Chapter 5: Findings Part 1 - Guild Structures and Raiding Leadership Tasks

5.0 Summary of Key Findings

Findings from my work are presented in this chapter and the next beginning with a brief look at some general trends related to the research questions I framed over the course of this inquiry. Following this I offer some a look at the organizational structures evident in guilds in my sample. The bulk of these two chapters is devoted to cataloging and describing the tasks of leadership in an end game raiding guild in *WoW*. In this chapter we will look at the leadership practices surrounding the activity of raiding itself. In the next we will look at practices that take shape around guild management. Throughout you will find evidence of the humor, candor, and seriousness with which the subjects engaged in the topic of their own in-game leadership experiences. I feel privileged as a researcher to have had the opportunity to conduct interviews with these leaders, and I can only hope that my presentation of the data here adequately conveys their experiences.

To begin with as my inquiry expanded I became interested in the (re)mediating effects of *WoW* and the affinity space around it on leadership and learning. While not all the guild leaders in my sample utilized digital tools for leadership to the fullest extent possible, every guild in my sample was deeply enmeshed within the rich learning ecology that has developed around *World of Warcraft*. This also confirmed the notion that leadership in *WoW* is often deeply distributed. The leaders I spoke with seldom pointed to specific members of their organizations when it came to crucial topics like "learning strats" in game or researching game content. Rather their responses indicated the manner

in which both in-game leadership activities and thought leadership are deeply distributed at many levels both inside of individual guilds, and within the *WoW* playing community. Successful guilds are in fact powerful learning organizations sitting in a network of connected organizations and individuals far more effective than any single entity within it.

In regard to the question of learning leadership in game, my conversations with guild leaders have lead me to believe that some aspects of leadership can be learned, but that skill at the game is the gatekeeper in access to *WoW* leadership. Although there are several avenues to playing skillfully and some workarounds, leading in *WoW* means knowing enough about the game as a domain of practice to be seen as capable of leadership. In this respect, it's not very shocking that the phenomenon of emergent leadership has been visible enough to draw attention (IBM, 2007). Playership within *WoW* is inherently prioritized over other pro-social modes, much as programming is in a software company or teaching in a school. Unlike those other contexts however, leadership in *WoW* is mediated through the game itself. Good players who might not stand out as team leaders in other contexts due to any number of other circumstances can potentially be pulled into leadership positions by virtue of being seen as expert by their peers. This seems to create far more opportunities for leadership learning than would be available in other contexts. At the same time, the leaders in my sample varied substantially in personality and path to leadership. While some rose to leadership positions because of their competence in the game, there were certainly individuals who identified themselves as prone to assuming leadership in whatever context they found themselves.

In terms of the heavy conflict management tasks I expected to find in *WoW* raiding guilds (Chapter 1, pg. 6) they were generally lacking in terms of contemporary practices in my sample. While almost all of the leaders I spoke with recalled periods in the history of their guilds where dealing with interpersonal conflict was a perpetual chore, almost every guild in my sample was curiously free from strife in their current state. Given the presence of conflict in their histories, I speculate that this was related to how I developed me sample. With a couple of exceptions I sought out guild leaders who deemed their guilds "successful" by some measure. Many of these guilds were relatively old, and as such had mature organizational cultures.

In some sense you could say that the guilds in my sample were more like the businesses in Collins' and Porras' *Built to Last* (1994) rather than those in Collins' *Good to Great* (2001)[1]. This may seem like an odd statement as *World of Warcraft* itself is only five and a half years old. However the internal challenges confronting guild leaders and the pressures on guilds stemming from game design choices made by Blizzard can cause seemingly successful organizations to implode or fracture within months. Bunny Slippers, the guild master of <Valar Morghulis> which has spanned several games provided some useful figures for understanding how even a guild which survives for a couple of years can be considered a remarkable success:

> . . . having been around 14 years you tend to get a sense for how things come and go. Using some 'anecdotal' data supplied by friends at Blizzard and EA, between those two games alone, every day more than 1,000 guilds are created and fail. So doing the math, in WoW alone there has been more than 2,000,000

---

[1] For those unfamiliar with Collins' work, *Built to Last* was an inquiry into exceptional enduring organizations, while *Good to Great* focused on regular businesses that had ratcheted up their practices to become excellent ones.

guild failures. That is 1 guild for every 5 players but given the average size is 25-50 people, its really more like each player having been in 5-10 guilds. That is rather insane.

Finally in looking at leadership in game at the most general level, the challenges emphasized by the guild leaders I spoke with involved the distributed nature of play in the game, coping with changes to the game over time, and the cumulative stress of leadership. They expressed this in terms of communication challenges, the impact of "real" and virtual activities upon each other, and the ways in which game mechanics structure leadership both in and outside of raiding. Many of the guilds in my sample have negotiated these issues and persist to this day, but a few have dissolved and a couple of them are still relatively new. As we look at the actual tasks of leading a raiding guild, we will begin to see

My subjects provided me with deeply exciting data which I believe has the capacity to inform both theory and practice of instructional leadership in a digital age. Both the consistencies in and diversity of leadership practices among the guilds in my sample was notable. When possible I have attempted to let the words of the guild leaders explain the learning and leadership ecology of *World of Warcraft* rather than providing exposition. At other times I have had to simply done best to explain these practices in a manner conducive for informing educational contexts.

5.1 The organizational structures of guilds

In this section we will look at the organizational structures evident in the guilds in my sample. We'll start with a look at the way the game itself informs leadership structures. Then we'll look at the tiers of leadership that are commonly utilized by the player community. Following this I've offered a description of the raid leader position,

which is the actual job of facilitating players during collaborative game play. Finally we'll take a look at the generic organizational structures that were common among the guilds in my sample.

Guild masters: Due to hard coded mechanics in the game, all guilds have one and only one guild master. This individual has the executive power in game to add members to the guild, kick members out of the guild, and create ranks within the guild through which the control of membership can be handed to other players as well. Much like other digital contexts (e.g. web forums, content management systems, social network sites), the executive functions apportioned by rank are handled via permissions akin to those used by a system administrator. The rank of guild master also confers control over a handful of other in-game resources which we will consider as they become relevant.

Due to this game design based limitation on organizational structure, many guilds operate with a single primary leader. However, not all guilds favor a steep hierarchy and in addition this same constraint does not exist in all MMOs. As Brazenwulf whose guild had migrated from another MMO called *Dark Age of Camelot* put it, "In *World of Warcraft* we were actually . . . kind of disappointed to see that they, their structure ahh, did not allow for multiple GMs. So I assumed the role of GM there, but still in philosophy, umm have the ah, the kind of structure that each of the officers has just about as much control as the GM does." Six of the guilds in my sample had a strong GM of some sort, while the other five had a weakened or absentee GM. <Cotidie Frendo> and <Unbroken> were more rather than less "hard core" and had devised a work around to create a flatter structure on top, while <Luminosity>, <Knights of the Worktable>, &

<Requisite Chaos> were smaller or more casual guilds and had either less need for or capacity to generate as strong or centralized a leadership structure.

Guild councils: In addition to the GM almost all guilds have some form of guild council. A guild council is the inner circle of players present in most guilds that either serves the guild leader in an advisory capacity or works alongside the leader making key decisions. In some instances the guild council itself is the primary engine of leadership in the guild. This was the case with <Unbroken>, a serious raiding guild that had intentionally opted to have no primary leader based on members' experiences in the "parent" guild from which it seceded. In other instances, guild councils may be little more than "just kind of the clique that all knew each other" as reported by Glowfinger. Finally while a council might be democratically elected with members serving limited terms as was the case with <AMGPA>, most guilds seemed to select council members based on decisions made by existing leaders.

The actual constitution of councils and their mode of assembly varied from guild to guild. In the cases of <Unbroken> and <AMGPA> council members were added any time the guild went through a merger absorbing another guild. As Lola of <Unbroken> explained, ". . . when we merged with other guilds, we took people from their ranks and made them officers. It was the idea that they could be a liaison to their people, and their people would feel like they had someone to go to right away." In other instances, GMs I spoke with hand picked council members based either on the individual's leadership record in the guild or the GM's general esteem for the individual. Anastasia emphasized the importance of trust in selecting council members stating, "I asked, to be quite honest,

four people, who are my friends, who I trust understand and know, about the game (*laughs*), and what this guild means, and are capable of representing it in a single solid voice, and know what the hierarchy of decision making is." The theme of a unified council based around mutual trust was one that several leaders I spoke with mentioned, and was a particularly prominent topic among the leaders of the more "hard core" or serious raiding guilds.

Class Leaders: A third tier of leadership called class leaders (based on character class) was also present in a number of the guilds at least at some point during their existences. These players lead in between the domains of guild and raid leadership, and they are commonly offered the role by the GM or guild council based on their demonstrated knowledge of that role and their prior performance in game. This was the case for Glowfinger who was asked to assume the role of Warlock class leader in <Destructifaction> after the guild split over an incident he couldn't recall specifically but as a consequence of which, ". . . a whole bunch of people left. It was hundreds of members and we lost about half of 'em."

    "Nepotism" became an issue in class leadership causing guilds to diminish the role in power or eliminate class leader titles altogether. Lola described how class leaders became a more or less vestigial feature of <Unbroken> saying, "The class leader thing didn't really work out, but we hung onto it as like, a nominal system." At the same time class leader roles can also be stepping-stones to the inner circle of leadership. Prior to assuming the raid leader role and rank of council member in <Unbroken>, Mort was originally a class leader in <Unbroken>'s parent guild <Clan of Shadows>. He explained

how the role had changed in response to changes in game content prior to that saying, " . . . before that (Tier 5[2]) the class leaders were more of a, soldier giving advice than a real leadership position."

Raid Leaders: In addition to the GM, the guild council, and potentially class captains, all raiding guilds have at least one raid leader (RL). In some instances the primary raid leader is also the GM or a council member, but this is not always the case. In fact, the RL in the guilds I contacted was in many instances outside of the regular hierarchy of guild leadership. Furthermore in almost all of the guilds I contacted the RL was considered the highest authority during a raid, with the GM often deferring to their RL on all matters during raid time. As Lola said, "So we had probably like two or three raid leaders that were full time, and absolutely everything that had to do with raids from class composition to who was let into the raid, to what strategy we pursued, they had final say over it period."

In many of the guilds I contacted, the GM and RL were close friends or associates as in the instance of <And My Axe> and <AMGPA>. In both cases the GM and primary RL had played together previously forging a close bond in another guild before breaking off from that guild in either a peaceful split or what Fuzzyface from <AMGPA> referred to as "this really fun, umm, mutiny that happened with our original guild." One other notable trend regarding raid leaders within the guilds in my sample was a tendency for "tanks" to hold RL positions. I will provide more specific consideration of this trend in

---

[2] Tier 5 refers to end game instances of a specific difficulty. The tier system in the game is tied to the quality of virtual rewards players receive for success in raids. The current top content is Tier 10.

my sample in considering guild leadership through the Four Frames, but for now it is simply worth noting that leadership formal leadership structures in guilds can not be considered without paying some attention to the ways in which game mechanics dictate certain requirements for successful leadership.

For instance, when relevant I asked the guild leaders I spoke with about how they filled other leadership positions in the game. When I asked Bunnyslippers about what he looks for when scouting for leaders in <Valar Morgulis>, he provided the following list of skills:

> 1) Understand the raw game mechanics of every different role (healing, dps and tanking) down to the specific class level (i.e rogue dps vs hunter dps)
>
> 2) Understand the people playing those roles and their personal strengths and weaknesses
>
> 3) And they need to take that understanding and translate it, real time, into a plan of action. If the pre-raid plan fails, how do you move the chess pieces around to make the next run a win?
>
> 4) They communicate verbally in relatively short bursts that have to be clear and hard to misunderstand.
>
> 5) They have to be professional in their demeanor which often means courteous yet clear and direct. It's a hard combination for some people because direct can come off as discourteous or downright mean.
>
> 6) They need to think 2 steps ahead since many aspects of raiding are multi-tiered (i.e. a fight has phases and they shift throughout a 5..10..15min engagement) and they need to be ready for the next piece while still coordinating the first piece.
>
> 7) They have to be able to juggle their OWN play with raid leadership. They have to do their personal role in the raid as an EXPERT while still leading the raid. There are lots of people

who are experts in their class but can they do that WHILE doing #1-#6?

As Bunny Slippers clearly illustrates, the role of raid leader requires both extensive technical understanding of the game, and a very specific set of communication skills for coordinating game play among up to twenty five players at once. Laying aside the game specific requirements of raid leadership that Bunny Slippers mentions (e.g. "Understand the raw game mechanics of every different role"), we can see an underlying set of critical thinking and communication skills which one might search for in other contexts that require live coordination of a large team or group such as athletic coaching or even classroom teaching (e.g. courteous yet direct communication, thinking two steps ahead of the current situation, realizing a theoretical plan in real time and adapting it in the face of changing circumstances, etc.).

Organizational Models: The guilds in my sample adhered to one of three basic models of organizational structure with a number of variations in specific features. These three basic types of guild can be thought of as Strong GM, Strong GM with assists, and Weak GM with council. The distribution of the guilds in my sample across these three models is shown in Table 5.1. In general strong GMs tend to handle most of the leadership tasks they are aware of in their guilds and may even be raid leaders themselves as was the case in the current instantiation of <AMGPA>. Strong GMs with assistance might look like a visible GM with a right hand man like <Credible Sources>, or a GM who works closely with the guild council like <Valar Morghulis>. A weak GM could be an absentee GM

with a strong council as in the instance of <Unbroken>, or a GM in name only who is

functionally a council member as was the case with <Luminosity>.

Table 5.1: Distribution of guilds across the three organizational models

Strong GM	Strong GM w/Assists	Weak GM w/Council
<Valar Morghulis>	<Cotidie Frendo>	<Unbroken>
<And My Axe>	<AMGPA>	<Luminosity>
<Throw Stone>	<Credible Sources>	<Destructifaction>
	<The Workmen>	<Requisite Chaos>

It is also notable that the presence of a GM or council doesn't guarantee that the

core work of leadership is being done by these nominal leaders. For instance Glowfinger

noted that in <Destructifaction>, the council was often disengaged from the needs of

many guild members and as a result class leaders were left to pick up the pieces. Finally,

there is also the case of Maverick who was GM of <AMGPA> when I spoke with him,

but who had held a variety of roles over the life of the guild. Maverick was in many ways

the mastermind behind the whole organization as he had initiated the split with the parent

guild, and then composed the guild charter and constitution before selecting a GM who

he saw as a non-controversial figure. In describing his selection of GM, Maverick also

provides us with a core perspective on how he perceives leadership:

> I sort of organized a coup, a putsch or whatever it is, and got
> everybody to jump ship . . . Yeah I mean, I mean the thing was
> when we did that I was sort of sensitive to the umm, to the
> thought people might have that I was doing it for personal
> reasons, so I actually, in the new guild I wrote the constitution,
> but I only made myself a temporary councilman, and I made the
> permanent GM someone who was a very sort of, always seen as a
> neutral guy, no axe to grind, kind of just like a nice fellow. So I
> wasn't GM then until he quit the game, maybe uhh years later.

Okay, gotcha. Umm, so he's no longer playing WoW?

No, he came back umm, and I'm still holding onto GM, but you know when I stop playing again it'll be him again just 'cause he's a non-controversial figure.

As with all the findings I present, I make no claim as to whether or not the guild structures from my sample and distribution across it are representative of all guilds in *WoW* or even all the guilds that define themselves as raiding guilds. Rather I intentionally sought out a relatively diverse sample of guilds in an attempt to capture some of the variation that arises among raiding guilds in *WoW*. The three basic types of leadership structures I've catalogued here provide an orientation to how guilds can structure themselves in relation to the hard coded aspects of the game and the task of raiding itself. While I believe that the structures I have described are probably some of the more common ones, there are undoubtedly a number of variations in structure that I have not captured in this work and it is certainly possible that there are common guild structures that look very little like those I have described.

5.2 The tasks of guild leadership

Having set out with the aim of understanding leadership practices in an online game by establishing the tasks of guild leadership in a WoW raiding guild, I shall proceed in this section by considering the tasks spoken about by the guild leaders I interviewed. I have utilized two abstractions in order to effectively sort through and define the tasks of leadership as evidenced by the guilds in my sample. This proved necessary due to the fact that leaders tended to speak about tasks at a relatively small grain size (sub-tasks or micro-tasks). I sorted these tasks in terms of raid leadership and

guild management, and then again in terms of whether they were executed synchronously or asynchronously.

Both of these categorizations were serviceable for helping to define leadership, but neither division is actually a hard binary. Raid leadership and guild management represent different ends of a spectrum of organizational leadership rather than distinct aspects leadership. The construct of a synchronous/asynchronous distinction carries its own peculiar caveats[3], however by sorting leadership tasks along both dimensions we can obtain a crisp delineation of leadership work in and around game play. In addition, the temporal frame also aids in disambiguating aspects of guild leadership that are more deeply tied to gaming as a domain of practice, and those which are more generic in character.

I have utilized the following terms to categorize the tasks of raiding guild leadership discussed by leaders in my sample:

- Synchronous Raid Leadership
    a. In-game Preparation for Collaborative Play
    b. Live Facilitation and Coordination of Players
    c. Post-gaming Cool Down and Reflection
- Asynchronous Raid Leadership
    d. Game Related Research and Raid Planning
    e. Advanced Preparation of In-Game Resources and Game Interface
- Synchronous Guild Management
    f. Player Leadership and Membership Cultivation
    g. Guild Politics and Executive Management
- Asynchronous Guild Management
    h. Software and Sociopolitical Artifact Creation and Adaptation
    i. Network Technology and In Game Maintenance

---

[3] Due to the fact that players are almost never in the same room and in most circumstances even voice communication is activated by pressing a key to talk, even the most synchronous activities are never truly synchronous. The construct is nonetheless useful in sorting the different tasks of leadership in a raiding guild.

Figure 5.1 below provides a more detailed look at the tasks, sub-tasks, and micro-tasks of leadership in *WoW* raiding guilds that emerged across the conversations I held with guild leaders. For the sake of visual clarity, I have reduced the full names I've given to the tasks to one or two words in this diagram. The four cells of the two by two grid in Figure 5.1 can prove helpful in clarifying which leadership practices might be more useful in thinking about instructional leadership.

Figure 5.1: Raiding guild leadership tasks
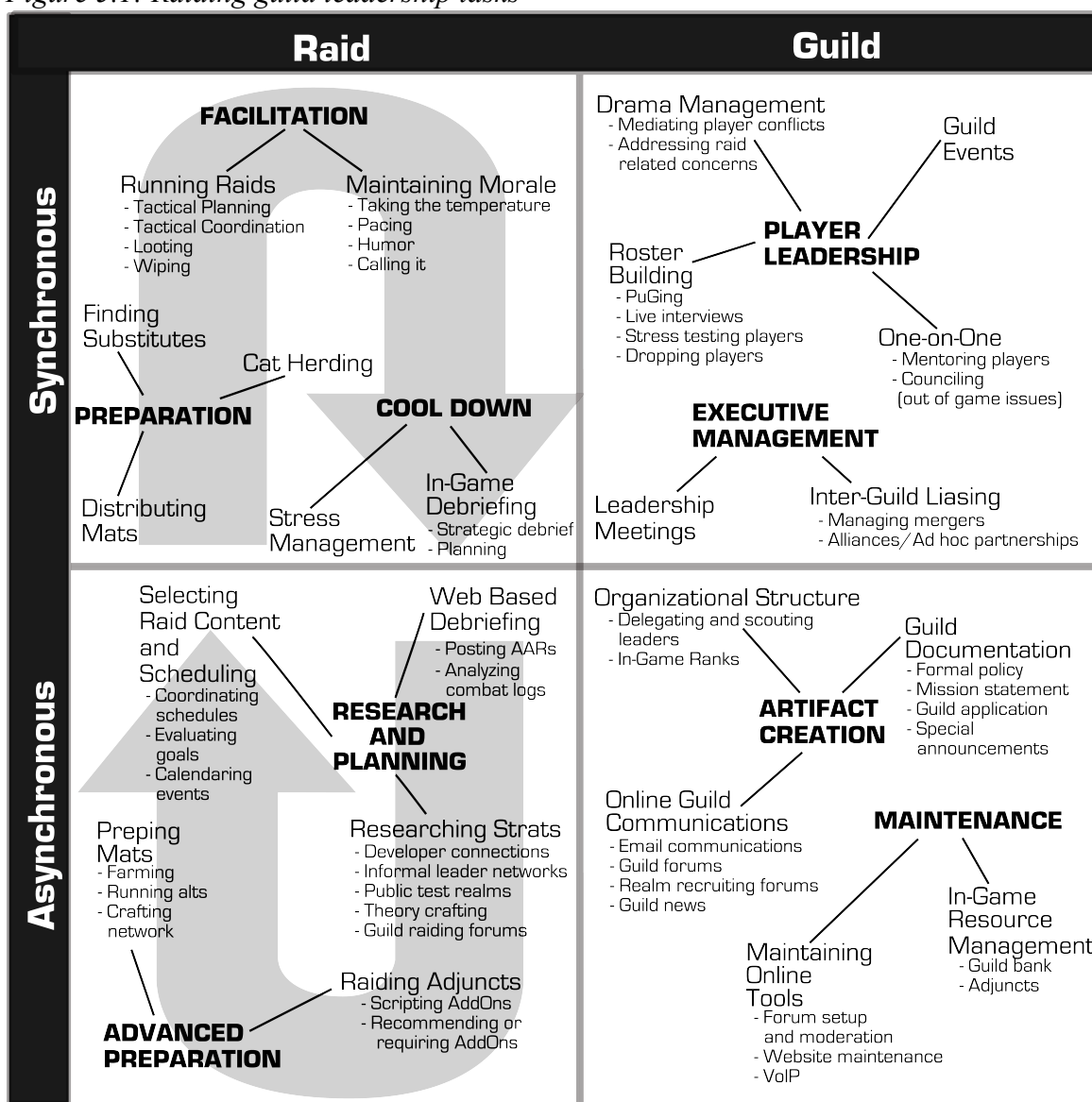
Tasks in the upper left cell (Synchronous Raid Leadership) include: In-Game Preparation for Collaborative Play, Live Facilitation and Coordination of Players, and Post-Gaming Cool Down and Reflection. These tasks are not only enacted in highly domain specific ways, but are also more common to running a team or other small group in real time as opposed to leading an organization more generally. Some of these tasks are particularly relevant when considering classroom leadership as opposed to school leadership. Tasks in the lower left cell (Asynchronous Raid Leadership) are: Game Related Research and Raid Planning, and Advanced Preparation of In-Game Resources and Game Interface. These tasks are tightly coupled with the context of gaming, however they also represent the kind of leadership tasks that are common within the sorts of knowledge ecologies that develop in online affinity spaces (Gee, 2005). Tasks in the upper right cell (Synchronous guild management) include: Player Leadership and Member Cultivation, and Guild Politics and Executive Management. Aspects of these tasks are common in almost any organizational context. However, they are given particular form when enacted in an online game. Consequently the manner in which in-game leaders enact these tasks is particularly worthy of attention for their potential to inform instructional leadership in digital contexts. Finally, tasks in the lower right cell (Asynchronous Guild Management) are: Software and Sociopolitical Artifact Creation and Adaptation, and Network Technology and In-Game Maintenance. Broadly speaking these tasks have parallels in most organizational setting like the synchronous guild management tasks. However as should be evident from the sub-tasks and micro-tasks listed in Figure 5.1 enacting many of these tasks requires approaches that are particular to

networked organizations, and in a few instances (e.g. Guild Bank, In-Game Ranks) peculiar to online games.

Finally, the arrows joining the two cells on the left side represent the cycle of leadership activity that takes place around raiding. Not all of the sub-tasks and micro-tasks included in this diagram take place within every cycle. However, the general flow between the five tasks of raid leadership was evidenced through the descriptions of in-game leadership provided by all of the players I spoke with. In this chapter we will consider the tasks tied to the raid leadership cycle. In chapter 6 we will unpack the guild management tasks.

5.3 Synchronous raid leadership

In this section we will take a look at the Synchronous Raid Leadership tasks. These tasks include: 1) In-game Preparation for Collaborative Play, 2) Live Facilitation and Coordination of Players, and 3) Post-gaming Cool Down and Reflection. Figure 5.2 below provides a close up of the upper right hand corner of Figure 5.1 for easier reference in looking at this subset of guild leadership tasks.

Figure 5.2 Synchronous Raid Leadership Tasks
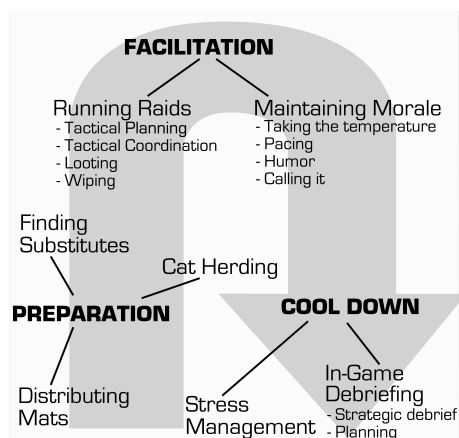
I will offer consideration of each of the main tasks in sequence beginning with preparation and walking through the process to Cool Down. Each of the following subsections is divided up with sub-tasks labeled with a letter following the subsection number (e.g. 5.31a Cat Herding). When there are constituent micro-tasks these are prefaced with their name in italics.

5.31 In-game Preparation for Collaborative Play

In this section we will look at the task of In-Game Preparation for Collaborative Play. This task consists of the sub-tasks Cat Herding, Finding Substitutes, and Distributing Mats. After considering the general nature of the task, I will examine each sub-task in turn with an eye for possible relations to educational leadership when appropriate.

Within the context of raid leadership, before an encounter begins and after it ends there are a range of preparation sub-tasks that speak in a limited way to an educational context of organizational leadership. Guild leaders identified specific synchronous sub-tasks tied to preparation. For instance when asked about the preparation process in <Destructifaction> Glowfinger described it is as follows:

> You need to coordinate with the other members of the raid, uh find out which bosses you're gonna down. Umm what path you're gonna take to get there. Figure out how long it's gonna take. Make sure everybody's gonna be able to be on that long. If they're not, make sure that you set up that so and so is gonna replace them at whatever time.

Based on his experience in both WoW and other MMOs, Glowfinger's list provides a basic orientation to one side of the Preparation process. While many guilds handle issues like determining "which bosses you're gonna down" during the asynchronous task of

Game Related Research & Raid Planning, the topics Glowfinger identifies are at least

representative of the sorts of issues that the leaders I spoke with indicated might get

resolved in a back channel prior to the beginning of a raid.

5.31a Cat Herding

When describing the preparation process, one thing Glowfinger doesn't explicitly

speak about is likely the most essential and vexing part of preparation: the sub-task often

referred to as "cat herding" in the player community. There was near universal

concurrence among the leaders I spoke with that coordinating the start of the raid was the

most difficult (and one of the least desirable) sub-tasks of leadership in *WoW*. For

instance, Brazenwulf stated that even in his casual guild, "The biggest challenge in pre-

raid activity is getting the word out . . . just making sure that, that the interested parties

are aware of the when and where of, of the raid." This issue was hardly particular to

casual guilds. Bruce Campbell noted that in <Cotidie Frendo>, " . . . the biggest problem

that we have pre-raid is literally making sure that people show up, at the time. We just

seem to have a lot of, flakey people, like but that's because, more of our people are older

and have to stay at work later, or have kids, or things to do . . . and then, and then of

course there are people like me who, I say I'll be there and then I end up going to a

college party. So I am the flake (*laughter*)."

If Brazenwulf and Bruce Campbell were willing to identify Cat Herding as a

challenge area, Fuzzyface was more explicit about the actual shape of that challenge.

When asked about the most difficult aspect of preparing for a raid he responded:

People are like sheep. They really are, they are like sheep. The hardest part is making people . . . showing up is probably the hardest part. And then having people realize, "Oh, I'm just in BG (battle ground), it'll only be five more minutes." Like, "No, you get the fuck out now, you have twenty four people waiting for you to get out of this so we can start this raid." You know, there's that and then there's, you know people say, "Oh yeah I know, while I signed up for the calendar I'll be here." And then they don't show up, and everyone's like, "What the, what the hell now we have to find a replacement healer." which is difficult.

When Fuzzyface bluntly describes his approach to delegation by saying, "I don't like marking things, if someone wants to do it for me then, god bless 'em. You know, I've been leading raids, but I don't know strat, you know?" it needs to be taken in the context of a raiding guild which looks to him as one of its primary raid leaders, and was actively working on the most difficult content in the game at the time of the interview. Equally when he states ,"People are like sheep" it's less an indication of far reaching social commentary, and more an honest assessment of the difficulties tied to his job in game.

Despite his aversion to the task, Fuzzyface, like the other leaders I spoke with, recognizes that Cat Herding is essential for making things happen in his guild. In fact, because of the relatively low frequency of his play, Fuzzyface considered himself "by no means one of the higher up council members." However he would still take it upon himself to organize raids. When asked why he found himself in this position, he stated "other people just like flounder around . . . One person to distribute responsibility, and to hold other people accountable, or else people won't do anything . . . it's mostly out of frustration that I end up in a leadership position because, no one does anything and I just want to, you know get things done." The idea that having someone who likes to "get things done" is essential in guild leadership came up across the interviews, and when we

consider guild leadership through the Four Frames we will revisit how this takes form in *WoW*.

5.31b Distributing Mats and Finding Substitutes

The other two sub-tasks of preparation, Distributing Mats[4] and Finding Substitutes, are more procedural in nature. I've utilized the term Distributing Mats as short hand for both handing out in-game materials that are necessary for raiding (i.e. potions, "buff food", etc.), and ensuring that all characters in the raid have the appropriate spell "buffs". In addition to their different skills in combat, many of the character classes in WoW also have the ability to grant temporary improvements to themselves and other characters through a type of spell referred to as a buff. Functionally speaking, making sure that everyone in the raid has the right buffs and raid mats is like checking to make sure that a student has come prepared with classroom materials. Within the context of leading adults, many players reported that the matter of buffs was left up to individuals. However, leaders also reported that ensuring all players had the appropriate buffs could also be a laborious aspect of their work.

In order to minimize the chance that a player might be missing an important raiding buff, Gimli mentioned that he utilized an AddOn called oRA2 to help ensure that all members of the raid group have had the appropriate buffs administered before beginning a raid. oRA2 is one of a number of successors to an older AddOn called

---

[4] The term "Mats" is short hand for in game goods used by players. Mats may be materials used to create durable items like armor and weapons, or in the case of raiding they are usually consumable items that players can use to grant their characters a temporary bonus.

CT_RaidAssist. As such it is designed for a range of raid management issues and can provide leaders with a variety of information about members of the party and the capacity to effect changes to the group that the default UI does not aid with. While no other leaders in my sample mentioned using AddOns in this capacity, Gimli's case does represent the sort of distributed practice which was commonly espoused by academics looking at WoW when it was still a newer game (Thomas & Brown, 2007). Based on data from curse gaming, an AddOn like oRA2 is still averaging just under 130 downloads per day over the last thirty days (wow.curse.com, 2010), so despite being scarce in my sample the use of sophisticated raid leader AddOns for managing play does persist.

5.32 Live Facilitation and Coordination of Players

Raid Facilitation can be understand as consisting of two sub-tasks: Running the Raid and Maintaining Player Morale. We will begin with the more technical sub-task of Running Raids. As a topic this sub-task is particularly complex containing numerous sub-tasks. It is also thick with *WoW* raiding terminology, and my interviewees often relied heavily on this language. Following this we will look at the sub-task of Maintaining Morale. This task also contains a number of sub-tasks, however these tasks are generally less technical in nature as they are fundamentally about working with the interpersonal side of raiding.

5.32a Running the Raid

Running the Raid consists of the sub-tasks 1) Tactical Planning 2) Tactical Coordination 3) Looting and 4) Wiping. These tasks occur iteratively over the course of a

single raid, although as we will see the tasks of Wiping and Looting are contingent upon the success of the group. Fuzzyface's initial description of "the leadership aspect" of raiding (Chapter 4) which included: explaining strats[5], assigning roles, and "marking pulls" describes some of the core elements of Tactical Planning and Tactical Coordination and in this section we will get a better understanding of just what a raid leader does through an examination of these and the other two micro-tasks.

Tactical Planning

Tactical Planning is executed immediately prior to the start of a specific encounter and consists of explaining strats, assigning roles, and performing "ready checks". Explaining Strats and Assigning Roles involve ensuring that all members of the raid understand how the fight will take place. Ready checks are performed via an in-game tool on an as needed basis and can be used to ensure that all players are prepared for an encounter. They can also be used during other lulls in action over the course of a raid to provide the leader with a quick survey of player opinions or willingness to detour through non-essential content. By considering each of these elements in slightly greater detail, we can position raiding (the core activity most of these guilds structured themselves around) in a more meaningful context.

---

[5] Technically speaking what *WoW* players refer to as strats might be better defined as tactics. The term is generally used to describe the specific deployment of character skills in an encounter rather than the more abstracted objectives to which the term strategy traditionally refers in military and corporate contexts, or institutional moves as they've been defined in social theory (de Certeau, 1984). For this reason, I refer to the sub-tasks of raiding as tactical planning and tactical coordination, even though the players talk about components of these activities using the terms reviewing and calling strats.

Explaining strats is the process of ensuring that all members of the raid

understand the behaviors of the mobs in the fight, the constraints and affordances of the

virtual space in which it will play out, and any other events that occur during the

encounter that can determine success or failure. If the members of the guild in a raid have

played through an encounter previously, explaining strats can be as simple as offering

everyone in the group a quick refresher as to how the fight goes. As Glowfinger said:

> Once you've basically learned the fight and you've got the strat
> down with reliable people, umm, there's not really much else to it
> than that.
>
> *So . . . once everybody's doing their job it kind of takes care of*
> *itself?*
>
> Right, I mean, if you've gotten to the point where you're
> downing the boss every single time, the fight basically takes care
> of itself, because at that point everybody essentially knows what
> to do.

However, if the guild is encountering content for the first time, has only made a few

previous attempts, or if less experienced members of the guild are brought along to learn

the instance and "gear up", the process of explaining strats can be more drawn out. When

asked about the difference between preparing for new content and revisiting material the

guild had already mastered, Fuzzyface explained, ". . . you always have to explain strat at

least twice before the boss. Oh and ping, 'You go here. You go there. When he casts this,

make sure someone interrupts it or we die.' You know. Super duper micro management,

and yell it out as it happens." When Fuzzyface mentions "ping", he is referring to an in-

game tool that allows a player to click on a map all players share of the virtual space

causing a sparkling point to temporarily appear on other players' on-screen maps. This

activity is accompanied by a description given over VoIP in order to achieve maximum

clarity when explaining strats. By "yell(ing) it out as it happens" Fuzzyface literally

means calling out upcoming events in the fight over VoIP. This actually takes place

during Tactical Coordination.

While explaining strats in real time was a consistent micro–task within raid

facilitation, it was also considered supplemental to other modes of learning brokered by

leaders or pursued by individual players within the larger *WoW* community

asynchronously. We will consider how the more deeply distributed activity of learning

strats is enacted after examining other synchronous leadership tasks that surround raiding.

Assigning roles is the final aspect of Tactical Planning. It can either be a process

addressed after the strat has been explained or included in the explanation. If the group

has the instance "on farm" or is otherwise familiar with the content, role assignment (like

explaining strats) might be handled in a perfunctory manner or might be unnecessary

once the raid is under way.

Not all roles receive the same level of formal attention in all encounters or even in

all guilds. In general raid leaders in the guilds I contacted held either a tank or melee DPS

role. Perhaps as a result, healing assignments were something that more often than not

they would delegate to another player. As Fuzzyface said, "healing assignments is

something I really wish I didn't have to do, but a lot of the time you really do." He later

elaborated, "You have to coordinate healers if they can't do it themselves, ummm, I like

to set one healer to do that that I kind of trust." Lola who played a healer herself similarly

noted that with raid leaders in <Unbroken>, "Usually they would farm out the task of

healing assignments to one of the senior healers." Often times in situations such as this, a

player without formal rank might be selected simply because the raid leader trusts that

this individual understands the mechanics of the game adequately. In other instances, healing assignments might be neglected entirely if the raid leader thinks the fight is simple enough. Notably, players of specific roles will often create a chat channel to communicate with each other during a raid and certain aspects of Tactical Preparation can take place in these channels as well.

Tactical Coordination

When Tactical Preparation is completed, the raiding party begins an encounter and the task of Tactical Coordination commences. Tactical Coordination can utilize a combination of in-game tools and adjunct tools to effect live orchestration of player actions during an encounter. Using in-game terms, Tactical Coordination includes activities that use in-game (or modified) tools for "Marking pulls" and "Raid warnings." Marking pulls involves literally placing one of a handful of different symbols over mobs on screen to help the different members of the raid know where and when to focus their attention once the encounter starts. Once an encounter is underway different enemies may need to be marked, and as a result marking pulls often spans preparation for and coordination of the encounter.

Raid warnings are just in time directions or corrections given during an encounter. They can be provided over VoIP, typed as a text notification that comes up across players' screens, or effected through the use of adjunct tools which either take care of the task automatically (in the case of software AddOns[6] on like BigWigs or Deadly Boss

---

[6] We will look at AddOns in greater depth in considering Asynchronous Raid Leadership. These are software tools that players develop to help them play the game.

Mods), or are triggered with player created macros using short text commands or by

clicking on a customized icon.[7] Marking pulls and raid warnings are generally executed

either by the raid leader, or by someone the raid leader has granted privileges to through a

setting in game. These individuals are referred to as raid assists.

In addition to the aspects of Tactical Coordination that rely on in-game tools or

more specialized adjunct software, the raid leader will commonly provide directions and

feedback during an encounter via voice. These sorts of directives are necessary if

something in the fight goes wrong and the leader wants the players to adapt, if the raid

leader perceives the need to offer players more extensive or explicit directions than a raid

warning can provide, or sometimes even just as encouragement (e.g. telling the group that

the boss's health is greatly reduced and victory is within their grasp).

Tactical Coordination and Tactical Planning have parallels in a wide variety of

other organizational contexts, and particularly within contexts requiring team leadership.

For instance in describing his raid leader, Gimli stated, "He's also like a, he also used to

be like a former junior hockey coach . . . so he does have experience leading stuff . . . he

also played Counterstrike competitively a lot, and he called strategies for that too. He

played competitively for a couple of years actually." To a great extent, these sorts of

activities have parallels in any small to medium team setting in which a strict hierarchy is

utilized to afford consistency, accountability, and structure. In some ways a raid is like a

traditional lecture based classroom (Wolfenstein & Dikkers, 2009).

---

[7] *WoW* gives players the capacity to program simple sequences of action or convey preset messages in chat windows by writing Macros using a specialized in-game coding interface.

Loot Distribution

While the tactical side of raiding resembles some other domains, there are two other micro-tasks that are essential aspects of raid Facilitation that have no real counterparts outside of the context of massively multiplayer online games. These activities are Loot Distribution and "Wiping". After a boss has been defeated, it will drop a limited number of high-end virtual items. Dealing appropriately with these "pixilated rewards" (as Fuzzyface referred to them) is not only essential for helping ones guild advance further in the game, it is also a (potentially) politically complex task as often times numerous players will be interested in a single item.

Player communities have developed a wide variety of mechanisms for ensuring fairness in the distribution of these virtual rewards, and the leaders I spoke to had fairly strong feelings about different tools and methods for handling loot distribution. The most common methods for loot distribution involve: allowing interested players to use an in-game tool to "role" on items (the highest score wins the item), using a rule based system (possibly with an accompanying AddOn) to determine distribution, or making an executive decision as to who receives what. Some guilds without a rule system for loot would use a hybridized version of player bidding on items and executive distribution.

While almost all of the guilds in my sample had utilized some form of rule-based system at some point (excepting some of the more casual guilds), many of the guilds had stopped utilizing these systems by the time I interviewed their leaders. The most common of these systems is called DKP (an abbreviation for Dragon Kill Points), and through it players accrue points (by showing up for raids and other desirable behaviors) that they can then "spend" on desirable items. Over time AddOns have been developed that allow

guilds to track DKP in game, however some guilds still retain out of game systems for tracking these points. In these instances a member of the guild leadership team will usually post the DKP of raiding members to the guild website. While guilds like <Unbroken> utilized DKP over most its life as a raiding guild, guilds like <AMGPA> had dropped their DKP system during a casual period in the guild's history and never picked it back up.

Many guilds utilize these tools successfully. <Unbroken> found that using DKP allowed them to reward players for a variety of desirable behaviors like showing up prepared, or punish them for undesirable behaviors like acting out or otherwise being unpleasant. As Lola noted though, this sort of punishment was "deployed very rarely." With the use of an AddOn called WebDKP, players in <Unbroken> were also able to check their DKP scores at any time adding a layer of transparency to the activity. Even with a system like DKP, players within a guild might still engage in private politicing over gear. As Lola said, "There were a lot of sort of, back channel dealings like, 'You pass on this for me, I'll pass on this for you next time.' But, officially none of us took part (in) or condoned any of that."

Other guilds began without a DKP system and never added one. Brazenwulf discussed how even in a guild as casual as <Luminosity> the subject of loot systems had come up before it was collectively dismissed:

> We have never used like a DKP system or anything like that. Umm, you know we had talked about it at one point, but it's just, you know everything you read about them and even those of us who have participated like, you know got invited to go with other guilds to raids and things like that, it's just a nightmare, and just a total management, and so much drama involved, and, and one of the things that we've found was that just by talking it through

umm, amongst your core group who were consistently going on raids, you eventually, you begin to build a trust that, yeah eventually I will get my piece, and this is for the betterment of the guild and that kind of thing, umm and that's kind of been our approach, all along.

In his response we see how he perceives a structural tool like DKP can actually conflict with trust in the other players. He would go on to agree with the idea that a system like DKP can actually create more interpersonal conflict than it can prevent in certain circumstances.

While the members of <Luminosity> dismissed DKP due to conflicts with their casual mode of play, Gimli had other reasons for not utilizing a DKP system when he founded <And My Axe>. As he explained, his decision to not use DKP was in response to the way he perceived it impacting his prior guild:

> We were using a DKP system at the time, right? So people, you know you come and raid, you show up, you get points and you buy gear, and I was noticing a disturbing pattern where . . . someone who had accumulated a lot of points in the past would show up for one raid maybe two raids, and then just never show up again, and in the process get two or three big upgrades from the players that were there repeatedly and contributing night after night through the wipes and uhh, all that progression. And that wasn't really sitting well with me, because I felt, I, I personally feel that the guys that show up and, and wipe with us are the ones that should be getting the stuff. And, and there's no point in showing up for a raid, getting one or two pieces of gear, and then never coming back again.

Gimli is clear in his explanation that he felt the system can not only promote rewarding the wrong players if it falls out of synch with actual attendance, it can also stymie the groups actual progress in game if it doesn't fit with other aspects of the guild's raiding system.

In order to maximize utility in loot distribution, Gimli instituted a "loot council" to handle the issue of who gets what during a raid. While players still roll on items in <And My Axe>, the council settles contention and has the final say. Gimli described the council at length:

> The, the council selection, the group of players that gets involved with it, I usually rotate them after every, say sixty to ninety days. I'll . . .
>
> *So they're not necessarily officers.*
>
> No. They're also raiders, but they're also intelligent raiders as well. I make sure that, you know I tell them in advance, 'You know, is this a position that you're interested in?' uhh 'There's a lot of responsibility, there's a lot of reading up to do', and they have to find out things about other classes that they themselves might not be familiar with . . . And, umm, there's a lot of criteria for different people when they decide who, who gets items. You know, it's not always going to be the same measuring stick every time . . . you know there's five people on the council, and they, they can come to their decision however they wish. So they could be like, "While, this person died on this fight and this person didn't, so I'm gonna give it to him." Another case would be, "You know, this person already got three items tonight, and this person hasn't yet, so I'm gonna give it to, to that guy." Right? So there's all sort of different uhh reasons for, for that sort of thing, and it does balance itself out in the end anyways.

Gimli was clear on not only the complexity of ensuring fair loot distribution, but also why a council is preferable in his eyes to a more procedural system. In explaining why he developed a council in the first place Gimli said, "We didn't want to rely on numbers and umm, you know cost so to speak because those can be really manipulated. Where as logic and reasoning, that stuff is in the flaws of us." Interestingly enough, while his context for loot distribution was significantly different from Brazenwulf's, the rationale behind his decision was ultimately similar: trusting individuals will ultimately create fewer problems

than using a system that can be gamed. Bunny Slippers articulated a similar reason for not using a loot system in <Valar Morghulis> saying, ". . .there is no need for a DKP system where points are given and people bid. We know all loot remains in the guild and everyone is happy when each other wins since its one team."

Wiping

Finally, the last micro-task affiliated with Running Raids is Wiping. Wiping is the term used to describe when all of the players' characters have been killed in a fight. However, because character death is not permanent in most video games (including *WoW*) the process of wiping in a game like *WoW* is unlike the process of losing in other team based activities including other online games where team death might signal the end of a round of play. Most of the time when players die in *WoW*, they are returned to the nearest in-game graveyard as ghosts. In order to regain corporeal form they must return to the location they died, an activity called a corpse run. In the case of a raid wipe, the players must re-enter the instance the group died inside of to regain their virtual bodies, and then must subsequently run back to the spot inside the dungeon where the boss that killed them resides.

The process of wiping and running back affords leaders in game a unique opportunity to trouble shoot how their team is performing and what exactly went wrong. In some guilds this conversation takes place among the leadership in a private back channel. Regardless of which players are invited into the conversation, all of the leaders I spoke with emphasized a similar approach regarding the sort of conversation they tried to ensure happened between attempts. Gimli framed his approach as follows:

> After every wipe, we'll go over what happened, we'll basically take a diagnostic stance to the entire, to the entire thing. So we find out, okay when did things start to go to hell here? What exactly happened? We try to reconstruct uhh the last possible seconds before, uhh before we wipe. And then we, we use that. We take, maybe a minute or two, to analyze what happened, what we can do to fix it, and if we determine it's random, you know, nothing we can do about it, then we try to minimize the, the randomness of it if possible.

While Gimli focused in his initial response on randomness, often times it is the action (or inaction) of a specific player or players that causes a raid to wipe. Mort emphasized how as a raid leader, it wasn't simply a matter of determining whose fault a wipe had been and berating them. Rather he emphasized how as a leader it was actually more technically advantageous to pay attention to the emotional well being of the player at fault:

> While, normally when there was a wipe, and it was somebody's fault I was aware, and I would just instead of, belittling that person in front of the guild I would either send them a tell, or just say in the, just say over all to the raid, you know like, 'You guys need to watch the fires.' When in fact I know so and so was in the, you know stuff like the flame wreath[8]. Cause as soon as you demoralize somebody, they really, start getting, sloppy.

These comments echo statements Mort had made previously about his experiences with leadership serving in the armed forces in Iraq:

> Well, it (military service) made me understand a couple of things about leadership. Uh, mostly that a real leader is one who doesn't want the job 'cause he understands what an entire . . . what responsibilities it comes with. Those that normally want leadership want the power that it comes with, but not necessarily the responsibilities . . . It's inspiring, inspiring the players instead of, I guess yelling at them, telling them to perform. It's a lot, it's a much better tool. I mean that was, that was something that was very good that I picked up early on.

---

[8] Flame Wreath is an example of a specific spell cast by a boss mob from the *Burning Crusade* expansion. When this spell is in effect if any player moves it can cause a large amount of damage to the whole group.

One final aspect of wiping worth noting is that it is accompanied by an in-game cost. Not only does the raid group have to begin the boss fight again following a wipe, but the virtual gear the characters wear takes cumulative damage every time the character dies. This gear can be repaired, however it requires fairly substantial amounts of virtual gold to repair high end weapons and armor in the game. As a result, wipes can be taxing on player morale, as each wipe carries with it a cost which the guild or individual players will later have cover.

5.32b Maintaining Player Morale

While the micro-tasks affiliated with Running Raids are technically complex and certainly essential, they weren't necessarily the aspects of raiding that received the most emphasis from the leaders I spoke with. The largely interpersonal micro-tasks that constitute Maintaining Player Morale were also prominently mentioned by both raid leaders and non-raid leaders in my sample. In particular leaders in virtually all of the guilds considered the micro-task of pacing the raid to be one of the most essential aspects of raid leadership in World of Warcraft. Maintaining Player Morale consists of: 1) Taking the temperature, 2) Pacing, 3) Improving player mood (or Humor as I've represented it in the figures) and 4) Calling It.

Pacing

Bunny Slippers was succinct in his description of this micro-task stating, "During the raid the primary task is keeping the raid moving forward. Specifically I mean

ensuring we aren't sitting around idle but are always moving through the content." He

went on to describe the ways in which pacing is tightly coupled with other micro-tasks of

Facilitation emphasizing how a raid leader's approach to explaining strats and loot

distribution could have a powerful impact on the pace.

Glowfinger described his perspective on the core tasks of raiding based on

experiences across several games in a way that also highlighted the issue of pacing:

> Umm, you've gotta keep things going. It's important not to let the raid stall out, especially in something really really long. Like if you're gonna do all of Karazahn[9] in a night and you're, for example, just learning it. That can take . . . many hours. Umm if somebody, you know, goes AFK (Away From Keyboard) to go to the bathroom and then, thirty seconds before they get back somebody else goes AFK to get pizza from the door, you can sit there for half an hour just waiting for people to come and go. Uhh, it's important to keep it going.

Glowfinger's response highlights both the intense amounts of time it can take to learn and

complete end game content, as well as the permeable nature of raiding as an activity.

Because players are geographically distributed and engaged in this activity for

entertainment purposes, in-game leaders need to contend with the personal and biological

needs of up to twenty-five players during a raid. While Blizzard has sought over time to

make end game raiding possible in more bite sized pieces, the leaders I spoke with had

almost all performed in-game leadership during prior iterations of game content where a

raid could take up to five hours to complete.

---

[9] Karazahn was the first instance released in the *Burning Crusade*. It was extremely large and could take upwards of four hours to complete even if all of the players in the group were familiar with it.

Taking the Temperature, Improving Player Mood, and Calling the Raid

Alongside Pacing, the other three micro-tasks of Maintaining Morale are: Taking the temperature, Improving Player Mood, and Calling the Raid. Often times, the leaders I spoke with addressed all three of these micro-tasks as a single topic. For instance when I was asking Lola how she could gauge the players' mood (Taking the Temperature) in a raid, she explained her role in the guild in a manner that emphasized how she helped maintain morale in general during a raid:

> Just that when you spend four hours a night, five nights a week with people, and a lot of them are the same people, umm you get to know them pretty well. You can pick up cues even if they're not necessarily face-to-face. A lot of my job, which is not an official job, it was more that I didn't excel in leading, I didn't excel in raid strategy. I was sort of like, buffing people in real life. So I was like sort of the hostess, umm, of the event. I cracked the jokes, I made people feel welcome, I smoothed ruffled feathers, I massaged egos, I performed the function that any really good host or hostess at a party would . . . If this were real life, I'd be the bar tender, umm. And therefore, wielding that type of soft power, umm, gave me a lot of real power, and allowed me to sort of like, motivate people, calm people down, or when I said, you know, to the raid leaders, 'People are getting frustrated, we really need to take out so and so, he's being a douche', or you know, 'We should keep going', then they took that part into consideration but it was by no means an official decision.

Here Lola not only answers my initial query regarding how to gauge player mood without conventional signals like body language, she also takes the opportunity to address the role that humor plays in leadership and how decisions to press on or call the raid are tightly coupled with other aspects of tending to player morale.

Even leaders who didn't discuss these elements as deeply still addressed them when discussing tasks of raid leadership. For instance when I asked Fuzzyface if there

were any other tasks mid raid he responded, "what else do you do mid raid . . . umm, we, we joke around. While, that's not like, it's not . . . we have, we have fun. It's trash, like who cares, it's not like we're gonna wipe on trash." While Fuzzyface was hesitant to term joking around a leadership task, he still recognized that creating room for humor was an essential part of the raiding experience in <AMGPA>, and that it was at least indirectly tied to raid leadership.

Similarly when I discussed tasks of raid leadership with Gimli, he emphasized the need to ensure that all of the players in a given raid were as capable as possible so as to ensure the best possible playing experience for the group within the limited windows during which <And My Axe> raids. For instance, when I asked him how he manages a player who is consistently making errors during an encounter he responded:

> . . . if after say three or four attempts and it's pretty consistent that that player just isn't doing it, I'm just gonna tell 'em, like, "Look buddy, you're not doing it tonight for whatever reason, you're not firing on all four cylinders, we're gonna sit you out and bring someone else in." It's a tough job. I don't like, I don't like sitting players, but you know, at the end of the day, we have to get the boss down. Yeah, and I won't hesitate to sit players in order to do that.

While Gimli's explicit emphasis in this response is on bringing the raiding group victory (e.g. "we have to get the boss down"), his hypothetical decision to bench a player in this kind of context highlights the close connection between Pacing and Maintaining Morale. Each in-game victory or loss has direct implications for the raiding group's morale, and even though benching a player is a hard choice it can be beneficial if it ensures that the raiding group can achieve success and thereby have the will to keep moving in the near term, and signal that the whole guild is making progress over time.

Calling It

The final micro-task of Maintaining Morale is determining when to call an end to the raid. In some guilds, this issue was predetermined based on scheduling (this was the case in <And My Axe>). In other guilds, calling it was a choice made by the leadership based on player morale. As Glowfinger said, "The only way of course a raid would end if we didn't down everything[10] was if it just took way too long, and it was getting too late at night. And so then eventually we determined umm, based on people's attitudes, how tired they were getting, how long it'd taken whether or not to call it."

Lola in particular emphasized that the decision to call a raid was ultimately one made by the raid leader stating, "If I said, 'You know, people are tired, they want to go home.' or 'We should keep pushing.' and the raid leader felt differently, then it doesn't matter, really, what I said, if it was contrary to what the raid leader thought." Ultimately in the case of <Unbroken> Lola framed raid leader autonomy as necessary, but not always ideal. In speaking about raiding and maintaining morale generally she had this to say, "So, the raid leaders had an incredibly complex job. I will never, never want to do that and I never faulted them for it, but I have seen a lot of times, um, the temperature and the mood get misread, because they're so focused on the strategy task."

5.33 Post-gaming Cool Down and Reflection

The final task tied to synchronous raid leadership is Post-gaming Cool Down and Reflection. The sub-tasks of Cool Down are Debriefing and Stress Management. However, unlike some of the other sub-tasks and micro-tasks leaders discussed, these two topics were often deeply intermingled. In some guilds the task of Cool Down was

---

[10] i.e. Kill all the bosses.

formalized as an official post raid leadership activity, while in others it was simply a de facto event. Additionally, not all guilds retained a Cool Down phase in their current iteration and as a result the sub-tasks I've attached to Cool Down were more often tended to in an asynchronous manner in these guilds. However, for guilds that utilized a Cool Down phase, it served the very important function of providing time for a live debrief and helping leaders manage the stress of running a raiding guild.

When I spoke with the leaders of <AMGPA> about post raid activities, they indicated that as the guild was run currently there was no real Cool Down phase. As Fuzzyface said, "We used to, we used to use O-Chat (officer chat in game). Where we would talk about, and bitch about people. We, we too, we phased it out, I don't know how that happened, but we don't use it any more." In following up on Fuzzyface's recommendation to speak with Maverick, I attempted to find out more about the shape of the Cool Down phase when <AMGPA> was raiding more competitively. Maverick indicated that there had been a more formal Cool Down for the guild when they were competitive on their server during the Burning Crusade, but ultimately provided me with more insight into the rationale for having Cool Down than a description of actual Cool Down activities.

However, <AMGPA>'s former guild leader Pericles provided me with a fairly substantial explanation over email detailing the after raid meetings conducted by the leadership of <AMGPA>:

> Most of the discussion was over vent, and involved mostly people griping about low dps, people being carried, some recruitment concerns (re: loot and scoot), and again, usually about Johnny, Jack, or Jim, all of whom raided drunk. There was no real setup structure (like who would talk first), but I usually

was involved in making sure the Council didn't jump on each other's throats. Sometimes it wouldn't work out all that well.

Usually we tried to keep the meetings short, longer only if there were concerns or dealing with the drunks.

Class captains and raid officers gave suggestions on how the raid could have been run better.

From Pericles' response, we begin to get a reasonable sense of the sub-tasks of Cool Down. Notably the first things Pericles mentions are "people griping about low dps[11], people being carried . . ." This actually confirms Fuzzyface's take that these meetings were an opportunity for the leadership to "talk about, and bitch about people." The importance of these casual remarks should not be underestimated. While there are a variety of mechanisms guild leaders employed for handling both personnel decisions and stress management, airing concerns about behaviors of particular guild members or the guild's general regard for the leadership was an extremely common practice in the guilds in my sample.

At the same time, Pericles mentioned that during <AMGPA> leadership meetings, "Class captains and raid officers gave suggestions on how the raid could have been run better." While improving raiding performance was an ongoing need tied as much to tasks enacted outside of the window of raiding as in it, many guilds in my sample did (at least some point) utilize post-raid leadership meetings as an opportunity for debriefing on the raid in preparation for the next one. For some guilds this task was formally enacted by the leadership team, while for others it was conducted by whichever

---

[11] While DPS is used to refer to character role, the term derives from the literal meaning of the term damage per second. Griping about low DPS would be a way of placing the blame on specific players in the group for not performing their role adequately.

members of the guild were still online after the raid was complete. This was the case in

<Cotidie Frendo> where Bruce Campbell noted that mostly Cool Down was given over

to scheduling the next raid and that, ". . . if you're sitting in the Vent channel at the time,

that pretty much will determine if the raid is on a day that you can go to or not."

In general Pericles' response provides a window into the task of Cool Down, and

it also brings to the fore the way in which raid leadership and guild management can

bleed into each other. For <AMGPA> aspects of the Guild Politics and Executive

Management and Player Leadership and Membership Cultivation tasks were handled

contiguously with Cool Down simply because leadership meetings took place after raids.

As evidenced by Bruce Campbell's remark, in <Cotidie Frendo> the micro-task of

Coordinating Schedules often took place during this time as well, although we will see

subsequently that there was some variance in this matter.

<AMGPA> was not the only guild that utilized Cool Down as an opportunity for

guild leadership meetings. <Unbroken> also engaged in this practice, but unlike

<AMGPA> both Lola and Mort were very clear on the essential nature of those meetings

in maintaining their leadership group. Mort offered his perspective on the meetings

emphasizing both their practical function and their significance for the council members

as ritual to affirm their mutual commitment:

> We would actually have a little leadership powwow to discuss
> what happened, what issues came up, and basically how we
> performed that night as leaders. It, it actually became almost like,
> religious 'cause uh, if I did something wrong it was, it would be
> brought up to me . . . It's important especially when we decided
> not to have a GM too, because we would have a, an officer
> council . . . I mean we, everybody was uh, had the same equal
> amount of power in that circle so, it was kind of like a check as
> well . . . there were several times when we got into huge

arguments, but that didn't stop our friendship. And because we would discuss it privately it also didn't demoralize the guild, we were aware. So I mean, even though we had our differences, our main goal was to make the guild function as a unit, and have it, you know be, be a, uh how do I explain this . . . umm, I don't know, for the members to be enjoying the guild.

Lola's perspective was more candid in some regards. The topic was one which she talked on at great length. However the following excerpt from the interview complements Mort's description with its focus on how Cool Down for <Unbroken> was as much an opportunity for the leadership to deal with cumulative stress as it was to critique the specific strategic and tactical choices of the evening's raid:

Some of our officer meetings would go on, almost as long as the raid because . . . and I will say that by that time, many of the officers were really drunk by then. So, half of the officer meetings were the two raid leaders hashing out strategy combined with dealing with actual stuff that went on in the raid, and abusing ourselves as to the direction that the guild was moving in because we were absolutely positively intent on blaming ourselves for absolutely everything that went wrong, and then maybe the other fifty percent was like, silly socializing and running stuff . . .

When Lola mentions "running stuff" she is referring to either smaller five man dungeons players might do more casually or PvP battlegrounds where competitive play between the player factions of Alliance and Horde takes place.

<Unbroken> was not the only guild where the Cool Down entailed actually playing another part of the game. For many of the leaders I spoke with including Gimli, playing around in a different part of Azeroth provided a backdrop for the sub-tasks of both Debriefing and Stress Management. While Gimli would later emphasize the fact that he didn't conduct whole guild meetings, he did discuss how <And My Axe> debriefed after each raid saying:

> We debrief as a guild more or less. Like after, after a raid is done, it's nine o'clock on the Pacific coast, which is midnight so some of our Eastern guys will take off, and they'll usually look at the post raid forums after the fact to catch up on anything. But then some of us on the West coast, the guys that, we'll usually stay up for an hour because we just wanna decompress and uhh, I call it the cooldown phase you know? And that is about fifteen or twenty of us are just chillin' in Vent, and we just go over a couple of things. You know, like how did our last fight go or whatever, things that could've been done better. We just talk about it so to, so to speak.

For <And My Axe>, the Cool Down phase involves a hybridized meeting space in which the nominal guild leadership mingles with other raider to debrief on the evening's activity. Gimli specifies here that this conversation takes place on VoIP. When I followed up with him about whether there was still activity going on in game during these debriefing sessions, he stated that players might be engaged in regular instances or PvP, but not in any officially organized manner.

Like the leaders of <Unbroken>, Gimli also invoked the topic of alcohol consumption as a form of stress management although not quite to the same extent. The following exchange took place at the end of our interview when I asked Gimli if there was anything else essential about leadership in <And My Axe> that we hadn't discussed:

> No, I don't think so. Other than the . . . the booze and the stuff I drink after every raid to (*laughter*) to sleep easier, but ah other than that, no not really.
>
> *You're not entirely joking.*
>
> No.
>
> *You're not the only one who alcohol is one of their coping strategies. I can tell you this, you are by no means alone in that respect.*
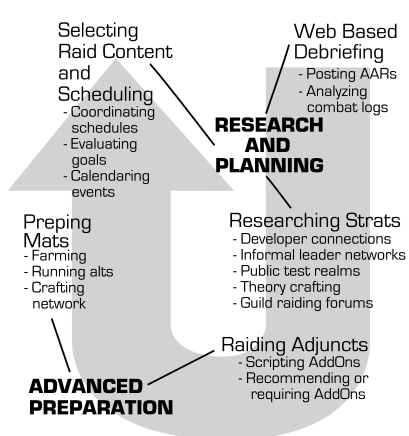>
> Oh good, that's good.

When I responded to Gimli that he wasn't alone in his use of alcohol for stress management, my interviews with the members of <Unbroken> were on my mind. However, so was the fact that alcohol is a common (if not healthy) coping strategy employed for stress management in other domains of practice. While the stakes of practice are much higher in the context of schools, Theoharis mentions how some school leaders committed to social justice also turn to drink to alleviate the stress of their work (2007, pp. 247 – 248). The commitment to ensuring that ones players have an enjoyable raiding experience is certainly no where near as noble as the commitment to ensuring that ones disadvantaged students are not being marginalized by the system. However the level of devotion by guild leaders is still intense, and the stress they handle is commensurate with that intensity.

In addition Lola's description of the leadership of <Unbroken> as, "absolutely positively intent on blaming ourselves for absolutely everything that went wrong" invokes a similar narrative to that described by Theoharis of leaders placing their own needs behind those of their most needful constituents. I do have to note however, that not all the leaders in my sample invoked the topic of alcohol when discussing Cold Down. For many leaders (particularly of less serious raiding guilds) the stress of leadership was clearly not enough to drive them to drink. Both Bunny Slippers and Pericles did however mention excessive alcohol consumption while raiding as grounds for kicking a player out of the guild.

5.4 Asynchronous Raid Leadership

Undoubtedly some of the most interesting tasks in raiding from an instructional leadership perspective lie in how more static online systems function as resources for distributed problem solving in virtual organizations. Much of the leadership work that makes raiding a viable activity is enacted alongside or outside of actual game play. Furthermore, some of these practices are stratified across the community of *WoW* raiding guilds with different guilds engaging in them at different levels.

Figure 5.4 Asynchronous Raid Leadership Tasks

Selecting Raid Content and Scheduling
- Coordinating schedules
- Evaluating goals
- Calendaring events

Web Based Debriefing
- Posting AARs
- Analyzing combat logs

RESEARCH AND PLANNING

Preping Mats
- Farming
- Running alts
- Crafting network

Researching Strats
- Developer connections
- Informal leader networks
- Public test realms
- Theory crafting
- Guild raiding forums

Raiding Adjuncts
- Scripting AddOns
- Recommending or requiring AddOns

ADVANCED PREPARATION

In this section we will consider the asynchronous tasks of raid leadership. I've categorized these tasks as Game Related Research and Raid Planning, and Advanced Preparation of In-Game Resources and Game Interface. These tasks are not necessarily performed out of game and in some instances they may involve playing with another guild member or members. However, as leadership tasks these aspects of raiding are ultimately accomplished in smaller discreet segments and crucially don't take place during the actual raid. That said, some guilds do engage in some of these practices in the hours leading up to the raid before Preparation begins in full or immediately following its conclusion while tending to other aspects of Cool Down.

5.41 Game Related Research and Raid Planning

Like the tasks of raid leadership in general, Game Related Research and Raid Planning can be considered as a cyclical process, albeit one that generally happens along a significantly different time scale. After the completion of an evening of raiding or prior to the release of new content, each guild has to determine what specific content they'll be working on next and when they will raid. If the content is new, the guild was unsuccessful previously, or they want to try something differently, then research needs to take place. Following the next raid, most guilds engage in some form of debriefing through the forums on their websites.

Analysis of the guild's previous performance often plays back into content selection and choice of specific strats for the next raid, and the cycle continues. Immediately prior to or after the release of new content, or when a guild embarks upon content which is new to them the task of Research and Planning becomes much more intensive. At other times, many of the active engagement in sub-tasks around Research and Planning will die back as the guild members learn the available content and move through it with greater automaticity.

5.41a Selecting Content and Scheduling Raids

Selecting Content and Scheduling Raids consists of the micro tasks: 1) Coordinating Schedules 2) Evaluating Goals, and 3) Calendaring Events. These micro-tasks are deeply inter-related, and the overarching themes that run through them are in some ways of more significance than the technical features of performing them. For this

reason we'll start this subsection with a look at the nature of Selecting Content and Scheduling Raids generally, following which I will give brief consideration to some of the technical details of that actual activity.

In some sense, the activity of scheduling is simply the technical counterpart to the more symbolic act of choosing what content the guild will attempt in the next raid. To a great extent the activity of content selection takes place within a very narrow framework established by the designers at Blizzard. However, within this bounded space guild leaders do the crucial work of establishing the identity of their guild and maintaining purpose for the organization when the process behind the game's design creates pacing issues.

Raid content selection takes place in two different ways depending on what content is available. When Blizzard has released new content, the issue of content selection depends on guild leaders determining what their organization is ready for. In addition with the release of new content, leaders may decide to work on a specific part of a new instance so long as it isn't constructed in a linear fashion where each boss needs to be taken in turn. When there is no new content to attempt, then guild leaders work to determine what available content will be beneficial for members in terms of loot, fun for the guild on its own merit, or worth doing for more idiosyncratic reasons.[12]

The rate of content release by Blizzard has varied substantially over the life of the game. Gimli described how the rate of the release of content can make what is at other

---

[12] Since the immediately prior to the *Wrath of the Lich King* expansion, Blizzard added in-game achievements to the game. Certain achievements are tied to performing in certain instances at a certain level of speed or with optional features that make encounters more difficult. Earning achievements sometimes provides an additional reason for a guild to schedule content they've already seen.

times an almost insignificant task a hugely important element of his work as a guild

leader:

> . . . on the raiding side of things, I'll be honest with you, it kind of slows down a bit on our end because once we know that a new patch comes out, the interest in current stuff kind of wanes. Yeah, partly because it's, "We've been doing this for four months, and why bother coming because there's new stuff to do", but thankfully I'm, I've been able to avoid most of that to keep my guys in shape, because I keep tellin' 'em, "Look, you know, the gear you get now means you get gear later as well. Because every advantage you get with the stuff we have now means that we don't have to work as hard, and it contributes to the, uhh raid strength of the, of the next hard bosses that we get." Not to mention, there is the whole achievement thing of, you know we wanna, we wanna beat this while it still matters, you have like, yeah so there is still that too, that I instill in them as well.

For Anastasia, the task of content selection was more significant for the alliance

she had helped create so that more serious members of her guild could attempt twenty-

five man content. While internally in <Credible Sources> content selection was handled

by interested members who were willing to organize and calendar an event (a format that

was also used in <The Workmen>), within the guild alliance the process was more

complex and more politically freighted. She related that this task would generally be done

in a designated in-game chat channel and might happen before or after a raiding alliance

event. Her discussion of content selection lends additional gravity to the essential nature

of this task despite the game design constrained context in which it takes place. She noted

that briefing sessions were often dominated by discussions of, "'Where are we gonna go?

'What are we gonna do?' 'Why are we doing this?'" She elaborated on how those

conversation played out in a recent decision that generated a functional guild alliance

policy for guiding raiding as well:

. . . so basically what it was is we ended up banging our head against the wall for three or four weeks, and, umm, you know where we're basically rep. farming. Okay? And . . . with repair bills. And when I said that, I said one night, I must've said it in guild alliance chat, because we hadn't decided where we were going. And I said, "Are we gonna go do something that we can do like ToC 25, that we can do realistically like ToC 25 or are we gonna go get everybody a, you know, two hundred gold repair bill at ICC?" And that pissed everybody off. But, that week, we set a limit of, I think it was five wipes. And then we would go to ToC twenty five. While the five wipes happened within . . . thirty five minutes of hitting Marrowgar. And, umm, we went to ToC twenty five, and that's the night we got Anub'arak down to one percent. While since then we've been doing ToC twenty five, because people are realizing that, 'Guess what, there are still upgrades to be had.' and that we're still fighting over the DPS trinket on, you know, the Twins. And, you know there are still people who are putting together their four piece, you know tier set. And we're, we're not ready to step into that. But the controversy that took place to get to there, to get back to doing raiding that was actually . . . you know.

The abbreviations Anastasia uses are standard abbreviations players have for the different instances. ToC stands for *Trial of the Crusader* while ICC stands for *Ice Crown Citadel*. Both of these instances were later content patches added to the game and extending its main narrative. *Ice Crown Citadel* was the final content release for the *Wrath of the Lich King* expansion and as such players were excited to do it not only because it included new challenges, but because it concluded the narrative events. The other capitalized names are the names of boss mobs inside of the instances (Marrowgar is a denizen of *Ice Crown Citadel*). Anastasia has related how after the guild attempted to try the much harder fight in *ICC* she then convinced them to go to *ToC* where players could still obtain gear that was useful for them.

While Anastasia trails off at the end of describing this incident, she has already related the core benefits that this particularly controversial conversation around content

selection enabled. Members of the alliance were able to take stock of their actual capacity as a whole to proceed looking beyond the lure of the "new" content to refocus on how raiding could be more productive for their own membership. In addition, the event allowed them to generate (in the field) a policy of a five wipe limit which would serve to help in Maintaining Morale on later raids.

While content selection was a presented as a sub-task with largely symbolic implications, scheduling was naturally addressed by leaders from a more pragmatic stance. The topic of scheduling also varied substantially among the different guilds I contacted. While some guilds handled the micro-task of Coordinating Schedules immediately after raids, others preferred to do that scheduling offline via web forums or other mechanisms of communication. In addition, some of the leaders I spoke with mentioned alternating among both of these practices.

Gimli discussed how he had implemented a somewhat different system for <And My Axe> than the sort utilized by the other guilds I spoke with. While most guilds use a sign-in process where players indicate their willingness to show up, Gimli stated that, ". . . we use a sign-out process. Everyone, if you're a certain rank, you're expected to be here. If you're not gonna be here, and you know this in advance, you let us know." We can see here how through the use of calendaring, Gimli pushes <And My Axe> towards a more professionalized model where guild members (like employees or students) are expected to be in attendance unless they indicate otherwise.

Actual Calendaring of specific events in guilds was somewhat more uniform in nature. Given the addition of an events calendar in the game with the release of patch 3.0 (a patch introduced prior to the release of the second expansion), all of the guilds I spoke

with who were still playing utilized the in-game calendar to actually schedule their

current raids and other events. In describing the calendaring process she employs with

<Requisite Chaos>, Clovie provides us with her perspective on how the actual in-game

tool is necessary but not sufficient for ensuring coordination of players:

> For both 10 and 25 man runs the first proper task is one I do, and
> is to get the raid invites out, using the in game calendar . . . Our
> 10 man group tends to be almost exactly the same every week,
> having cultivated a core that work well. However, one or two of
> those people regularly has to swap around which 10 man evening
> they attend due to real life commitments. That's why getting the
> calendar invites out early is important; as at that time I would
> also give our 10 man raiders a quick poke to make sure they're
> able to attend the next 10 man (or expect them to poke me). We
> also generally stay in contact throughout the week - we've all
> become friends, and so chat, although a lot of the chat seems to
> route through me (as the guild's unofficial 'social worker', as it
> were).

Key to her description of this group is the fact that the group stays "in contact throughout

the week", allowing more flexibility in navigating the schedules of this smaller tighter

sub-group.

Image 5.1: A screenshot of the in-game calendar

Many guild leaders mentioned the addition of the in-game calendar and other tools Blizzard has added to the game. Brazenwulf stated, "So it used to be that the number one tool for organizing and planning was to place (things) in the message boards. Now most of that happens in-game through the calendar and, and those sorts of things." As Brazenwulf's comment about the message boards points towards, guilds leaders have historically used a variety of methods to actually calendar events. When I asked Bruce Campbell how <Cotidie Frendo> handled calendaring prior to the advent of the in-game tool, he responded, "Yeah we had . . . a pretty basic, I think it was just like a PHP[13] page where Brains essentially mimicked a calendar and said, 'The days that we're raiding, click which one you want to sign up for.' And then whichever days had more people, we ended up going with that etcetera."

While Bruce Campbell offers a description typical of the sort of highly tech. savvy practices that characterize <Cotidie Frendo>, other guilds mentioned utilizing an AddOn for calendaring before the calendar was integrated into the game. Glowfinger described how <Destructifaction> ,"downloaded some kind of calendar mod" but , "only had mixed success with that." He went on to say, "We only got about half of the guild to use it, but the half that did use it was very successful using it. It was extremely convenient."

5.41b Researching Strats

The sub-task of Researching Strats lies at the heart of the research and planning process, and it is this sub-task in particular which is taken up at a variety of levels across

---

[13] A scripting language for web development.

the playing community. The five micro-tasks that constitute researching strats are 1)

Developer Connections 2) Informal Leader Networks 3) Public Test Realms 4) Theory

Crafting and 5) Guild Raiding Forums. These different micro-tasks are actually

representative of four different levels of participation which players in different types of

guilds have access to. While the most serious guilds may have an inside line to

developers keying them into the general nature of upcoming content or changes to the

game, even the most casual guilds engage in research for online resources to prepare for

raids.

As noted previously, <Cotidie Frendo> is one of a handful of guilds that sits at the

heart of the larger WoW raiding community. As a result the topic of strats and

theorycrafting[14] in general was a persistent one in my interview with Bruce Campbell.

Late in the interview I asked him specifically about how <Cotidie Frendo> prepared for

new content:

> While, (*laughs*) if I can, oh man, I don't know if I can say this I
> have some very secretive things I could say right now . . .
>
> *Yeah, don't say anything that you wouldn't be comfortable uh,*
> *you know . . .*
>
> Divulged to the public? Alright, basically I guess, I guess the best
> way to put this would be, uh we just have a ton of people who are
> 'in the know' about up to the minute things about the, the
> progression of raiding. Whether that be strats that other guilds

---

[14] The online World of Warcraft resource wowwiki.com defines *theorycraft* as the
attempt to mathematically analyze game mechanics in order to gain a better
understanding of the inner workings of the game. Depending on its complexity, certain
random factors might be left out, resulting in a less representative outcome. The term
originated in the Starcraft community. When somebody describes a strategy or a formula
behind damage, they are talking about Theorycraft. However, in WoW itself, there will
always be random factors or external influences that could distort the result of a damage
formula or strategy.

> are, you know, working on. We just have a lot of people who are, who have been in the MMO scene for quite a while and have friends, like old friends who are still umm, religiously attending MMO raids and stuff like that, and they all talk. It's kind of like the old mafia etcetera of WoW, umm but we have a few of those in our guild and stuff like that. And, so we get a lot of knowledge from those places and from our own, very own forums and we just, talk about it.

In this description Bruce Campbell offers us a general description of the informal networks that high-end raiding guilds have access too. He also makes reference to a comment he had made when the topic of researching strats first came up. Specifically, when I first asked him about researching strats he stated, " . . . we go to our own forums. One of the greatest benefits about being in <Cotidie Frendo> is you are privy to all of this information, and you can get immediate, I mean practically immediate, discussion on any subject that you're curious about."

In addition to the "old mafia etcetera of *WoW*", Bruce Campbell also provided some measure of detail on how players like himself who aren't necessarily part of that inner circle still make use of the informal network which has developed in the upper echelons of raiding guilds. His description emphasizes how the task of Research and Planning can start with activity during a raid for even the most competitive guilds:

> Oh yeah, definitely. What'll happen so often is like, you know, we're in the middle of our instance you know? And someone on Vent who's like sitting outside the raid will say, "Oh um, you know, <Ensidia> just downed Algalon." And then we're like, "Oh crap we really need to get on this", and so Brains will say, alright, umm you know, if they put out a video or if they did whatever, he'll say, "Just send us whatever there is and we'll talk about it after the raid." Just because of how that works we end up, we can get information like, information flows between guilds a lot more freely than most people expect.

<Ensidia> is a well known highly competitive guild, and Algalon is a boss Bruce

Campbell chose to illustrate the example. In this response, we see again Bruce

Campbell's emphasis on the informal network among high-end guilds which drives the

knowledge production community of *WoW*, and by extension shapes the activity of

raiding and leadership in raiding guilds.

While he emphasized the competitive element that drives guilds, Bruce Campbell

also discussed how the distribution of guilds on specific servers also helps to move

information around among high-end guilds. On several instances over the course of the

interview he specified that the server on which <Cotidie Frendo> plays is somewhat

unique as it hosts a number of the high end raiding guilds present on North American

servers. This topic came up when I asked him about the medium through which

communication between guilds about raid strats occurred:

> Uhh usually they take place on umm IRC, umm. They'll happen
> in Ventrillo, like I'll hop on over to like, <Second Scythe>'s
> Ventrillo or someone, some other guild's Ventrillo and like, go
> into a private channel, talk with my friend. In a way it'll happen
> like I have umm, I know they have, err a lot of people play on
> XXXXXXXX with, for PvP alts, and so we'll just end up like
> going into arenas and talking about stuff in general. I mean, it
> ends up like some people have a PvP alt, some people have a PvP
> alt somewhere else, but like . . . the eventual intermingling of
> umm, and I suppose it's pretty specific to XXXXXXXXX the
> more that I think about it but, just because of how huge
> XXXXXXXXX is in general like, it's kind of an anomaly, but a
> lot of people play there.

IRC stands for Internet Relay Chat (a form of text messaging) while Ventrillo is one of

several provides of VoIP service. When I have included a string of X's here and in other

parts it is to obscure the name of the specifi server the player is making a reference to.

Finally Alts is short for alternate character. While all players have a main character they

play, many crate an alt to experience the game from another angle or for a specific

purpose like PvP combat.

While Bruce Campbell was clear that the communications between members of

different guilds can take place openly, he also emphasized how the size of the server and

the capacity for players to play alts who were unaffiliated with their guild could also lead

to less intentional communication between guilds:

> A lot of people have alts, and so you'll just have someone who's in, either in <Cotidie Frendo> from another guild, or you'll have people who are in like other guilds that we play with pretty often and like, do battlegrounds with and stuff, but they'll talk to each other all the time. It's the identities are usually kept secret for as long as possible about like, who this is or who that is, and nobody questions it, but it's just been like, 'Oh that dude's in some other guild and we just gave him our whole strat on accident, good job.' Yeah. But, that is part and parcel of the adventure of high end raiding I suppose.

While the highest end guilds in WoW employ an informal network that ultimately

works to create resources for the larger community, guilds at the next level down in the

WoW knowledge production line are not so persistently networked. When I asked Gimli

about the existence of a persistent back channel or forum for guild leaders at his level his

reply was, "There, there probably is one for the upper, like the top tier raiding guilds but

at this level, probably not, no. Yeah, it would be kind of cool, but no. Unfortunately there

isn't."

While guilds at the level of <And My Axe> might not be persistently networked

with other serious raiding guilds, they are nonetheless part of a mutable informal network

which coalesces on the public test realms (PTRs) which Blizzard operates when testing

new content out prior to release. When I asked Gimli about how <And My Axe> prepares

for new content, he replied as follows:

> Uhh basically either I or someone else hits the PTR and we just join PuGs (Pick Up Groups). I have my own little group on the side. I have my own little PTR group that I know umm. And by know I mean just, people that kind of look me up on my blog and stuff that are like, 'Yeah, hey, I wanna join you on the PTR.' And you know, that sort of thing. So . . .
>
> *Are these also often like uhh, raid leaders or guild leaders in their own right?*
>
> Yeah. In some ways yes. Some of them are guild leaders, some of them are officers. So it's like you're taking, you're basically taking leadership players from other guilds and putting them into one super group task force and stuff, which is pretty good because everyone, you know, you're getting the best tactical minds here that, and everyone usually has an idea of how something works or, or they're spotting for certain things that others might miss, so it's really good to have that kind of thing going on.

Gimli was clear that while this "super group task force" comes together when PTRs are

open to get a sneak peak at new content and lay groundwork for the strategies they'll

employ with their own guilds, the contact is limited to these windows of time. When I

pushed further to see if conversations that start on the PTRs are extended outside of them

in any way Gimli responded by saying:

> We'll usually have like our own Vent server and we'll usually discuss a couple of things after the, after the server's shut down, or if they close off the encounters or testing or whatever, we'll just talk about it a bit, and just compare notes and share stuff and that kind of thing, but we don't normally go to each other's forums and post stuff. All this stuff just happens, we just play it by the ear.

This process of "playing it by ear" represents the aspect of Research and Planning which

involves the most intensive amounts of hypothesis testing and field work. When I asked

Gimli about the learning that takes place in the PTR's he provided one perspective on the role guilds operating at the level of <And My Axe> play stating, "Right, it's practical information because these blogs, blogs and stuff like Wowwiki and stuff, they have to get their information from somewhere. You know . . . we are the trend setters, we are the ones that go out and get this information and, and we're the ones that put it on these blogs."

Apart from <And My Axe> and <Cotidie Frendo>, the only other guild from my sample in which a leader mentioned access to beta versions of game content via PTRs was <Valar Morghulis>. While many of the comments Bunny Slippers made were shorter due to the use of email as an interviewing medium, when I inquired about preparation for new content he replied by stating, "The primary task done before release of an expansion or a major content patch is communication/information sharing. We do like to get people into the beta to learn what they can, and then dig through various online sources to find out what we can on the new content and changes to the current systems." Since members of <Valar Morghulis> also do work from within the guild serving as consultants with game developers, Bunny Slippers later emphasized that they, " . . . have several (players) who are always in the betas and they, in turn, bring that knowledge back into the guild before that expansion launches."

While both the most elite and the second tier guilds have members involved with knowledge production around *WoW*, other raiding guilds have become increasingly dependent on the accumulation of online resources generated by their more cutting edge counterparts. The raid leaders I spoke with were particularly nostalgic for the early days of *WoW* in which the community was less developed and each guild had to work on its

own to determine the best approach to an encounter. As Mort said regarding what could be termed a trend towards a best practices approach to raiding, "While I wish actually, I wish that never would've happened. I mean, I really enjoyed learning fights by myself, uhh when we were starting raiding originally, <Blind Guardians>, figuring out the bosses ourselves, not with strategies."

Mort's regrets for the direction the larger community of players has taken tacitly acknowledges that for the majority of raiding guilds the task of Researching Strats generally involves selecting one from maybe a few existing approaches, and possibly modifying it slightly to fill the needs of a specific guild. As Fuzzyface stated when explaining why he always goes over a strat again during the actual raid, "It's usually only like one right way to do it, and if we, if there is a debate on like what's the better technique, we'll go with the standard, then we'll see what was the screw up and why we wiped, and then if it happens to be another strat that might fix it we'll switch it up."

Even in the most casual raiding guilds Researching Strats at minimum involves having at least one member of the guild read up on the available options from the existing resources and referring other members of the guild to the resources they've settled on. While most guilds post copies of strats or links to the appropriate material on their own website, <Luminosity> took an even more casual approach generally utilizing the pre-raid time when the whole group was logged in to actually disseminate strats. As Brazenwulf stated:

> The most interested person, generally who, who kind of organized the thing, will often go out and find a YouTube video, something from TankSpot (a *WoW* strat website) or somewhere like that, and say, "Okay, everybody go to the link in my Ventrillo comment and watch that, umm, and then, that's the

> strategy that we're gonna do." And so everybody will spend, you
> know like ten, fifteen minutes prior, just prior to the raid umm,
> just kind of reviewing that general idea, and then we'll go in and
> just trial and error it until we master it.

There is an unspoken acknowledgment in Brazenwulf's response that despite the

synchronous dispersal of strats in <Luminosity>, the individual in the guild who took on

the onus of organizing the specific raid would have already spent time on their own

Researching Strats and tracking down appropriate instructional materials to aid the rest of

the raid in engaging with the new content.

5.41c Web Based Debriefing

While Researching Strats is a core aspect of the Game Related Research and Raid

Planning cycle, most raiding guilds also work to ensure that their practices are informed

by some record of their previous activity as well as approaches developed within the

larger community. While more casual guilds don't necessarily engage in the sub-task of

Debriefing, all of the more serious guilds I contacted posted some type of After Action

Report (AAR), recorded combat logs during the raid and then posted those logs to their

web page for analysis, or performed both of these micro-tasks.

Combat logs provide a particularly interesting tool for evaluation that a game

environment like World of Warcraft enables. When I asked Gimli about how combat logs

function he provided me with the following basic orientation of how in-game data can be

made available as a diagnostic tool for raid leadership:

> What you can do is you can type something called /combatlog
> and it basically turns your entire combat log, it outputs into a text
> file into your WoW folder. Yeah so you do that, and the thing
> though is if you look at it in its raw form, you're looking at

possibly a hundred, a hundred megs of just text information. So you've gotta be able to organize that into something coherent. There's a couple of websites that will handle that for you. Uhh the two biggest ones, the two biggest ones are worldoflogs.com and wowmeteronline.com. And you basically, you run this Java client, and it compresses all that information into meaningful stuff. Graphs, bars, overall DPS done, overall whatever done. It'll analyze who died on each individual fight or which attempt or whatever. And it's really handy with when we're trying to diagnose our uhh, our wipes.

So it'll give you some analytics even without, umm analysis on your part basically?

Yeah, it it'll tell us, yeah. You just have to know how to find it. You have to be very, very contextual in how you read that kind of thing. For example, if a mage does say, 2000 DPS or something like that compared to this other mage that was doing 8000 DPS, so you gotta figure out, while what's the difference here? Oh that's because mage A was doing something else like uhh, keeping these certain bombs and make sure, making sure that they don't hit the ground or whatever, or maybe he was basically crowd control or something for the entire fight, you know. So, this stuff has to be taken in context. It's all raw information, but you gotta, and it doesn't tell the story on its own, so you have to know how to read this stuff and figure out, you know, why this person's doing this, and why this person's doing that.
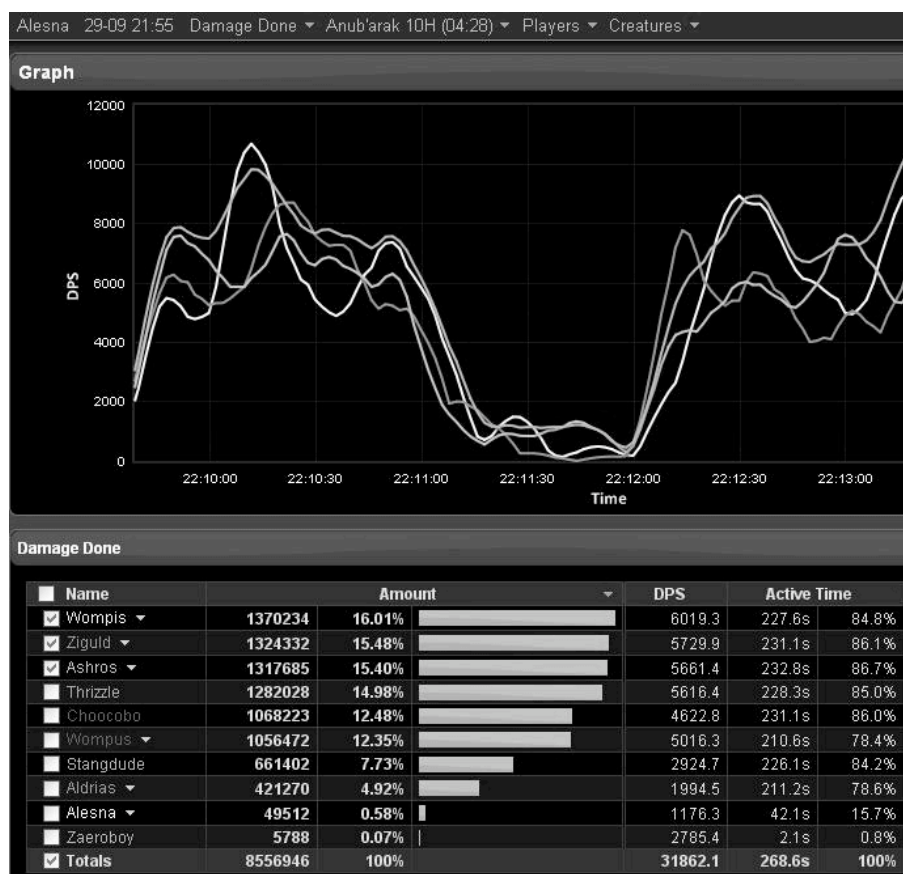
While Gimli is describing here how combat logs work functionally, he is also careful to emphasize the contextual nature of the data they supply. As a player who is also actively involved in the raid, he is very clear on the fact that the data "doesn't tell the story on its own." Furthermore, he goes on in his explanation to emphasize that the interpretive process is one that is aided by a collective analysis. When I asked him if he had ever been, "stumped for a while" by data before, "the light goes on, like, 'Oh, that's what happened there!'" he responded as follows:

Yeah, usually it happens a lot. You know, I usually rely on, I'm a healer, I don't, I don't claim to be the best person when it comes to tanking stuff or DPS stuff, so I'll just ask a question or two and

be like you know, "Why did this happen?" or "How come this person's doing this?" and then all of them are pretty much straight forward answers, or something like that, which makes me look dumb, but you know, that's how it goes, it's the learning process.

Here Gimli recognizes the limitations on his capacity to observe and interpret all of the events that take place during a raid due to his role as healer. Crucially, he is also willing to "look dumb" in conversation with his other players even though he is the guild master, since doing so ensures that the whole group can optimize the analytic value of the logs for collective learning.

Image 5.2: A screenshot of a combat log from World of Logs

Name	Amount		DPS	Active Time	
☑ Wompis ▾	1370234	16.01%	6019.3	227.6s	84.8%
☑ Ziguld ▾	1324332	15.48%	5729.9	231.1s	86.1%
☑ Ashros ▾	1317685	15.40%	5661.4	232.8s	86.7%
☐ Thrizzle	1282028	14.98%	5616.4	228.3s	85.0%
☐ Choocobo	1068223	12.48%	4622.8	231.1s	86.0%
☐ Wompus ▾	1056472	12.35%	5016.3	210.6s	78.4%
☐ Stangdude	661402	7.73%	2924.7	226.1s	84.2%
☐ Aldrias ▾	421270	4.92%	1994.5	211.2s	78.6%
☐ Alesna ▾	49512	0.58%	1176.3	42.1s	15.7%
☐ Zaeroboy	5788	0.07%	2785.4	2.1s	0.8%
☑ Totals	8556946	100%	31862.1	268.6s	100%

Most of the guilds in my sample that utilized combat logs tended to talk about doing so consistently. One exception to this trend was Cuprum who contacted me late in my research process after hearing about my work. In using the constant comparative method (Conrad, 1982), I noted that despite being a serious raiding guild, Cuprum made no mention of <Throw Stone>'s use of combat logs in his initial response to my questions about post raid activity. When I asked him via email if <Throw Stone> utilized logs, he responded, "On the fly during the raid unless something dramatic or outstanding (happens) and a larger point needs to be made." Notably, <Throw Stone> is structured by design for playing through "10 man" raids rather than the larger 25 person versions of those instances. When responding about the use of logs, Cuprum also noted that, "One of the advantages of running a 10 man, is that poor performance is very noticeable both in actual numbers but in spell choice and positioning. Unlike in 25 mans (where) it's easier to absorb a mistake or (miss) someone hiding behind their colleagues." While this comment largely speaks to the synchronous activity of raiding itself, it also helps us to see how key choices around content selection can ripple back out effecting not only what a guild does in game, but to what degree and how it employs other practices to support that play.

Finally it is noteworthy that in some of the guilds where the topic of combat logs didn't necessarily come up in the initial interview, a quick check on guild websites served to indicate that logs were being utilized regularly. For instance Anastasia didn't mention the use of logs in my interview with her, but after checking on the website of the raiding guild alliance to which <Credible Sources> belongs, it

became fairly evident that since our interview earlier this year the large group of more serious raiders which she has helped to establish has been utilizing combat logs to advance their raiding practices.

By contrast to the deployment of combat logs, the use of more text based AARs varied somewhat. In the case of <Unbroken> Lola had previously emphasized that debriefing was not usually done with the whole guild, but primarily done by the officers during Cool Down. When I asked about whether or not the conclusions from the debriefing done in those meetings ever made it back out to the guild, she noted that it didn't happen with consistency saying, "So, so officer meetings took up a huge amount of time, and then because nobody seemed to like to type, umm (*laughter*) I was often times tasked with like, and also I'm a decent writer, you know putting the, the guild discussions, the officer discussions into words and then posting them on the forums usually fell to me." She later emphasized that especially prior to her push for more transparency, these report outs to the rest of the guild were less consistent and allowed little room for the other players to respond.

In addition, some of the guilds in my sample like <AMGPA> and <Luminosity> posted news items to their websites to mark either individual player or guild achievements but didn't necessarily use these tools for any debriefing function. It's quite possible that use of more formal/documented modes of debriefing are less common among more casual guilds. As Glowfinger noted regarding his time with <Destructifaction>, debriefing was an officer only activity conducted over voice after a raid and greatly contingent on where in the learning process the guild was. In describing how meetings for debriefing occurred he stated, "Umm, basically we'd get together, we'd

discuss the strategies that worked, umm if we thought there was a way they could work better. We'd talk about the stuff that didn't work or the bosses that we had to skip and uh what we might be able to do to get them next time." When I checked with him to see if these discussions were transmitted back to the rest of the guild at all, he stated that the members were not briefed on the outcomes of those leadership discussions until immediately before a raid or specific encounter. He added, "This probably stems from (the guild) being very much not hardcore about things."

If some guilds in my sample used few or no additional tools to debrief, at least one guild in my sample utilized a full complement of tools to aid in this process. Bunny Slippers provided me with a detailed list of how <Valar Morghulis> uses a full array of tools in it's debriefing process in response to an email question about what tasks take place following a raid:

> When a raid is over there are several tasks. The first is to upload all raid data to our analysis tool. We currently use World of Logs. We load it there so all raiders can evaluate their performance. One lead handles this. A report is also sent to Bunny Slippers. That report is detailed on what dropped, who won it, what was killed, any issues with raid tactics etc... Every day the entire guild gets a communication on what went on the previous day and what is coming up and those reports are used to keep everyone on the same page. And finally, there is a post-mortem discussion on the leads forum for any new bosses we faced to see what tactics worked or didn't work. We don't consider any of those optional. The biggest challenge can sometimes be finding the time to do them between raids. We raid Thur and Fri back to back with brand new content and that doesn't always leave a lot of time to discuss things.

It's worth noting that while <Valar Morghulis> uses combat logs so that "all raiders can evaluate their performance", Bunny Slippers also receives a report in case he needs to handle any issues top down, and he in turn sends out a communication to the whole guild

to "keep everyone on the same page." Finally, Bunny Slippers mentions the use of forums by his leadership to trouble shoot specific issues. Notably, <Valar Morghulis> is a serious guild but not a competitive raiding guild in the traditional sense. As an extremely well established organization with a long history however, they choose to take advantage of the full array of tools to support their collective learning process outside of the time in which they are actually playing through content together.

5.42 Advanced Preparation of In-Game Resources and Game Interface

While the sub-tasks of Research and Planning can be intensive, the work around Advanced Preparation of In-Game Resources and Game Interface can also be an intensely demanding aspect of raiding guild leadership. As Lola said stated with regard to the micro-task of Farming[15] which is an essential part of preparing the virtual consumables necessary for raiding, "It was hours and hours of farming. It really honestly, for as expensive as it was to raid it felt like for every hour we spent in a raid we spent at least two for farming." While Farming can be particularly time consuming many (although not all) of the micro-tasks of Advanced Preparation can make significant demands on player time. The sub-tasks of Advanced Preparation include Preparing Mats, and Adjunct Software.

---

[15] The term farming in MMOs and in games generally refers to repeating aspects of game play for the purpose of accruing virtual goods or improving a character's statistics. Farming in WoW can refer to either individual play for one of these purposes, or the practice of "farming an instance" the guild has already beaten for the purpose of gearing characters.

5.42a Preparing Mats

Like many of the sub-tasks of Research and Planning leadership practices around Advanced Preparation were also executed with varying degrees of synchronicity, and varying degrees of distribution. As previously noted, the micro-tasks affiliated with Preparing Mats were some of the most time consuming activities identified by players. These activities are also some of the ones which blur the line between game play and leadership task, and which as a result are often executed through combinations of players who are and are not officially ranked members.

All of the leaders I interviewed acknowledged that farming for the materials necessary to make raid consumables and preparing them was an essential task of leadership in a raiding guild. Many of them also mentioned running alts (alternate characters) specifically for the purpose of having the capacity to craft more raid consumables. Many of those who didn't run alts themselves referred to the need to know who comprised the network of crafting alts in the guild. In the end however, for most guilds Preparing Mats was a task so deeply distributed that it seldom rested inside of the nominal leadership group. Gimli's casual statement that general maintenance involves, "just farming, and making sure our bank supplies are stocked up, that kind of thing" is fairly representative of the sort of answers many guild leaders supplied me with when I tried to determine if there were maintenance tasks which they tended to as leaders over longer spans of time. This response falls amongst similar responses indicating that the leadership needed to ensure these tasks were tended to, but that often times they were tasks ultimately executed by all or almost all of the guild members involved in raiding.

Following her statement about the massive quantities of time required for farming in order to prepare for raids, Lola went on to describe how Preparing Mats was a task taken up across the guild and executed by different members according to their own capacity:

> It was all left up to you. I mean some people preferred to like, farm non-stop and buy their shit off the Auction House, and other people like our main tanks, were like so broke that they relied on like the charity of the other officers. So having like a strong social network, especially I can say as an officer, was extremely helpful for me because I . . . I was very, sort of resource limited in game, so I relied a lot on sort of the charity of my fellow officers, not asking them but it was really like, "Oh you know, you got this new piece of gear I saw, let me enchant it for you." And my contributions were a lot more with my labor like, "Alright look, you need this piece I'll heal it for you like, that's fine." . . . So it was all left up to the individual player.

In and amidst the WoW jargon, Lola is describing how limitations on when and how she had time to play made it difficult for her to operate as an entirely self-sufficient player for raiding. However, like the tanks in the guild her role as a healer allowed her to offer other valuable services to players who did have the time to make their characters skilled at Enchanting or another craft that could be used to help provide her character with consumables and other enhancements for raiding.

Lola's case exemplifies how in a very real way, the sub-task of Preparing Mats is leadership as a modeling activity. Unlike in schools where the day-to-day work of teachers is to teach while the core (visible) work of administrators is management, leaders in WoW must ultimately perform the same basic activities as the players in their guilds. In these respects, good leaders have the opportunity to make sure that they are modeling the behaviors they would like to see the rest of their players enact.

5.42b Raiding Adjuncts

Given statements from the leaders I spoke with, this was also the case with the adoption of adjunct software tools for raiding. I use the term Raiding Adjuncts to include both AddOns developed to modify game play as well as macro scripts composed in the game to aid in play. While AddOns can be used to modify the actual interface of the game in global ways or otherwise provide players with data about the game in real time, macros can be written to effect a series of actions in-game including sending a specific text message to a chat channel for anything ranging from direct orders to humorous quips. While interviewing guild leaders I asked them directly about the use of AddOns but didn't delve into macros as much. However, for the level of analysis I provide here the two can be considered within the single category of Raiding Adjuncts as they can serve similar functions in raiding and generally seem to receive similar treatments from guilds accordingly.

Image 5.3: A screenshot of Omen a *WoW* AddOn

Virtually none of the guild leaders I spoke with required the use of AddOns, although many recommended them. In the rare instances when a mod was required it was usually one that would serve the function of providing raid warnings like Deadly Boss Mods. While one of these types of mods was required by <Unbroken> and <And My Axe>[16], it was only a recommended addition for <AMGPA>, <Cotidie Frendo>, and others. In fact, much to my surprise neither Pericles nor Bruce Campbell utilized any of the conventional raiding mods personally in their current setups. In fact after noting that with the addition of a number of in-game tools AddOns were often less necessary, Pericles specifically commented, "People rely way too much on add-ons, I play the game pretty vanilla."

While guild leader attitudes about the use of AddOns in their own guilds were generally more varied (and often less intense) than I'd anticipated, the perspective of some of the more veteran players on the development of AddOns over time, and the production of these tools within their communities helped to provide some perspective on how AddOns have become immensely popular among the playership even without mandate. Bruce Campbell specifically noted that some members of <Cotidie Frendo> were capable of developing AddOns for players on an as needed basis. In the process he related how players within the guild had begun developing these "mods" as a mechanism for trouble shooting specific problems early on:

> While, I mean, it's usually like if, if someone has a need for it,
> and then other people like see that that's a possible need and then

---

[16] One other exception to the trend of only recommending mods was Gimli's requirement that his raiders have oRA2 installed. In order for the leader to get full use out of a mod like oRA2 the entire raiding group must have it installed.

they all get it. But there was a period where, uhh in, back when we were doing Molten Core, and Onyxia, and like Black Wing Lair, like the first few raids, umm we had our own version of umm, a like, raid assist yell. Which, like up in your like, in the middle of your screen, like a, some text, you could make it play a sound, and so that's how we like, that's how we did Onyxia . . . that's how we did a bunch of our first raids that required like, teaching movement to people pretty much. You could use these images, and that was you know one of, one of our guys was just like, umm, "You know, this is possible, why wouldn't we do it?" and so we . . . And we used it for a good two, two and a half years before people like, started to take modding pretty seriously and efficiently and stuff.

Here he is specifically referencing the fact that the modding community has developed into a sophisticated network, and yet the barriers to legitimate participation in the development community have increased with players expecting relatively polished products.

That said, the practice of creating AddOns on an as needed basis is one which Bruce Campbell indicated persisted in <Cotidie Frendo>, and in addition both Bunny Slippers and Clovie mentioned AddOns which were developed in-house for use by their guilds to solve specific problems. In the instance of <Valar Morghulis>, they have "an in house developed raid tool that helps facilitate signups and list creation" which becomes useful in managing a very large guild. For <Requisite Chaos>, Clovie related that, "we also have our own custom raidspam[17] addon" for doing twenty-five man instances. Because <Requisite Chaos> is a raiding group formed around a very small close-knit guild, development of this custom AddOn has grown over time. Clovie provided further detail about the development process stating, "Bettering it for the next raid is a large task

---

[17] A RaidSpam AddOn would be one used for calling strats or giving raid warnings in the middle of a fight. This sort of AddOn would be particularly useful for a competitive group like <Requisite Chaos> attempting content that was still new to them.

between raids, performed by the raid leader himself. I tend to help out with this by researching the fights and writing the spams to go in the code."

Hence, overall we can see how like the development and use of raid strats, development and distribution of Raiding Adjuncts is distributed across the larger community at multiple levels. There is clearly technical expertise required for developing these tools, but very little required for deploying them. Unlike raid strats however, their adoption in the community seems to have become less uniform as Blizzard has provided some of the functionality that many of these tools give by including them as features in the game itself. While there are still guilds like <Requisite Chaos> which choose to develop AddOns to aid in their particular context of play, many guild leaders like Pericles seem to have adopted a more laissez-faire attitude about what AddOns their players use.

5.5 Variation around raiding and associated leadership tasks

There were distinct differences in how different guilds described the activity of raiding. While all of the leaders I spoke with emphasized learning, the actual process varied considerably between more casual guilds and more serious ones. When I asked Brazenwulf how <Luminosity> conducted actual boss fights, he responded:

> Yelling, screaming, and total chaos. (*laughter*) Usually, if we're comfortable, we've done it several times, umm, you know, there's always that learning experience, so for example umm, the umm, gosh, the first encounter in Ulduar, the big tank thing, the Leviathan, Flame Leviathan. Yeah, so you know that, our first few uh, ah, runs in that, it was total nightmare, you know, and just chaos. Umm, and we kept at it. You know, and eventually umm, we honed our strategy as a group, and it eventually was to where it became simple.

By contrast, Bruce Campbell of <Cotidie Frendo> stated:

> . . . during the raid we're always referencing those forums and it's like, "Alright, if you don't know the positioning, go to page twelve of this thread, look at my post, look at the diagram." And then you know if, if, we usually go into the raids trying a specific strategy that we've settled on for that day, that week, you know if we're working on the new content.

<Cotidie Frendo> and <Luminosity> could be considered the most serious and casual guilds from my sample respectively, and the differences between how these two leaders discuss handling new content is fairly representative of the differences in how leaders from across my sample discussed learning raid content in their guilds.

A guild like <Luminosity> will likely be working to execute raid strats that have already been established within the community elsewhere, and their process is very immediate and experiential. There is only a soft expectation players will know how to approach a new encounter. In a guild like <Cotidie Frendo> however, resources for structuring the encounter are more deeply integrated into the activity system and the line between synchronous play and asynchronous planning becomes much blurrier. The description I've provided of raiding guild leadership obscures some of those differences in an attempt to capture the most persistent aspects of raid leadership.