is not very strong. Our informant would say that "you are not in the guild because they are all your friends. You are in the guild because you want to raid and get items."

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 **Guilds as Communities of Practice**

In this section, we will visit each duality of CoP and discuss how they manifest in WoW guilds.

4.1.1 *Legitimate Peripheral Participation*

But besides this explicit aspect, newcomers to the game have to work hard to be accepted into the player's community, by acquiring the skills and behaving in the ways that they are expected to. This is process is obvious in the stringent initiation period of the Olympus hardcore guild. Its "recruits" had to gain the respect and trust of the rest of the guild. During the initial period the newcomers get socialized in the explicit and implicit norms and expectations of the guild. They also where tested on their skills proficiency when taken into raiding. After the initiation period was finished, the recruits officially became full members of their community.

4.1.2 *Local-Global Duality*

Decisions of guild officers affect the other members of the guild. For instance in the Olympus hardcore guild, the officers are burdened by deciding how items are distributed, and decisions are often arbitrary. No matter what decision was made, as long as there is more than one person who wants it for a long time, there will be tension between them. The decision of the officers then becomes highly contentious.

Another type of local-global duality can be seen in the real-virtual life dichotomy. While a player is in the game, she has to be well aware of her responsibilities at work and relationships. In Jessika, we saw both factors at work. Her new job required her to re-evaluate her roles in the game. Even hardcore players, like our informant, have to negotiate such tension. Hardcore gaming is highly taxing on commitment, as much as a professional career does -- constantly in contact, always developing, high in demand, and also quickly left behind. He is no longer playing because he had a summer job requiring him to work 9-7pm, and is on track with his career development.

4.1.3 *Designed-Emergent Duality*

While guilds may be designed to be mostly social or progression based, the emphasis evolves [4]. In Dragonkin's guild, it started from a very open and social guild into having more and more raid components. In the beginning, he has no choice but to accept and accommodate all. In the adulthood of the guild, he

began to impose rules on the organizations. When more and more members matured to the highest level, news dynamics within the guild emerges. Players began to organize their schedules to go for raids and PvPs. Rare items suddenly became a possibility. In another word, the shift from left towards the right began to emerge.

Hardcore guilds, on the other hand, have the need to maintain its performance. In doing so requires much more work in recruitment, enforcement of hierarchy, fair distribution of loots, best strategy during raids, and most importantly, successes in raids. 'People swiftly start to leave,' as soon as the latter is not fulfilled. It is to such an extent that hardcore guilds have higher turnover. The ever going recruitment process is thus a key to keep the guild at its best.

4.1.4 Participation-Reification Duality

In the midst of participation, actions were internalized and become tacit knowledge. One way that WoW allows its players to learn quickly is that it provides explicit hints and tips as they advance. For example, when a player meets the first quest giver, one was treated with a short paragraph saying what quests are for and how one receives them. It was the good dosage of reified knowledge that allows a CoP to function within its design.

4.1.5 Identification-Negotiability Duality

Part of a player's worth is given by the guild. In hardcore guilds, these are best expressed in the sharing of loots. It is through this system where individual players are judged and differentiated. In fact, while all players claimed to be there for the fun of raid, 'everyone wants the item.' It reinforces the need to achieve. This leads to a constant negotiation in loot methods and what it meant to be 'fair.' In fact, according to our informant, his guild waiver between different systems at different stages of the guild development.

4.2 Unexplained Behaviors

Werner (1998, p125) states that "as an analytical tool, the concept of community of practice is a mid level category. It is neither a specific, narrowly defined activity or interaction nor a broadly defined aggregate that is abstractly historical and social" This focus a middle ground is due to the fact that this theory conceptualizes human reality as a construction at a communitarian level. Nevertheless, we found that the guild dynamics are deeply affected by the "narrow" level of activity and the "wider" social level. We found that (1) the presence of intentionality amongst guild members defines their activities beyond their CoP identity, (2) that this intention has strong effects on the guild, and (3) that wider inter-community, societal constraints on a CoP define it locally. Next we will explain in detail these behaviors:

Presence of intentionality was observed in many instances. A player's intention appears to be a strong determinant in deciding which guild to join. It is not mandatory for lower level players to join a guild. Those who did used the guild to support their trade or hasten their progression. If a guild does not fit into his expectation, he can setup one or join another. We see a need to relate an individual's actions to effects on a community. In relation to this, Wenger (1998) sees identity as the bridge:

"The concept of identity served as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other."

In doing so, Wenger (1998) expressed that an individual lives in the social, cultural, and historical environment, and is intricately tied to it [17]. An identity is shaped by a collective of individuals. Identity is a social construct, where individuals have ownership of its meaning [17]. While adopting a new identity negotiated within a CoP, players take on peripheral tasks, such as when a hardcore guild member sitting out for a months before becoming active in the raids. However, it was not clear how lower level players and casual gamers shape their behaviors. The frame of CoP determined that each behavior is intricately tied to identity, defined by society. Since a personal impetus is missing, we can only recognize an individual out of a collective.

Another issue is that these external intentions have an impact on CoPs. Every member that enters a guild has the ability to change its norms and activities. CoP defined a collective negotiation that have to take place, and therefore identity itself is always being negotiated. Yet, we argued that this is unsatisfactory. The argument is effectively entering a circular form where identity, internal or external, shapes identities. In order to understand social effects from individuals and technology, explanation for social phenomena has to be sought from another layer of abstraction [11]. For instance, if we explain one social construct with another social construct, we would never make the connection to more fundamental forms of reality (Kallinikos, 2004).

In furthering the argument, the key in socio-technological studies are three. One, social. Two, technology. And the relationship between them. So the effects of making a self-referential argument within a social construct is that we are guaranteed never to reach an understanding of technological effects. Instead, [11] argued to explain social phenomena from a technology, psychology, or sociology point of view, and effectively integrating the three, forming a holistic interpretation.

The third issue is the effects one CoP has on another. Within the frame of CoP, we may argue that any individuals who come into a new community have other identities as well. One may be a family man or a college student. Both CoPs have a potential impact on oneself. Within WoW, there is local-global dualism, which is "related levels of participation that always coexist and shape each other. The relevance of communities of practice is therefore not diminished by the formation of broader and broader configurations. [17](p. 131)"

Yet, effects of one CoP has on another CoP is effectively more than local-global issue. Local-global dualism is a metaphor which is community-centric. A CoP must be put in the global frame in order to avoid losing the relations to external influences. However, external influences can hardly be reduced to just global, or 'broader and broader.' Each community is inter-linked to one another -- overlapping, nesting, or encompassing. We cannot avoid the issues of inter-community relationship. It is because a person moves from one community to another in fluid activity. Thus influencing and being influenced by each of them. Its a long march beyond just a moment of negotiation. It speaks

of a framing of community outlook that spans across time and space.

We argue that it is possible to solve these issues by analyzing the phenomena within at its most fundamental element. It also has to be sufficiently abstracted from social constructs to ground it within these elemental compositions. The elements are the people. The abstraction is their intentionality.

4.3 Singularity Behind the Duality -- Intentionality of Players

People are the most fundamental elements within a society. In looking at people, we can understand the movements and changes within a community. Once the focus is on people, we cannot disregard the other communities. For people moves and act in multiple communities. Through these movements, CoPs are then effectively interlinked.

The movements are in fact a continuum of activities, only defined by time. The movements are answerable by intentions of the people. These intentions are defined by many CoPs in the person's life, yet shared by them as well. Each CoP, within the stream of the activities, plays a part in aiding one in the drive towards the goals.

Thus, we arrive at yet another challenge of CoP. As a person journeys upon different CoPs, his intentionality drives his activity, reaction and strategies depending on his changing identities. Yet what happen to one between two CoPs, when one left one and not yet engage the other? Bill Gates has a famous 'think week' where he sits alone and rethinks the future of Microsoft. It at such boundary where no identities are enacting that creativity may happen. What then drives the people, the very elements that form communities?

Motivations are seen by [11] as the key to understanding people. The origin of motivations is no doubt from society, for it is the demands of the society which shaped a person's conceptual thoughts [11]. Therefore, every CoP has an influence on the people. Yet CoPs are themselves made up of people. Therefore, the flow of people and their conceptions also continuously change their CoPs. As we saw in WoW, as more and more members of a guild reaches level 70, by membership or maturity, the guild's dynamics also change.

Another advantage of such view, in seeing CoPs as interlinked, and humans as freely moving agent, is that it promotes creativity, which differentiates any human from animals or machines. It is voluntary activities, not highly developed intellect that differentiates man from animal [11]. If CoP defined the development of intellect, tacit or explicit, within a community of people, the links between these islands of knowledge are where human creativity exists and thrives.

5. CONCLUSION

CoP provides a framework to describe the structure of how practice is done in guilds and how the different constituents of the group come together. It explains how a guild is constituted at a given point of time, but it does not explain how these groups develop over time. By focusing on the middle ground of community and not getting into the intentions of the individuals

and the wider societal constraints, CoP limits itself to explaining the dynamics of within a single community.

In order to understand how guilds change over time it is necessary to integrate the personal, communitarian and societal level. The CoP's members intentions drive the development of the community, and these intentions are in turn constituted within the influence of the wider societal level. We propose to study guilds as a community of practice, embedded in a cultural-historical context that determines their development.

6. REFERENCES

- [1] Karsten D. Wolf. Communities of Practice in MMORPGs: An Entry Point into Addiction? Universität Bremen, Germany
- [2] Blizzard Entertainment Inc., Jan 22, 2008. <http://www.blizzard.com/us/press/080122.html>
- [3] Brown, B. and Bell, M. CSCW at play. 'There' as a collaborative virtual environment. Proceedings CSCW 2004, ACM Press, New York, 350-359.
- [4] Coleman S and Dyer-theford N (2007). Playing on the digital commons: collectivities, capital and contestation in videogame culture. *Media Culture and Society*, 29, 6.
- [5] Ducheneaut, N. and Moore, R.J. (2005). "More than just 'XP': Learning social skills in massively multiplayer online games." *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, 2(2), pp. 89-100.
- [6] O'Hara K, Alani H, and Shadbolt N, 2002. Identifying Communities of Practice: Analysing Ontologies as Networks to Support Community Recognition. IFIP-WCC-2002
- [7] Etienne Wenger. 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press
- [8] Flyvbjerg, Bent. "Five Misunderstandings About Case Study Research." *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 2, April 2006, pp. 219-245.
- [9] Kallinikos J (2004). Farewell to constructivism: technology and context-embedded actions. In Avgerou C, Ciborra C, and Land F. *The Social Study of Information and Communication Technology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- [10] Lave J and Wenger E. 1991. *Situated Learning*. Cambridge University Press. Turkle, 1995
- [11] Vygotsky L, 1978. *Mind and Society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- [12] Wolf K (2007). Communities of Practice in MMORPGs: An Entry Point into Addiction? 3rd International Conference on Communities and Technologies
- [13] Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. Third Edition. Applied social research method series Volume 5. Sage Publications. California, 2002
- [14] <http://www.lifewithalacrity.com/>
- [15] <http://www.wowjutsu.com/>
- [16] <http://www.warcraftrealms.com/>

- [17] Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity
- [18] Wenger, McDermott, Snyder. "Cultivating Communities of Practice" In Journal of Knowledge Management Practice, October 2002, p. 27.
- [19] Wenger, E. (2001). Supporting communities of practice: A survey of community-oriented technologies. p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.ewenger.com/tech>
- [20] Lave J. & Wenger, E. (1991) Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation.
- Wenger, 2000. E.C. Wenger, Communities of practice: The organizational frontier.