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KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING IN A SERVICE CONTEXT:
SENSEMAKING IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF HAIR STYLISTS

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Ira Fachira

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ABSTRACT

Little research is directly concerned with knowledge and learning in the service context, especially with how frontline service personnel learn to deal with the technical and social aspects of service encounters. This thesis aims to explore knowledge and learning in the service context by investigating how frontline personnel make sense of their workplace experiences in an online community of practice. This thesis uses Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor concepts to look at service encounters as similar to a theatre. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning paradigm is used as an interpretive lens to examine learning as the development of practice and identities through participation in a community of practice.

This research presents a qualitative study of a single case: an online community of hair stylists called Hair Pro Forum. Data was collected from the Forum's online discussions stored in the community's archive. Discussion threads are characterised by storytelling and collective interpretation of workplace events. There are two forms of data in this study: discussion strings and stories. The primary data for this study was 31 strings and 29 stories. Data was examined using thematic analysis.

Knowledge and learning in the service context was analysed using Weickian (1995) ideas about collective and individual sensemaking activities. Gabriel's (1995) notion of 'story-work' enabled sense to be made of hairstylists' sensemaking activities. Results of the study indicated that knowledge in the service context was constructed through narrative sensemaking, conducted online through discussion. Hair stylists created meaning by sharing stories about a service encounter as a specific event, consisting of technical and social interaction approaches suitable for the particular situation.

Findings are that the initial stories of the hairstylists are posted as possible interpretations of an event, and this enables the community to respond and make collective sense of the event. Sensemaking activities enable hairstylists to gain deeper understandings of the significance of their actions in light of the flux of events in the workplace. Narrative performance invites collective interpretation, which enables learning, which in turn assists the construction of professional identity.

This study provides an exemplar of how sensemaking and storytelling in an online community can help develop learning and professional identity. Further, the study shows how the activity of learning about customers is social, on-going and constantly being interpreted. The study also provides empirical evidence that knowledge about the service encounter is not static but is continuously generated.

INTERNET GLOSSARY

Emoticon refers to various combinations of keyboard characters that typically represent a facial expression, or suggests an attitude or emotion that is used in electronic communications to convey the writer's feelings or intended tone. The following emoticons can be found in the thesis:

- : -) :) ☺ : Smile or happy face,
- : -D : Laughing or big grin,
- : -(:(☹ : Frown, sad
- : -P :-p : Tongue sticking out, playful
- ; -) : Wink, smirk

Internet abbreviation refers to a shortened form of a written word or phrase used, popularised and, in many cases, coined by internet users in electronic communications.

These abbreviations can be found in the thesis:

- LOL, lol : Laughing out loud or laugh out loud
- LMAO, lmao : Laughing my ass off
- ROTFL, rotfl : Roll(ing) on the floor laughing
- TMI : Too much information

HAIR STYLING GLOSSARY

Balayage or *baliage* refers to a hair-colouring technique. A colouring formula is applied directly to sections of hair without foils, like painting. The technique aims to create a more natural look compared to the foiling technique (see below).

Bleach refers to a type of chemical used to remove hair pigment (natural pigment or colouring chemicals in previously coloured hair) in the hair-colouring process.

Breaking the base or *base break* refers to a hair-colouring technique. A hair-colouring formula is applied to blend different colours between the newly grown hair at the roots (the customer's natural colour) and the rest of the hair strand which was previously coloured in lighter shades.

Colour level refers to a level system which represents hair colour in numbers from 1 to 10. Level 1 represents the darkest colour (black), then gradually lightens to dark brown, light brown and through to blonde (level 10).

Double process or *DP* refers to a hair-colouring technique. This process aims to create a much lighter hair colour, usually towards a blonde. Bleach is applied to the hair to lift all pigments (natural, or colouring chemicals from previously coloured hair). A colouring formula is applied after the bleaching process. The alternative of this process is a single process or *highlifts* (see below).

Foiling refers to a hair-colouring technique. A hair section is placed on a sheet of foil, and the stylist applies the colouring formula to the section. The foil is then folded to keep the colour in place, separating the section from the rest of the customer's hair.

Highlifts or *HL* refers to a hair-colouring technique. This technique is also known as a single process, an alternative to a double process. Highlift formula contains two main chemicals: low-level bleach and a colouring pigment. The formula works simultaneously to remove the previous colouring and add new colour pigment in one application.

Highlights refers to a hair colouring technique. The stylist applies a colouring formula which is a lighter level than the rest of the customer's hair. Hairstylists usually use a foiling technique or balayage to get this result.

Layering refers to a hair-cutting technique. The technique aims to create length and volume in hair by arranging it into various layers, with the top layers cut shorter than the layers beneath. Stylists use shapes to refer to various layering styles; for example square, round or V.

ULP is an abbreviation of the term *underlying pigments*. The ULP emerge as a side effect of the hair-lightening process, revealing the hair contributing pigment. For example, dark red-brown pigments contribute to natural black hair. A dark-red brown colour will surface after the black pigment is removed in the lightening process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

Knowledge and learning in the service context have been discussed in two main research areas: mainstream service management and marketing, and research in the social sciences on service encounters. Most studies on service management and marketing discuss knowledge in the service context as involving employees identifying customers' characteristics and knowing how to respond to them with suitable products and processes. Conversely, research in social sciences on service encounters is more critical and focuses on understanding occupational roles and how service workers deal with issues of power and control. This thesis builds on both of these previous strands of research to explore knowledge and learning in the service context.

The point of departure of this research is knowledge about service encounters. This study adopts Davenport and Prusak's (2000, p. 5) definition: "Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information" Service management and marketing literature discusses knowledge as knowing customers' characteristics and service strategies (Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter, 2001) and skills that are required to deliver service (Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003; Li, Yang, & Wu, 2009). Research in the social studies area shows that an understanding about occupational roles plays a part in how frontline personnel deal with power and control in service encounters (e.g., Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Gimlin, 1996). These are indications

that deeper understanding of knowledge and learning in the service context needs to be extended to include how frontline personnel shape their occupational identities and how these identities inform social interactions with customers. This study focuses on knowledge exchange in one community of frontline service personnel who discuss in depth their own roles in the service encounter.

The research setting was an online community of hair stylists, Hair Pro Forum. The community's discussion forum is the centre of activities where members exchange knowledge and workplace experiences through posted messages. These messages present insights into the workplace experience of frontline personnel and how the community helps them learn to deal with service encounters. An online community of frontline service personnel presents an opportunity to gain an understanding of the knowledge frontline personnel have about service encounters and how the community shapes this knowledge. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore knowledge about service encounters and how frontline personnel share it in an online community of service personnel.

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge and learning in the service context. The topic will be investigated using sense-making concepts to explain how frontline personnel make sense of interactions with customers as a part of their daily working experiences. Learning in an online community is investigated as sense-making processes of developing shared mental models, which occurs through storytelling, dialogue and collective interpretation (Desanctis, Fayard, Roach, & Jiang, 2003). In this study context, the sense-making approach enables the researcher to observe social

construction of knowledge as communication processes that allow individuals to make sense of workplace experiences.

This chapter presents an introduction and overview of the study. A background for investigating the topic is explained in the next section, followed by an introduction to concepts used in the study. These sections are followed by the research purpose and research questions that guide the study. Research methodology, the significance of the study and an overview of the thesis are also outlined. A chapter summary and review ends this chapter.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study frames knowledge and learning in the service context from the perspective of frontline personnel of service encounters. A service encounter is defined as interactions between the customer and the service organisation (Shostack, 1985; Solomon, Surprenant, & Czepiel, 1985). This study focuses on frontline personnel experiences in face-to-face interaction with customers in service settings.

It is widely acknowledged that frontline personnel play an important role in linking service organisations to their customers. A customer's service experience is largely dependent on the behaviour of frontline personnel (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Frontline personnel can be a source of information about evolving customer needs and possible improvements in service delivery as they work with customers on a daily basis (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). Despite this, there is limited research in the

service management and marketing areas that focuses on frontline personnel's knowledge about service encounters; that is, how they learn about service delivery.

Service management and marketing literature discusses knowledge in the service context as knowledge about customers' characteristics and an understanding of customers' needs. Drawn from personal selling studies (e.g., Sujan, Sujan, & Bettman, 1988; Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986), the knowledge that frontline personnel have is constructed from knowing about customer types (consumer characteristics) and strategies to deal with these types (consumer interaction strategies). Previous studies in a service context used this approach to show that frontline personnel's knowledge is associated with their ability to customise service (e.g., Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Gwinner, Bitner, Brown, & Kumar, 2005). Thus, research in this area is focused on the relationship between predictors and outcomes, with relatively less attention paid to knowledge content and learning processes.

Knowledge content in the service context is discussed as skills that are required in service delivery. These skills are often drawn from Grönroos' (1984) service quality model which describes service as having technical and functional dimensions. The technical dimension can be translated into technical skills: what frontline personnel need to know to deliver core service. The functional dimension can be translated into social skills: the social interaction approaches that represent how service is delivered (Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003). Li et al.'s (2009) study across different service types confirms that from a customer's and an organisation's point of view, these skills are required to create a satisfactory encounter. Accordingly, knowledge in the service context involves technical and social interaction aspects of service encounters.

In summary, literature in the service management and marketing areas examines knowledge in the service context through its structure and content. Knowledge is discussed as knowledge about customer types, technical capability to deliver service, and social interaction aspects of service encounters. Research in this area confirms that frontline personnel need to be knowledgeable about what to do in service encounters and how to deliver them according to customers' preferences. These studies also agree that knowledge in the service context is represented in frontline personnel behaviour during service encounters.

Another influential perspective on how to conceptualise the service encounter is the dramaturgical metaphor. This perspective focuses on interaction behaviour to analyse service encounters (e.g., Grove, Fisk, & Bitner, 1992; Solomon et al., 1985). These authors follow Goffman's (1959) widely accepted ideas that frame face-to-face interactions as drama, enacted by actors who perform their social roles. Service encounters are similar to drama, performed by actors (frontline personnel) and directed towards the audience (customers). The quality of the performance is dependent on how the actors play their roles. A role is defined as "a cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual's behaviour in a given setting" (Solomon et al., 1985, p. 102). In the service context, roles represent behaviours that are expected from frontline personnel and customers. Following Goffman (1959), service marketing authors suggest that customers draw on past experience to learn about their role in a new service setting (e.g., Parasuraman et al., 1985; Solomon et al., 1985). These authors indicate that a customer's expectation of the role of frontline personnel is learned in wider society. However, this issue has not been elaborated on in the service management and marketing literature.

The service-as-a-theatre metaphor views service roles as behaviours that are expected from frontline personnel. Service management and marketing literature generally describes service roles in terms of the frontline personnel's interaction with customers in order to provide service (Tansik & Smith, 1991; Yagil, 2008). These actions can be explained using general social interaction rules, such as showing empathy, politeness and effective communication. The right performance enables frontline personnel to (1) create and maintain customers' empathy, and (2) manage power and control in the encounter (Broderick, 1998; Gabbott & Hogg, 2001). The effectiveness of a frontline employee is often measured by how well they can co-create desired emotional states in customers.

Service management and marketing literature generally discusses service roles in an organisational context, and defines them according to the organisation's goals. This approach simplifies human interaction in service encounters into organisationally defined roles. In addition, knowledge about service encounters is represented through the frontline personnel's knowledge about customer types and interaction strategies. These might be reasons why literature in the service management and marketing areas generally focuses on an organisation's attempt to broaden its frontline personnel's behavioural repertoires through manuals (Broderick, 1998; Tansik & Smith, 1991) and training (e.g., Daly, Grove, Dorsch, & Fisk, 2009; Gwinner et al., 2005; Yagil, 2008).

Research in the social sciences examines service encounters as a complex human interaction involving subjects engaged in relations of power and control. Research in this area includes the consumer as an agent of power who tries to control service encounters. A customer's perception of a service provider's occupational status

influences power and control in a service interaction (Leidner, 1996). Occupational status is defined by cultural and historical contexts and informs social interaction in service encounters. Service encounters can be a power struggle between customers and employees over who controls service delivery, particularly when service providers have subordinate status to their clients. Frontline personnel's sense of control in an encounter is not only to satisfy a psychological need but also to avoid making mistakes that can lead to service failure (Leidner, 1996; Rafaeli, 1989). Social sciences studies show that understanding the occupational role enables frontline personnel to manage service encounters in nursing (Bolton, 2005), hair styling (Eayrs, 1993; Gimlin, 1996), and flight attending (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). These are indications that knowledge in the service context involves the understanding by frontline personnel of their occupational role.

Another topic related to the service encounter is community of practice (CoP). A community of practice is an informal occupational community where employees share workplace experiences. Service encounters are complex social interactions where frontline personnel are expected to perform occupational roles. Occupational roles are defined by the organisation, society and the occupational communities. Service organisations define the roles of frontline personnel through manuals and training. Alternatively, research has indicated that frontline service personnel turn to CoPs to help them deal with daily workplace problems. Studies conducted in service settings suggest that frontline personnel share and learn about workplace experiences in the CoP (Geiger & Turley, 2005; Meyer, Connell, & Klein, 2005; Wägar, 2008). Encounter experiences are shared through informal channels because service delivery is too complex and too 'rich' to be shared in formal channels (Geiger & Turley, 2005; Orr,

1990). Learning in the CoPs enables frontline service personnel to make sense of their relationships with customers (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007), learn about emotion rules (Seymour & Sandiford, 2005), and how to cope with emotional aspects of service encounters (Raz, 2007).

This section introduces two strands of research areas as the background of this study. Service management and marketing represent the first strand, focusing on the skills of frontline personnel in identifying and delivering customers' demands. The second strand, research in social studies about service workers, emphasises complex social interactions between service providers and service recipients. Research on CoPs indicates that frontline service personnel turn to occupational communities to solve their workplace problems and learn about their occupational roles. Although CoPs have been indicated as space to learn about service encounters, no study—except for a study in a car sales and service setting (Wägar, 2007)—has directly focused on how knowledge is constructed in the community and how individuals learn about service encounters. This study attempts to fill the gap by exploring knowledge and learning in the service context in an online community of practice.

1.3 KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING IN THE SERVICE CONTEXT: SENSEMAKING IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Figure 1.1, Conceptual Framework, shows relevant literatures of this study. Each coloured box represents a research area that contributes to an understanding of knowledge and learning in the service context. However, there is a limited literature that explains learning process in a community of practice. This gap is shown in a question,

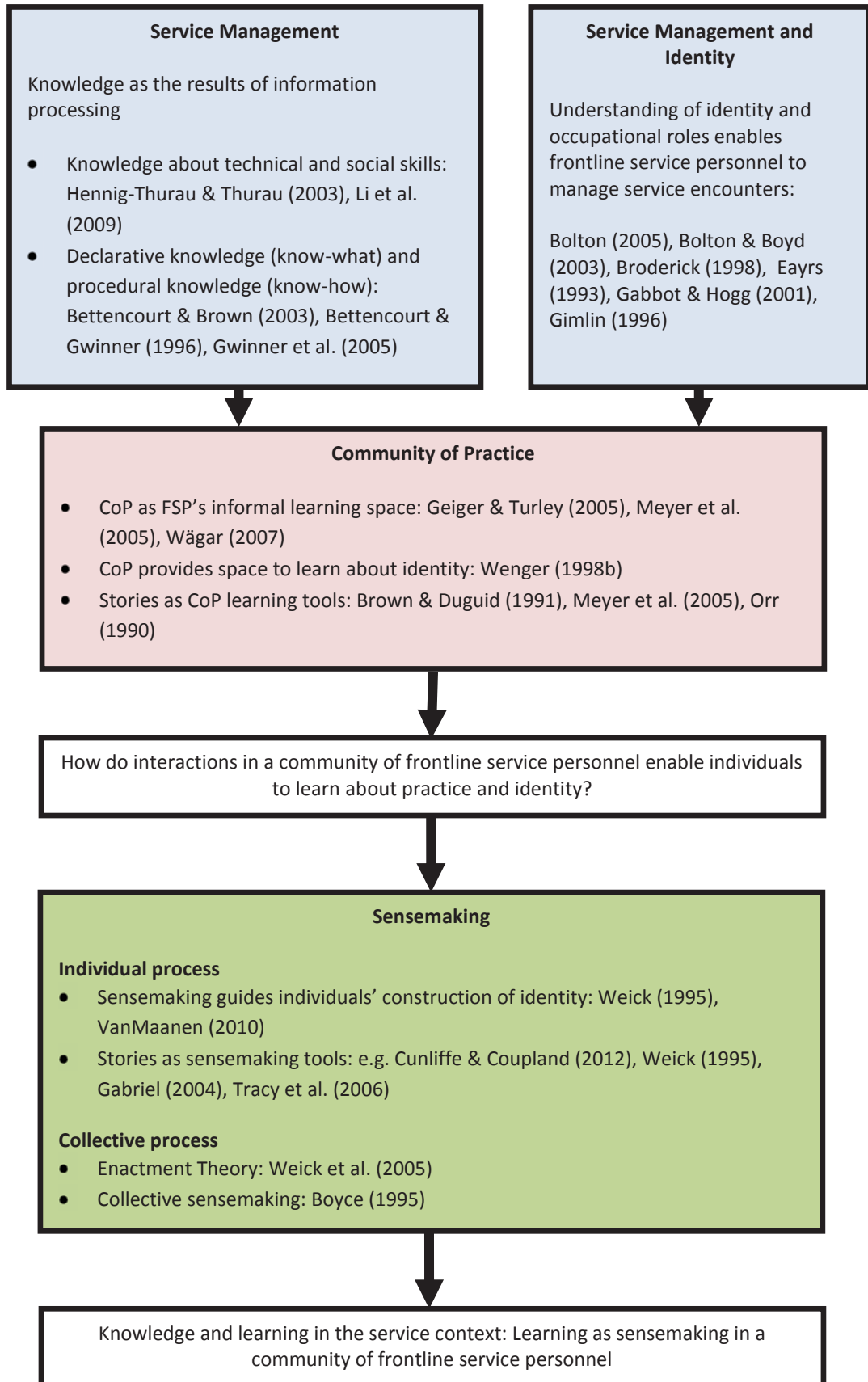


Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework

illustrated in the first white box in Figure 1.1. The question leads the researcher to sensemaking concepts as a framework to explain learning in a community of frontline service personnel. This section will elaborate the conceptual framework of this study.

Section 1.2 presents knowledge and learning in the service context from two strands of research areas. These strands focused on the knowledge content, reflected in skills that are required to manage service encounters. In other words, previous studies discussed 'what' frontline personnel needs to know to be able deliver good service. Knowledge content in the service context can be classified into two topics. Service management and marketing literature focused on management of service. The approach within this strand is knowledge in the service context as the results of frontline personnels' information process. Learning is discussed as a process of acquiring and classifying information: procedural and declarative or social and technical. Research in social sciences presents a different approach as they discuss identity as part of knowledge about service encounters. This topic is classified as service management and identity. Figure 1.1 illustrated relevant literatures within these two research areas in blue boxes.

A light purple box in Figure 1.1 presents relevant research in community of practice that informs this study. A community of practice is a popular concept to explain learning in the workplace and research have shown that CoPs provides informal learning space for frontline service personnel (Geiger & Turley, 2005; Meyer et al. 2005; Wägar, 2007). Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the concept to describe the situated learning paradigm: learning is situated in the setting where knowledge, as the result of learning, will be applied. A community of practice is described as a group of people with similar working situations who share the same interests in their practice. Learning in workplace

contexts is situated in communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as communities help members give context to daily workplace practices (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Wenger (1998b) developed the concept further to explain learning in the workplace as identity transformation. Learning occurs as a process of creating meaning from daily practice, which allows individuals to experience life as meaningful and enables them to understand who they are (Wenger, 1998b). These authors shed light on how occupational groups enable individuals to develop an occupational identity that informs what they ought to do as a practitioner. They focus on group activities in a CoP, with vague descriptions of how these interactions lead to an individual's understanding of practice and identity. A question emerged: How do interactions in a community of frontline service personnel enable individuals to learn about practice and identity?

Sensemaking (Weick, 1995) is a complementary concept to examine learning processes in a community of practice. Relevant literatures in this area are illustrated in a green box in Figure 1.1. Sensemaking concepts (Weick, 1995, 2001) have been used in organisational studies to investigate how individuals make sense of the events in the workplace. It involves “turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Sensemaking is based on communication processes that enable individuals to make sense of their environment and communicate their interpretation to the group level, leading to collective understanding of the event. In turn, collective sensemaking shape individuals' interpretation of the meaning of the workplace events. These activities are described as “Enactment Theory” (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

Storytelling is widely discussed in sensemaking research. Stories have been shown as sensemaking strategy to explain how individuals make sense of workplace experiences (e.g., Bird, 2007; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Maclean, Harvey, & Chia, 2012; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006). These studies have confirmed Weick's (1995) ideas that the sensemaking process is grounded in identity construction that enables individuals to maintain their sense of self. Gabriel's (1995, 2004) "story-work" is a complementary concept to explain how individuals make sense of their experience by attributing framework to a sequence of events.

Storytelling is also discussed in CoP research as an inseparable part of knowledge-sharing activities in a community. Research in the knowledge management area has acknowledged stories as an essential tool in knowledge exchange in CoPs (e.g., Brown & Duguid, 1991; Meyer et al., 2005; Orr, 1990). However, research in this area does not offer a detailed examination of how storytelling in a CoP guides individuals to develop their practice and professional identity.

So far, this section has presented research in sensemaking area that can be used to complement findings from CoP research. This study uses two concepts from sensemaking area: Enactment Theory and stories as sensemaking tools. Enactment theory guides a deeper understanding of the situated learning paradigm in a CoP, as it enables the researcher to investigate how the community creates shared meaning that shapes an individual's understanding of practice and identities. The approach allows the researcher to investigate knowledge transfer between the group and individual levels as the community guides individuals to learn about practice by helping the individuals to make sense of the workplace experiences shared in the community. The researcher used

Gabriel's (1995; 2004) concept of stories as sensemaking tools to observe the interaction between individuals and group. Thus, this section have shown how sensemaking concept can be used to investigate how interactions in a community of frontline service personnel enable individuals to learn about practice and identity. These frameworks will be used to discuss knowledge and learning in the service context.

Online communities present an opportunity to investigate the research topic as it allows the researcher to examine the knowledge content and how a community guides individuals' sensemaking processes. A simple Google search shows 304,000,000 results for online communities of professionals. These include internet communities of frontline service personnel such as flight attendants, hair stylists, personal trainers and waiters at fast-food restaurants. Participation in an online community occurs through posted messages, which are explained in this thesis as an explicit form of sensemaking activity. Discussions in the board present an opportunity to investigate the community's interpretation of shared events that lead to a collective sensemaking process. Research on online communities has already shown that the sensemaking process can be observed in discussion activities of an online community of stockholders (Herrmann, 2007) and an online community of Wikipedia members (Nagar, 2012).

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore knowledge about service encounters and how it is shared in an online community of frontline personnel. It aims to develop a better understanding of knowledge and learning in the service context. This study comprised

three stages: a pilot study and two phases of data collection and analysis. The first phase of data collection and analysis was guided by three initial research questions:

1. Why do individuals participate in an online community of frontline service personnel?
2. What workplace knowledge do individuals share in an online community of frontline service personnel?
3. How do individuals share knowledge about service encounters in an online community of frontline service personnel?

These research questions directed an indepth literature review, a pilot study and the first phase of the study. Although the results provided answers to knowledge about service encounters and its sharing processes in an online community, the model did not reveal a clear picture of the dynamics between individuals and the community that lead to individuals' understanding of practice and identity. This led to a further refinement of the research questions which guided the second phase of data collection and analysis:

1. What are the online community's characteristics that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning?
2. How do online community members overcome limitations of online media to share and learn implicit elements of service encounters?
3. How do individuals develop practice and identity in an online community of frontline service personnel?

The six research questions led the study to focus on learning processes in an online community of frontline service personnel. These questions guided the researcher to gain an understanding of knowledge in the service context and how the community guides individuals to learn their roles in service encounters.

1.5 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was designed as a qualitative case study. Knowledge was viewed as constructed from social interpretations, and thus the researcher's role was to help the readers interpret the phenomenon by providing a thick description of the reality (Stake, 1995).

An online community of frontline service personnel provides a meeting space to share workplace experiences and exchange knowledge. An online community's activities are centred on the bulletin board where content is generated through the members' communication activities. Thus, the content is inseparable from the community's activities. The case study approach focuses on a "bounded system", or a case (or multiple cases), and aims to understand the phenomenon within the system (Creswell, 2007). A case study strategy was selected because it allowed the researcher to observe the contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2009). It enabled the researcher to explore both the knowledge content and how interactions in the discussion forum shaped it.

An online community of professional hair stylists was selected as the case in this study. The data collected for the study was the online discussions stored in the community's public archive. The most popular discussions were analysed to examine the content of the messages. Two types of discussions were collected for the study: discussions that were similar to conversations, and stories. Shared stories were collected with community members' interpretations of these stories.

This study comprised two main phases. The first phase was led by the three initial research questions. Despite detailed descriptions of knowledge content and its sharing processes, the preliminary results indicated that some parts of the learning process remained vague. These findings were explored further in three refined research questions in the second phase. An additional indepth literature review led to adopting sensemaking and storytelling as the interpretive lenses to investigate learning in an online community. These concepts directed another data collection to include stories shared in the online forum and the community's interpretation of these stories. Data analysis in the second phase involved re-reading and re-interpreting both the raw data collected in the first phase of the study and the "new" raw data. A detailed description of the research methodology will be presented in chapter three.

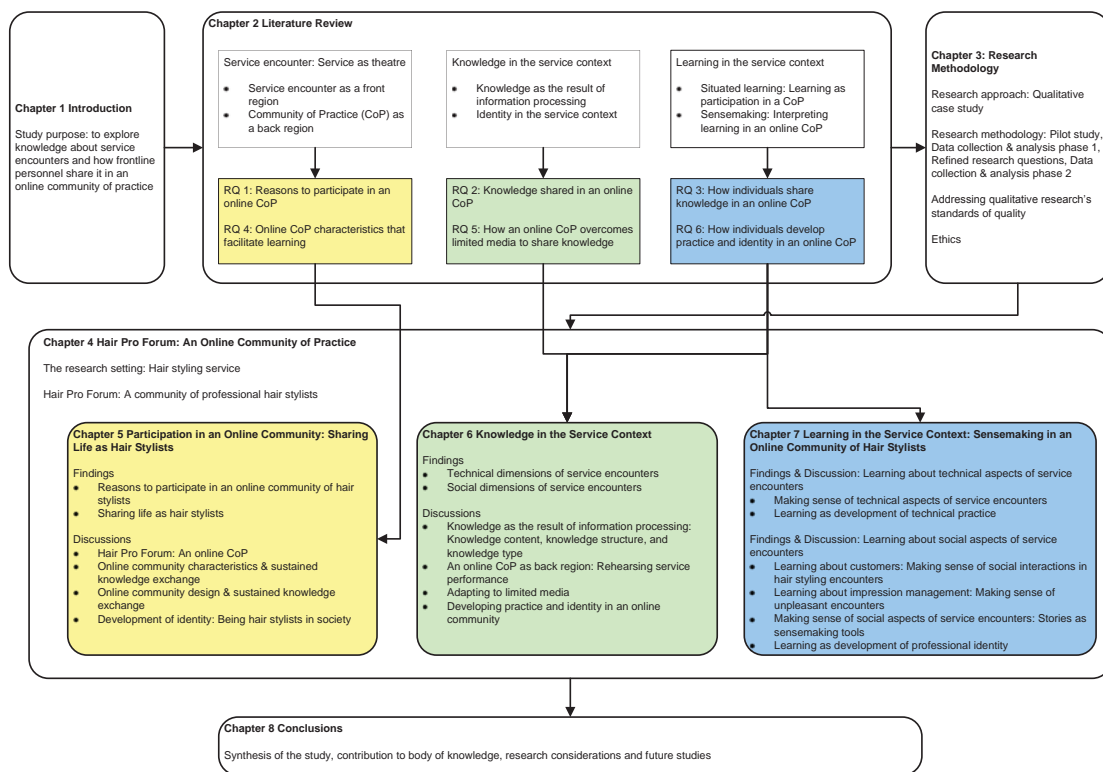


Figure 1.2 Thesis map

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

This thesis is structured into eight chapters. Figure 1.1 illustrates the organisation of this thesis to present the connections between chapters. Each rounded rectangle represents a chapter in this thesis. Figure 1.1 also shows the links between the research questions and the chapters that address these questions, displaying these linked areas in the same colours.

Chapter one presents the background of the study, defines its aims and introduces its methodological approach. This introductory chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

Chapter two presents the literature review, which covers four main areas: service encounters, knowledge in the service context, learning in the service context, and sensemaking. Figure 1.1 points out how these areas are linked to the research questions. The chapter also presents a conceptual framework which guides the design of the methodology.

Chapter three describes in detail the research design of the qualitative case study approach adopted in the study. The research involved a pilot study and two phases of data collection and analysis. Research design refinements, informed by the results of the pilot study, are presented. The results from the first phase of data collection and analysis led to the research questions being refined, which then directed the study's second phase. Data collection and analysis protocols are presented, along with detailed criteria to interpret the findings. This chapter also elaborates on issues regarding qualitative

research standards of quality, along with ethical issues relevant to research in online community settings.

Chapter four entails the presentation of the research setting: an online community of hair stylists. This chapter aims to provide context for findings and discussions presented in chapters five, six and seven. Figure 1.1 displays these three chapters inside chapter four's box to illustrate the hair-styling setting as the context for discussing the findings of this study. Chapter four begins with a description of the hair-styling service. A common career progression in hair styling is presented, followed by a description of general hair-styling services and encounters. A short literature review, focused on hair-styling settings, illustrates the complexity of client–hair stylist social interaction. The main part of this chapter is an elaborate description of Hair Pro Forum as an online community of practice, including its history, communication pattern, community maintenance and general culture.

Chapter five presents findings and an analysis of reasons for participating in an online community of hair stylists. The chapter aims to answer two research questions: (1) Why frontline personnel participate in a professional online community, and (2) What characteristics facilitate knowledge exchange and learning in an online community.

Chapter six involves the presentation and analysis of knowledge shared in the online community. This chapter aims to answer two research questions: (1) What workplace knowledge is shared in the community, and (2) How community members overcome limitations of limited media to share implicit elements of service encounters. The chapter also discusses how knowledge is shared in the community, focusing on

knowledge sharing at the group level, which is described as being similar to rehearsals in a theatre production.

Chapter seven presents findings and analysis of how individuals share knowledge in an online community. The chapter aims to show how learning occurs at the individual level by elaborating how collective sensemaking guides individuals to develop practice and identity as professional hair stylists. Storytelling as a sensemaking tool is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter eight presents a synthesis of findings and discussions presented in chapters four through seven. A summary of the main points from previous chapters is provided. The contribution of this study to the body of knowledge is presented. The chapter also offers topics for future study and discusses research considerations.

1.7 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

Frontline service personnel are essential to effective service delivery. However, little is understood of what they know about service encounters and how they learn about it. This study explores the topic by investigating knowledge shared in an online community of hair stylists.

This thesis ultimately uses sensemaking as an interpretive lens to explore knowing and learning in the service context. The next chapter presents a literature review aimed at representing key concepts related to the service encounters as understood in this thesis, such as knowledge, community of practice, and sensemaking.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a literature review which addresses main ideas, concepts and theories focused on three central questions: (1) What do frontline service personnel know about service encounters? , (2) How do frontline service personnel learn about service encounters? , and (3) Why do frontline service personnel participate in communities of practice to learn about service encounters?

This literature review is organised in the following way. First, I present literature that has considered the first research question: Why do individuals participate in an online community of frontline service personnel? I focus on service encounters and knowledge. This discussion centres on mainstream service management and marketing literature and relevant knowledge management (KM) literature. Second, I discuss literature related to the second and the third research questions: What workplace knowledge do individuals share in an online community of frontline service personnel, and how do individuals share knowledge about service encounters in an online community of frontline service personnel? I focus on learning in the service context, and propose sensemaking as a viable framework for understanding learning in this thesis.

The service management and marketing areas offer some relevant but ultimately limited literature on the topic of knowledge and learning in the service context. The cognitive

selling approach is favoured as a framework to analyse frontline knowledge, for example, “dealing with a difficult customer”. This approach views knowledge as the results of information processing, involving memory retention of categories. The literature review here includes relevant knowledge management literature, complementing it with relevant KM research. KM proposes that knowledge is an organisational resource which can be managed to gain competitiveness. KM considers knowledge as an objectified resource, and research has focused on its attributes and how individuals acquire and share knowledge in the workplace. Literature about KM is relevant for understanding learning in online communities.

The second phase of the literature review was guided by the refined research questions: (1) What are the online community’s characteristics that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning? (2) How do online community members overcome limitations of online media to share and learn implicit elements of service encounters? and (3) How do individuals develop practice and identity in an online community of frontline service personnel? This second phase review focused on the dynamics between individuals and professional groups that enable development of practice and professional identity. Although KM literature has presented an extensive explanation of group learning, there is limited KM research that examines how individuals learn through participation in communities of practice. This led to the adoption in this thesis of Weick’s (1995) sensemaking ideas as an interpretive lens to examine learning in the service context.

So, this literature review chapter is divided into four main topics: service encounters, knowledge in the service context, learning in the service context and sensemaking concepts. The first section (Section 2.2) will present concepts in service management

and marketing that guide this study. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor was used as an interpretive lens to explain service encounters. Identity issues will also be discussed in this section, drawing on research on service workers from the sociology literature.

Knowledge and learning in the service context is presented in the next two sections (Section 2.3 Knowledge in the Service Context, and Section 2.4 Learning in the Service Context). The fourth topic in the review (Section 2.5 Sensemaking) presents sensemaking concepts as an interpretive lens to examine learning in the service context. This section also debates how stories and storytelling are discussed in the literature as sensemaking strategies. Conceptual frameworks that emerge from the literature review and guide the study are presented at the end of the chapter.

2.2 THE SERVICE ENCOUNTER

Service is a process of intangible activities which are provided for customers. These activities occur in service encounters where customers and service providers have a dyadic interaction for a period of time (Shostack, 1985; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). A service encounter occurs between a customer and a provider who represents the service organisation. The organisation can be represented by machines; for example, an ATM or an internet banking website. Service often requires some face-to-face interaction with frontline personnel, and with technology and materials used to facilitate processes. This thesis is concerned with face-to-face interactions.

Service characteristics—inseparability, intangibility and heterogeneity—affect how customers evaluate service encounters. Inseparability refers to how customers consume the outcome of service production. Service outcome is consumed while customers are experiencing its delivery. Thus, service is judged not only on the outcome but also on how it is delivered according to customer preferences (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The next characteristic, service intangibility, refers to the issue that service, being an intangible process, unlike goods, has no tangible features. Thus, customers evaluate a service by comparing their expectation with actual service delivery (Parasuraman et al., 1985), and the result will determine customers' perception of service value (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000). Consequently, service quality is heterogeneous and personal to each customer. Heterogeneity also refers to the nature of human interactions, which varies for each service encounter. Each customer is different, with varying needs, desires and personal characteristics. To summarise, the evaluation of the service encounter is based on customers' perception of how the outcome fulfils their needs and how the process suits their preferences. This means the service encounter is a complex site of human interaction.

Service management literature discusses a service encounter as having both technical and functional dimensions. Following Grönroos (1984), studies have examined customers' perceptions of value through these dimensions (e.g., Caruana, 2002; Jamal & Adelowore, 2008; Sharma & Patterson, 1999). The technical dimension deals with the core service: what customers intend to get from the encounter or what is being delivered to the customer. The functional dimension deals with social aspects of the encounter, including the psychological and behavioural aspects of human interaction between customers and frontline personnel. For example, a hair stylist deals with the

technical aspect by offering a range of hair styles that will suit a customer's needs and personality; and then delivering the chosen style. The functional dimension deals with social interaction: how the stylist greets the customer and makes them comfortable during the encounter. Frontline personnel have to manage various elements affecting the technical and functional dimensions in service encounters. In other words, frontline personnel have to have technical and social skills.

Research in service marketing management generally agrees that frontline service personnel play a critical role in service encounters (e.g., Bendapudi & Berry, 1997; Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Gwinner et al., 1998; Jamal & Adelowore, 2008). From an organisation's perspective, the role of frontline personnel is "to interact with customers in order to provide mostly intangible outputs that are consumed at the time of the process" (Yagil, 2008, p. 2). Research confirms that knowledge about customer types and strategies allows frontline personnel to adapt their behaviour and service offerings to match a customer's preferences (Gwinner et al., 2005). Frontline personnel have to be able to identify a customer's needs, adjust the service offering according to his or her needs and personality, and predict the customer's expectation of how it should be delivered. This knowledge is generally associated with the technical dimensions of service. Social aspects generally deal with social interactions in service encounters. To create a pleasant encounter, service providers must be able to monitor the service environment, get cues from the customer's reaction to their behaviour, and react according to the customer's expectations. Service providers need to continually adapt their behaviour and service offering according to this complex and dynamic situation.

The complexity of service encounters has been classified with the use of typologies. Previous studies classify service based on the service process (Silvestro, Fitzgerald, & Johnston, 1992) and the personal interface in an encounter (Mills & Margulies, 1980).

Dimension	Mass services/ Maintenance- interactive	Service shops/ Task- interactive	Professional services/ Personal- interactive
Customer contact time: The time the service personnel spend with the customer, total time in direct contact.	Brief	Moderate	High
Degree of customisation: The degree of the service process that can be adapted to suit the needs of individual customers.	Low	Limited	High
Degree of discretion: The degree of authority by service personnel to alter the service package (offer and delivery) without referring to superiors.	Low	Limited	High
Value added back office/front office: Frontline personnel's contribution to the service value, compared with value created in the back office.	Low	Moderate	High
Product/process focus: A product-oriented service is where the emphasis is on what the customer buys. A process-oriented service is where the emphasis is on how the service is delivered to the customer.	Product-oriented	Task-oriented	Process-oriented
Industry examples	Banks, airlines, fast-food restaurants	Beauty salons, Car-repair shops	Schools, health
Profession examples	Tellers, flight attendants, waiters	Hair stylists, mechanic	Teachers, doctors

Table 2. 1 Service typology

These characteristics illustrate different types of service encounters. Three service archetypes are commonly identified, with different degrees of customer contact time, customisation and discretion. Table 2.1 displays service categorisation with industry and profession examples. Mass services, such as fast-food restaurants, airlines and retail banking, represent service with a very short, direct contact time, where frontline

personnel deliver a generally similar service for all customers. Most of the service processes are not performed in front of customers, and are often created by people who have no contact with customers. Consequently, frontline personnel do not have discretion to alter the service. Their main task is to give customers the results of the service delivery according to customers' preferences. The mass services category represents a relatively simple service encounter because frontline personnel need only to focus on delivering the service correctly using prescribed organisation "scripts" (Leidner, 1993). For example, the main task of waiters at fast-food restaurants is to deliver the correct order within a tolerable time frame. They need to be friendly, but due to the short period of contact time they do not have to entertain the customers.

Compared to mass services, professional services represent contrasting characteristics. Professional services represent service with long contact time between customers and frontline personnel, where the personnel deliver a highly customised service. Most of the service value is created during the encounter and usually requires a high degree of discretion, where the personnel are allowed to alter the service package to suit the customer's needs. The main aim of the encounter is the encounter itself, because customers buy both the process and the results of service delivery. Examples of this type of service are schools and hospitals. Service encounters in this category are complex because frontline personnel need to design the core service and be able to customise the social aspects of service delivery. The third type, service shops, represents service that falls between these two extremes.

This section has presented service encounters as complex face-to-face interactions. Due to the intangibility of service, customers judge service encounters by comparing their

expectations of how a service should proceed and their perception of the actual service received. These expectations are based on personal needs, word-of-mouth communication and past experiences (Parasuraman et al., 1985). As they are intangible, service encounters are evaluated by customers through the behaviour of frontline personnel. Consequently, frontline service personnel must be able to predict a customer's expectation while monitoring the actual process of service delivery. Different service types require different foci on the frontline personnel's role. Despite this, their roles are essential to a customer's perception of service.

The following sections will present service encounters in detail. This study uses Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor to frame service encounters. Service as theatre is used to analyse two elements in the encounter: service script and service role. The next section begins with a summary of Goffman's (1959) ideas, followed by their application in service management and marketing research (Section 2.2.2). Service roles are presented in the next section (Section 2.2.3). This section also introduces service identity and discusses it in relation to knowledge and learning in the service context.

2.2.1 Dramaturgical Metaphor

Dramaturgical metaphor (Goffman, 1959) is widely accepted in service management and marketing research as a framework to analyse service encounters. Service as theatre concepts were drawn from Goffman's (1959) seminal book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Some of Goffman's ideas are relevant to this study, especially his notion that social interactions involve performance of social roles, and his front region–back region concept.

Goffman (1959) frames face-to-face interactions as performances by social actors whose goals are to create desired impressions before an audience. In order to do so, individuals seek information about their counterparts to be able to define the situation, and predict the counterpart's expectation of their behaviour in order to avoid embarrassing themselves. Sources of information can be gleaned from the counterpart's socio-economic status and their behaviour during the interaction. Goffman suggests that individuals generally want to have a sense of control of the other's conduct so that they can respond appropriately to the other individual's actions. They do so by giving impressions that will influence others to act voluntarily to do what the individuals' want them to do. In summary, Goffman's ideas describe social interactions as complex performances, where each person tries to give desired impressions that enable them to have a sense of control of the situation.

Actors' understandings of social roles determine the success of a social interaction. Social interactions as performance comprise social roles and parts (Goffman, 1959). A social role is defined as "the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status" (Goffman, 1959, p. 16). A part is defined as "the pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions" (Goffman, 1959, p. 16). A social role represents an individual's status, which informs the actors of the parts the role occupant is expected to perform in a particular setting. It also informs others of what the role occupant expects of them as a counterpart in the interaction. Social actors' understanding of each other's role guides them to perform the expected parts which lead to another person's positive impression. For example, a medical consultation setting involves people who perform their roles as a doctor and a patient. A "doctor role" informs the patient of the behaviour expected

from the doctor role occupant. The role also informs the patient of the doctor's expectations of her or his behaviour and guides the patient to perform the "patient role" in this setting.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor explains social interactions as "the front region" where individuals perform their roles and present an ideal standard of themselves. Performances are rehearsed away from the audience's view, in the "the back region". During rehearsal, actors work out aspects of presentation to be able to create a believable performance. Goffman further explains that different routines may employ the same front regions; observers need only be familiar with a relatively small vocabulary of "front regions" and know how to respond to them. The front becomes the "collective representation" (Goffman, 1959, p. 16) of a particular social setting.

Performance is pre-established, as it is tied with the historical and cultural context of the society (Goffman, 1959). However, performance is not static, as it is "'socialised', moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). For example, a medical consultation setting represents all medical consultations, regardless of the type of medical service the patient intends to get. This setting informs the patient how to behave, whether one consults a dentist or a general practitioner.

2.2.2 Service as Theatre

Drawing on Goffman's concepts, service management and marketing authors argue that service is essentially a performance because it can only be experienced, and exists only during its enactment (Grove et al., 1992). How service is performed is as important as

what is performed. An actor's performance involves her or his displayed manner and specific service tasks that are completed. They argue that service as performance is a tenuous and fragile process which can be disrupted with even a minor mishap. In order to impress the audience, frontline personnel have to display a suitable appearance and manner, perform their routines (core service delivery), and be committed to service performance. The personnel create performances that they predict the customers want to experience. Thus, service is similar to theatre and service encounters are drama performed by customers with service providers as actors. This metaphor for the service interaction pervades service management and marketing literature (e.g., Baron, Harris, & Harris, 2001; Daly et al., 2009; Harris, Harris, & Baron, 2003; Williams & Anderson, 2005).

When considered as drama, service encounters consist of four key theatrical components: actor (service personnel), audience (customer), setting (physical environment) and performance (service delivery). These components create an experience in the service setting, where frontline personnel perform the service delivery in front of customers (Grove et al., 1992). They are bound together in a service script: a sequence of behaviours or actions regarding the service process (Tansik & Smith, 1991). The service script informs the technical dimension by "telling" frontline employees the series of actions that need to be done to deliver a particular service offering. Some organisations develop scripts with specific words and actions to guide frontline personnel in a social interaction, also covering the social dimension or social process of an encounter. Thus, a service script can guide frontline service personnel on how to conduct both technical and social dimensions of the encounter. From a service firm's perspective, service scripts enable the firm to ensure that frontline personnel

deliver a standardised and efficient service. For example, McDonalds provides a “tight” script which informs frontline staff on both technical and processual dimensions of quality (Leidner, 1993).

The service script functions to control the service encounter. Service firms develop scripts as a part of designing frontline personnel jobs. A standardised service script enables firms to overcome the heterogeneous characteristic of service, as the script determines the sequence of actions in an encounter. It enables the firm to make sure that customers have similar experiences. Tansik and Smith (1991) suggest that the script allows the firm to measure the personnel’s performance. They also propose that a service script is similar to a “performance programme” (Tansik & Smith, 1991, p. 35), a pre-learned action which becomes habitual and performed mindlessly in an encounter. It helps frontline personnel to anticipate a customer’s action, guiding them to enact suitable behaviours for the situation. However, each service encounter is unique and thus it is difficult to develop service scripts that are applicable in every situation. Service scripts are often developed by generalising about the service process and taking actions out of the event’s context, which can lead to “robotic” behaviour and inappropriate and inflexible delivery, which impacts on the customer’s experience and thus perceptions of quality.

Service management and marketing authors often criticise service script because of their inability to capture the complex nature of service encounters. Service scripts are criticised as being too rigid and therefore giving little flexibility for frontline personnel to personalise the interaction (e.g., Chebat & Kollias, 2000; Harris et al., 2003). Flexible scripts, however, can lead to more ways to deliver service which might cause anxiety

for frontline personnel and customers (Chebat & Kollias, 2000). Despite these arguments, scripts are useful to describe, manage and critically explore interactions in service encounters (e.g., Halliday, Davies, Ward, & Lim, 2008; Harris et al., 2003; Williams & Anderson, 2005).

Goffman's ideas are useful as an interpretive lens to examine service encounters. Service encounters are similar to complex interactions, as both customers and frontline personnel try to give desired impressions that enable them to control the interaction. Research in service management and marketing has used Goffman's ideas about human behaviour as performance to develop the script idea in order to assist managers and frontline service personnel predict a customer's expectations. In other words, a service script guides frontline personnel to create an impression that enables them to control customers in service encounters.

With regard to the present research, Goffman's conception of performance and control is critical. The work of hair stylists, as this thesis will show, involves significant performativity. As most stylists work in small, highly interactive environments, scripts are loose but very apparent. As any customer interaction is relatively long, scripting is a complex interaction and is often manifest as a struggle for control between stylists and customers. These key ideas will be explored in the empirical parts of this thesis.

2.2.3 Service Roles and Emotional Labour

Service roles focus on actors' actions and performance. A role is defined as "a cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual's behaviour in a given setting" (Solomon

et al., 1985, p. 102). The success of service encounter is determined by how the customer and the service personnel each perform their respective roles: acting one's role and reacting to the other actor's performance. Service scripts, as discussed above, help personnel to understand a customer's expectations of the role of personnel, enabling him or her to influence customers to perform correctly during the delivery process (Broderick, 1998; Tansik & Smith, 1991). The understanding by frontline personnel of service roles facilitates his or her control of the interaction with customers, leading to efficient service delivery. The above service marketing literature puts emphasis on the roles of frontline personnel in the organisational context, focusing on his or her social behaviour as a member of a service organisation. Consequently, service scripts in this literature focus on the organisational aspects of the interaction between frontline personnel and customers. The historical and cultural aspects of service encounters as social interaction are not discussed in detail. However these aspects are essential to understand service roles in the context of frontline personnel as emotional labour, which will be discussed below.

A service performance consists of a sequence of actions involving spoken and unspoken elements that the actors must communicate; these might be facial expression, modulation of the voice and body language. Service work is often referred to as emotional labour because the task requires the worker to have face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with customers; to produce an emotional state in another person; and allows the organisation to control emotional display through manuals, training or other forms of socialisation of rules (Hochschild, 1983).

Emotional labour refers to jobs that require “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) challenge this definition, suggesting that there should be more focus on the displayed emotion and behaviour, and not on the presumed emotions underlying these displays. Frontline service personnel are expected to conform to display rules, which are defined as “what emotions ought to be publicly expressed” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p. 89). Thus, emotional labour is defined as jobs involving “the act of displaying the appropriate emotion (i.e., conforming with a display rule)” (p. 90). They argue that this definition is more focused on the expression of emotion, enabling others to observe acts to conform to these rules.

Ashforth and Humphrey’s (1993) work expands the emotional labour concept to include the historical and cultural aspects of service roles. They argue that display rules are defined by social, organisational and occupational norms. This idea draws attention to the social expectations of emotions displayed by service-role occupants. For example, funeral directors are expected to be sombre, flight attendants cheerful, nurses friendly and doctors calm. Emotional labour facilitates task-effectiveness because conforming to display rules creates a predictable encounter (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Other authors suggest that enacting the right performance enables frontline personnel to control the service encounter and maintain their authority of the service encounter (Broderick, 1998; Gabbott & Hogg, 2001).

As part of performing service roles, frontline personnel are expected to display emotion that is preferred for the encounter. Service performance often requires frontline

personnel to conceal their own feelings to appear empathetic, friendly and even happy. Frontline personnel manage their emotions through acting: displaying emotion expected by the customers without actually feeling it (surface acting) or altering their inner emotional state to be able to feel and show the desired emotion (deep acting) (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild (1983) argues that emotional labour has negative effects on the wellbeing of frontline personnel as they lose the sense of authentic self.

Service management literature discusses service roles in relation to the wellbeing of frontline personnel. Research in this area discusses two types of role stressors: role ambiguity and role conflict (e.g., Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Singh, 1993). Role ambiguity is a frontline personnel's perception of the lack of salient information to enact her or his role, involving role definition, expectations, responsibilities, tasks and behaviours (Singh, 1993). Role conflict is defined as a frontline personnel's perception of incompatibility between one or more role sets (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Role sets draw attention to the fact that individuals have multi-layered facets that inform the enactment of social roles. In the service context, a service provider's performance consists of enacting the role that represents one's status as an employee, a member of an occupational group and a member of society in general. Role conflict represents incompatibility between these facets. Research in the service management and marketing areas show that role stressors affect the perception of frontline personnel of job satisfaction, self-efficacy and adaptability (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Singh, 1993). These studies focus on frontline service personnel's boundary spanning roles, with an emphasis on their roles as members of a service organisation. Service roles are discussed in the context of helping frontline personnel to understand organisational and customer expectations.

Research in the service marketing and management areas are focused on frontline personnel performance. Although service management and marketing researchers indicate that society influences customers' expectations of service roles (e.g., Parasuraman et al., 1985; Solomon et al., 1985), how these expectations affect service encounters is largely under-explained. This issue has been discussed in sociological research however, where service work and service workers have attracted research interest. Relevant studies are discussed in the next section.

Research in the service work area examines role conflict in the context of power relations between customers and service providers. Frontline service personnel are more likely to experience person–role conflict where their role expectations are incongruent with their values, feelings or beliefs (Shamir, 1980). Person–role conflict is more evident in service work where a service provider's social status and power are perceived as being lower than the client's. Service personnel have a subordinate status because their income is mainly dependent on clients who are not required to have the same provider when they need the same service. In addition, society has a low perception of these jobs as an “occupation” as opposed to a “profession”. These jobs are often associated with emotional labour, such as nursing (Bolton, 2005), hair styling (Lindsay, 2004), beauty therapy (Sharma & Black, 2001) and flight attending (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). The role occupants of these jobs are required to display specific emotions which sometimes are not compatible with their own feelings.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) argue that identification with service roles helps frontline personnel to have a coherent sense of identity even if they have to alter display

rules, leading to the ability to cope with emotional aspects of their jobs. Bolton and Boyd's (2003) case study shows that flight attendants are skilled emotion managers. Other studies show that hair stylists breach their role as they reprimand customers who used hair stylists' tools (Jacobs-Huey, 2007) and waiters scold rude customers (Paules, 1996). These actions help frontline personnel cope with customers' misbehaviour without feeling guilty that they do not conform to the expected roles as subservient service personnel.

Role stressors represent frontline personnel issues in maintaining a coherent sense of self as an organisational member and a member of society. Service management literature generally discusses this issue in terms of how frontline personnel perform organisationally defined roles, socialised through human resources management tools such as formal service script and training.

Identity issues have been acknowledged in the service management and marketing areas as part of performing service roles. Authors indicate that frontline personnel who strongly identify with service roles will be more motivated to give good service (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Solomon et al., 1985). In addition, identification with service roles helps frontline personnel have a coherent sense of self (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). These authors argue that identification with occupational roles means being a service provider is the central aspect of who one is, and so the individual tends to feel more authentic when he or she conforms to the occupational display rules. Despite this, identity issues have not been the focus of attention in the service management and marketing areas. Identity in the service context will be introduced in the following section.

2.2.4 Identity in the Service Context

Identity issues have been discussed in organisational studies and sociology of work areas. In general terms, an identity is a perception of who or what a person is, in relation to others (Watson, 2012). There are two aspects of identity: internal (self-identity) and external (social identities). Giddens (1991) defines self-identity as “the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of her or his biography” (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). Self-identity is “the individual’s own notion of who and what they are” (Watson, 2008, p. 131). Social identities refer to “cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be” (Watson, 2008, p. 131). An individual might belong to various social identities; for example, a social category (such as class, gender or nationality); formal role (e.g., occupation, rank); or cultural stereotype. Hence, an individual’s identity is that person’s understanding of who and what he or she is, compared to the available social definition of who or what an individual might be.

Identity work refers to a process individuals go through to bring together self- and social identities, whereby individuals integrate internal self-reflection and external engagement with social identities to shape a relatively coherent sense of self (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Watson, 2008). Individuals refer to culture and discourse around them to define who they are. An individual’s decision to take up one identity will bring together personal and external notions of that identity. For example, becoming a hair stylist will combine the individual’s personal notions of a being hair stylist and society’s idea of the profession.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) argue that occupational community is a source of discourse to define social and personal identities as service personnel. An occupational

community's role is particularly important in the context of occupational identity of low prestige jobs (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Drawn from sociology literature, occupational prestige represents social perceptions of various work types, comprising status, power, quality of work, education and income (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). These attributes affect perceptions of occupational identity of both role occupants and outsiders. An occupational community guides an understanding of service roles by informing service personnel about the display rules that are more localised and specific than society in general (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). For customers, the occupational role informs customers about certain expectations of social interaction with role occupants: that is, role occupants' behaviour and how one should interact with them. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argue that occupational communities guide individuals to construct a positive perception of their work to improve self-esteem which help them to cope with role stress.

The previous sections have shown that service organisations need to address identity issues to help frontline personnel perform their roles. Literature presented in this section indicated that understanding of service roles and identity informs frontline personnel of the most suitable actions for the situation. In addition, identification with the service roles helps frontline service personnel to cope with emotional aspects of their job. Indeed, research in organisational studies generally agrees that one's identity is not in a fixed state; instead individuals have emergent identities which they continuously shape and redefine (Van Maanen, 2010; Watson, 2008). Consequently, in order to be able to understand knowledge and learning in the service context, examination of how frontline personnel construct their occupational identity is necessary.

2.3 KNOWLEDGE IN THE SERVICE CONTEXT

For the purpose of this study, knowledge in the service context refers to frontline personnel's perception of skills and knowledge required in service delivery. Service management and marketing research primarily uses the cognitive approach to examine knowledge about service encounters. Knowledge is generated through interactions at the frontline, focusing on how frontline personnel transform customer information into knowledge through categorisation (e.g., Bettencourt et al., 2001; Ye, Marinova, & Singh, 2011). Following the cognitive approach in the service management and marketing areas, this study expands the literature review to include knowledge management concepts.

Research in the KM area investigates knowledge transformation and generation in an organisational context. The knowledge management approach views knowledge as a transferable resource that should be managed to improve a firm's competitiveness (e.g., Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wiig, 1997). As an organisational resource, KM literature examines knowledge structure, dimension and type to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals use and share knowledge in the workplace.

The following sections present main concepts that guide the understanding of knowledge in the service context. The first section discusses knowledge as the result of information processing (Section 2.3.1); this is followed by a section about knowledge types (Section 2.3.2). Knowledge in the service context is presented at the end of this section (Section 2.3.3).

2.3.1 Knowledge as the Result of Information Processing

Knowledge construction describes how individuals transform data that represents events around them into knowledge. Data is defined as “a set of discrete objective facts about events” (Davenport & Prusak, 2000, p. 2). It is a raw description of individuals’ observation of their world (DeLong & Fahey, 2000). In other words, data is a collection of facts that represent individuals’ observation of events happening around them.

Information is the result of individuals’ attempts to organise data. Individuals generate information by finding or imbuing patterns in data or by giving it structure (Glazer, 1998). This process marks the beginning of individuals’ interpretations of their worlds.

More complex processes take place when information is converted into knowledge. Individuals connect pieces of information to construct knowledge:

knowledge is created, restructured, or changed from related and unrelated pieces of information, to the extent that the information has the right kinds of signals that, in the mind of the receiver, are conducive to the creation of knowledge. (Bhagat, Kedia, Harveston, & Triandis, 2002, p. 206)

Hence, individuals select and decide which information they use to create knowledge. Individuals use their own framework in the selection process. Leonard and Sensiper (1998, p. 113) clarify this process: “...knowledge as information that is relevant, actionable, and based at least partially on experience. Knowledge is a subset of information; it is subjective; it is linked to meaningful behaviour; and it has tacit elements born of experience”. They indicate the subjective characteristic of knowledge by linking it to how individuals combine pieces of information with their own personal

experiences. In other words, knowledge is framed with the individual's experience. Davenport and Prusak (2000, p. 5) propose a definition: "Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information". This definition incorporates subjective characteristics of knowledge and links to its use in the business context. Thus, Davenport and Prusak's (2000) definition will be used in the study.

Knowledge has dimensions that contribute to efforts to share it. These dimensions are: complexity, independence from system and degree of articulation (Garud & Nayyar, 1994; Winter, 1987). The complexity dimension portrays knowledge as complex versus simple. This dimension describes how much information is needed to explain knowledge (Bhagat et al., 2002; Garud & Nayyar, 1994). Simple knowledge can be explained with little information, contrary to complex knowledge. Bhagat et al. (2002, p. 207) suggest that "complex knowledge evokes more causal uncertainties". Consequently, more information is needed to completely capture these causal relationships to accurately transfer complex knowledge to others. The second dimension describes how knowledge is embedded in larger systems (Garud & Nayyar, 1994). Systemic knowledge is dependent on a larger system, and thus must be explained in relation to other knowledge. Independent knowledge, however, can be described without reference to other systems. The third dimension portrays knowledge as tacit versus explicit. Tacit and explicit knowledge describe knowledge according to its ease of transfer through articulation. Explicit knowledge can be expressed in language and thus communicated easily, as opposed to tacit knowledge which is difficult to articulate.

2.3.2 Knowledge Types

Knowledge dimensions can be useful to analyse what frameworks are used to create knowledge. An understanding of the knowledge creation processes allows individuals to find a suitable method to share knowledge. Knowledge is created by adding frameworks to new experiences and information (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). For example, complex knowledge can be analysed by exploring the causal relationship of the information that framed the knowledge. In the same approach, systemic knowledge can be explored by revisiting how the system is attached to give meaning to the information. Tacit and explicit knowledge can be explored by examining individuals' ability to articulate their knowledge creation processes. Knowledge types are important in this research because traditionally hair stylists' work is complex and largely tacit, with most learning occurring "on the job". The next section will discuss explicit and tacit knowledge in detail.

2.3.2.1 Explicit Knowledge

Explicit knowledge is described as knowledge that can be codified (DeLong & Fahey, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), articulated (Winter, 1987) or expressed (Ichijo & Nonaka, 2007). Contrasting explicit with tacit knowledge, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, p. 59) suggest that, "Explicit or 'codified' knowledge refers to knowledge that is transmittable in formal, systematic language". Explicit knowledge can be transferred because it can be expressed in an orderly way in language that is familiar to the receiver. Hence the receiver can easily capture and understand the frameworks that lie behind the creation of knowledge. Ichijo and Nonaka (2007, p. 283) give further description to its various forms: "Explicit knowledge can be expressed in words and

numbers, and is easily communicated and shared in the form of hard data, scientific formulas, codified procedures, or universal principles”. These various forms emphasise explicit knowledge’s ease of transfer from the individual that possesses the original knowledge to others. Winter (1987, p. 175) contrasted articulated with unarticulated knowledge: “Fully articulable knowledge, on the other hand, can be communicated from its possessor to another person in symbolic form, and the recipient of the communication become as much ‘in the know’ as the originator”. This aspect, the ease of transferring knowledge to other individuals, is the most significant nature of explicit knowledge. In summary, explicit knowledge is knowledge that can be articulated through symbolic forms to another individual in such away that the recipient is as knowledgeable as the possessor. This issue of the codification or symbolising of knowledge is important to this thesis because hair stylists in Hair Pro Forum use a variety of methods to symbolise their experiences (make it explicit), in order to transfer it in digital media; for example, stories, photographs, videos, emoticons and celebrity references, as well as more common textual and verbal representations of language.

2.3.2.2 Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge is at the other end of the continuum from explicit knowledge. “Tacit knowledge is what we know but cannot explain” (DeLong & Fahey, 2000, p. 114). This simple definition describes how tacit knowledge is not easy to articulate and communicate to other individuals. Ichijo and Nonaka (2007) add:

Tacit knowledge is personal knowledge embedded in individual experience, and involves intangible factors such as personal belief and perspective, and the

value system: it is not easily visible and expressible, and thus is hard to articulate with formal language and to communicate. (2007, p. 298)

They suggest that the individual's experience and intangible factors are the reasons why tacit knowledge is hard to communicate. These factors are deeply embedded in individuals and are unconsciously used as frameworks in the creation of personal knowledge. Berman, Down, & Hill (2002) suggest that tacit knowledge: "Involves pattern recognition, it is acquired through cumulative experience, it operates unconsciously in the background, it is difficult if not impossible to articulate, and it forms the basis of valuable individual human skills" (Berman, Down, & Hill, 2002, p. 15). They suggest that tacit knowledge is represented in human skills and the ability to recognise patterns in new information. Tacit knowledge is not only associated with skill: "Tacit knowledge, the knowledge that workers possess but do not articulate, is associated with terms such as 'skill', 'know-how', 'working knowledge', and 'expertise' that are used to describe knowledge about and ability to perform work" (McAdam, Mason, & McCrory, 2007, p. 45). McAdam et al. (2007) indicate that tacit knowledge cannot be articulated because it constitutes not only workers' personal beliefs and perspectives, but also experiences in their day-to-day working activities.

2.3.3 Knowledge about Service Encounters

Personal selling literature argues that knowledge is constructed from declarative and procedural knowledge (Weitz et al., 1986). Declarative knowledge is defined as a set of facts associated with a category, or "knowing what". An ability to identify a customer's needs is critical to be able to match the type with the suitable interaction approach (Szymanski, 1988). Procedural knowledge is defined as a sequence of actions or

approaches to handle a situation, or “knowing how”. Frontline personnel access declarative knowledge to identify a customer type. This process enables them to find a suitable approach to handle the situation from the stock of procedural knowledge. Studies in personal selling demonstrate that knowledge about customers allows frontline personnel to adapt their social interaction approaches with customers, leading to effective sales (e.g., Matsuo & Kusumi, 2002; Sharma, Levy, & Evanschitzky, 2007; Weitz et al., 1986).

Drawing on personal selling concepts (e.g., Sujan et al., 1988; Szymanski, 1988), Bettencourt and Gwinner (1996) suggest that knowledge in the service context has a similar structure. They argue that experience enables frontline service personnel to develop more elaborate customer categorisation schemes that are associated with specific behavioural strategies. Experience allows frontline personnel to recognise cues and place them in the right category. Various interactions enable them to polish social interaction strategies. Declarative knowledge informs procedural knowledge that guides them to handle service encounters. These authors follow up their proposition with two studies that confirm that knowledge is generally associated with frontline personnel’s ability to customise personal interaction with customers (e.g., Bettencourt et al., 2001; Gwinner et al., 2005).

The service management and marketing literature also discusses knowledge about service encounters in relation to the customer’s perception of service quality. The quality of the service encounter is usually measured using technical and functional (or social interactions) dimensions (Grönroos, 1984). Hennig-Thurau and Thurau (2003) translate these quality dimensions into service personnel skills. Frontline personnel are

required to display technical skills and social skills. Technical skills refer to knowledge the service personnel need to be able to offer and execute at core service delivery. Social skills refer to the ability of service personnel to engage with customers by taking their perspective into the delivery service. Frontline personnel need to be able to understand how customers see, think and feel (Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003). Li et al.'s (2009) study supports the view that technical and social skills are required to deliver a satisfactory service. They conducted a survey with two types of participants: customers and human resource managers in service organisations. The study shows that frontline service personnel need to have both technical and social interactions skills.

Research in the service management and marketing areas indicates that frontline personnel gain knowledge through experiences with many types of customers and situations. Frontline personnel use customer profiles to simplify their task by classifying customers based on their similarities (Sujan et al., 1988; Weitz et al., 1986). A case study on frontline personnel suggests that they use visual and auditory cues to determine the behavioural approach most suitable for the type (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). The case study elaborates these cues as: “customer-provided cues or characteristics such as speech attributes, mannerisms, dress and demographic variables such as age and gender” (p. 7). During encounters, frontline personnel pay attention to these cues to determine which group this customer belongs to and to monitor customers’ reactions to their social interaction approach. These cues are not easily described to others and difficult to articulate:

Visual and auditory experience is difficult to describe because language abstracts from the particulars of experience, leaving out much of its informational value and emotional impact. Similarly, some knowledge can be

described as bodily skill and involves our sensory awareness of our own bodies as well as brain signals of which we are not fully conscious. This sort of knowledge is hard if not impossible to articulate (Mooradian, 2005, p. 110)

It is difficult to articulate a detailed service experience because frontline personnel are focusing on words that customers use, the customers' mannerisms and other stimuli, not on how they select and combine these stimuli to inform their own actions. Mooradian (2005) explains:

The fundamental idea is that we use ideas to understand or create new ideas, and because our focus must be on the creating and understanding we cannot be aware of all the ideas actively participating in the act of knowing. Sometimes these mental states are experiential, sensual and emotional. When that is the case, expression in a natural or formal language is difficult if not impossible. (Mooradian, 2005, p. 109)

Frontline personnel understand the situation but seem unable to explain what factors they combine to get to the conclusion. Therefore, knowledge in the service context is largely tacit.

So far this literature review has shown that knowledge in the service context is gained through daily interactions with customers. Knowledge in the service context is largely tacit, and thus it is difficult to communicate through the codified forms represented in manuals and formal in-class training. This has an effect on how frontline personnel learn about service encounters, as will be presented in the following section.

2.4 LEARNING IN THE SERVICE CONTEXT

Davenport and Prusak (2000, p. 71) suggest that tacit knowledge is inseparable from how individuals act, and therefore the most effective way to “codify” knowledge is by “locating someone with the knowledge, pointing the seeker to it, and encouraging them to interact”. This is similar to Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) idea of apprenticeship in transferring tacit knowledge. These authors agree that individuals learn about tacit knowledge by personally interacting with its possessor. More recent literature supports the propositions to shift attention from tacit to explicit conversion (Gourlay, 2006; Klein, 2008; McAdam et al., 2007; Miller, 2008). Authors argue that tacit knowledge should be developed through interaction: “There is a need to start recursively drawing our attention to how we draw each other’s attention to events and phenomena to assimilate and develop tacit knowledge” (McAdam et al., 2007, p. 49). In a similar vein, Gourlay (2006, p. 65) suggests focusing on the “reproduction of behaviours attributed to tacit knowledge”. He suggests that tacit knowledge transfer occurs by copying behaviours that are attributed to it. It can be assumed that although it is difficult to articulate, tacit knowledge can be transferred to other individuals by drawing the learner’s attention to actions that represent tacit knowledge. In the workplace, learning the tacit aspects of the job involves the newcomer’s ability to integrate actions that represent tacit knowledge into her or his repertoire. On the other hand, experienced workers should guide learning by calling the learner’s attention to these actions. The underlying idea is to raise the newcomer’s awareness of behaviour that represents tacit knowledge without having to articulate the experienced worker’s thinking processes. This is an indication that learning about service encounters should be investigated as interactions between newcomers and experienced practitioners. This also might be the

reason why frontline personnel depend on occupational communities to help them deal with service encounters.

Research on communities of frontline service personnel have shown they have a significant role in facilitating workplace learning. Research in the service management and marketing areas show that frontline personnel prefer to share workplace experiences in informal communities (Geiger & Turley, 2005). Studies in the hospitality industry show that the occupational community guides frontline personnel to make sense of their relationship with customers (Lundberg & Mossberg, 2008; Sandiford & Seymour, 2007) and learn about emotion rules (Seymour & Sandiford, 2005). Studies in call centre settings show the occupational community guides frontline personnel to cope with emotional aspects of service encounters (Korczynski, 2003; Raz, 2007). This evidence suggests that communities of frontline personnel provide an opportunity to investigate learning in the service context.

The following sections present concepts on learning as participation in communities of professionals. An introduction to community of practice will be presented in the next section, followed by a review of the situated learning paradigm and learning as participation in a CoP.

2.4.1 Community of Practice

Management literature discusses the role of the community of practice in facilitating workplace learning (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning in the workplace context is situated in the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as the

community helps members to give context to daily workplace practices (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Wenger (1998b) developed the concept further by focusing on social participation as part of the learning process.

Although community of practice was introduced as a part of Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning concept, it is Wenger (1998a, 1998b) who explored the concept further. Community of practice is defined as "a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for joint enterprise" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139). Wenger (1998b) argues that shared interests and passion towards the practice becomes a joint enterprise to which members are committed. Commitment to joint enterprise differentiates a CoP from an organisation's functional groups that are bound by tasks that the organisation defines for them.

Wenger (1998a) says communities of practice are formed informally and develop naturally as people help each other to solve problems. A CoP starts as people find themselves facing the same situations in their daily tasks. By knowing other people who share these similarities, they discover that others have the potential to help them do their job better, hence improving their practice. Community members define what it is that the CoP can contribute to practice, defining boundaries, domains of knowledge discussed in the community and how practice is shared. In short, CoPs are formed based on shared context, which its members explore and negotiate further into the standard of practice in CoP.

Participation in a CoP involves telling stories about practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Klein, 2008; Wenger, 1998b). Stories are important tools to form a communal

understanding of work because they tell why and how things are done the way they are (Brown & Duguid, 1991). The community provides social space to discuss workplace experience. Community members offer multiple perspectives of the complex situations they face in practice. In this process of creating community, knowledge diverges when individuals contribute different “knowledge bases” (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998). Storytelling functions to converge separate experiences, constructing a “communal interpretation of hitherto uninterpretable data and individual experience”(Leonard & Sensiper, 1998, p. 44). Leonard and Sensiper (1998) refer to this as knowledge convergence; meanings are shared and interpreted together and thus adopted by the community. These propositions are confirmed in the manufacturing context as different communities develop shared meaning through storytelling (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002). These studies show storytelling enables people from different work groups (sales/marketing, design engineering, manufacturing engineering and production) to have shared meaning in the development of high-tech products such as semiconductors (Bechky, 2003) and automobile parts (Carlile, 2002). Storytelling as a learning tool will be presented in detail as part of a review of the sensemaking literature in Section 2.5.

2.4.2 Learning as Participation in Communities of Practice

Both the situated learning paradigm and community of practice are key ideas needed to understand workplace learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced situated learning as an alternative to the dominant cognitivist approach, which de-contextualises knowledge as it takes away learning from daily activities in which the knowledge is applied. They draw on the apprenticeship concept to view learning as legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. Learning is situated in the setting where

knowledge, as the result of learning, will be applied. Knowing is defined as knowing in action and in practice. Situated learning theory describes learning as participation in a community where inexperienced members observe more experienced members. Gaining more experience enables these members to join the conversation and contribute more to the community. Situated learning theory was illustrated with examples involving midwives, tailors, butchers, quartermasters and alcoholics.

Brown and Duguid (1991) draw on situated learning theory to explain learning in informal workplace communities. They presented Orr's (1990) ethnographic study to illustrate how a CoP gives context to daily work practices for copy machine technicians. Orr's study was set in Xerox, which leases photocopier machines to companies. Orr (1990) followed the daily work practices of Xerox service technicians who are called in to fix broken machines. Orr's study showed that Xerox technicians were aware of each machine's unique characteristics as each company had a different using pattern. The study also showed that Xerox technicians learn about their practice in the CoP as they share "war stories" about their experiences in handling copy machines. Drawing on Orr's (1990) study, Brown and Duguid (1991) showed that company manuals are often insufficient to guide the complex problems faced by the technicians. These technicians relied on support from the CoP to solve their problems. Brown and Duguid (1991) showed how the community gives context to daily practices, legitimising them and sharing particular knowledge.

Brown and Duguid (1991) draw attention to explicit and tacit knowledge. They argue that company manuals and formal training take the practice out of its context, to "generalise" the problem. They argue that codified knowledge, the explicit part in

company manuals and trainings, is unable to cover the complexity of the actual event faced by service technicians. They pose storytelling as a tool to share knowledge. That is, technicians tell stories about their experiences in dealing with each machine's characteristics.

Wenger (1998b) discusses learning in terms of meaning and identity in the context of a community of practice. He suggests that embracing a practice “entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context” (Wenger, 1998b, p. 149). Identity in this context is defining self as part of a community, negotiating the meaning of an individual's experience in terms of the community's values. Identity is shaped by the community's social interpretation of members' experiences. In the context of practice, an individual's identity is in an on-going process of negotiation of meaning as individuals engage in their daily lives. Experienced members of the community in this context are a representation of “history of the practice as the way of life” and “living testimonies of what is possible, expected, desirable” (Wenger, 1998b, p. 156). Wenger suggests that identifying self as a part of a community of practice translates identity into a form of competence, as members adopt some of the community's perspectives and repertoires. Therefore, learning takes place as individuals participate in the community's activities to become a part of the community.

Wenger (1998b) refers to learning as negotiation of meaning which involves the interaction of reification and participation. Reification is defined as “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’”(Wenger, 1998b, p. 58), and participation as “a process of taking part and also to the relations with others that reflect this process” (Wenger, 1998b, p. 55). Thus,

participation is not only acting the part but also connecting to others in the community. Reification is giving “thingness” to our experience and projecting ourselves to the world. It articulates our experience to the world and thus provides a shortcut to communication.

In summary so far, learning is situated in a community of practice where individuals learn to become a practitioner. Lave and Wenger (1991), Brown and Duguid (1991) and Wenger (1998b) discuss indepth learning in CoPs. These authors shed light on how groups enable occupational value socialisation and knowledge construction at a group level. However, interaction between groups and individuals is not explained in detail. The concept of sensemaking enables a better understanding of the mechanics of individual learning in relation to the group, and this was the focus of the second phase of the present study and the next section of this literature review.

2.5 SENSEMAKING

This section presents literature reviewed in the second phase of the study. The previous sections have shown that communities of frontline personnel provide an opportunity to investigate knowledge and learning in the service context. The initial review directed the first phase of the study, resulting in detailed insights on what knowledge is being shared and how it is shared at the online community level (findings and discussions will be presented in chapters five and six). These findings were the basis of further investigation into how online communities guide individuals to develop their practice and construct their professional identity.

The second phase of the study engages directly with Weick's (1995) sensemaking concepts. Sensemaking is similar in some ways to Wenger's (1998b) CoP in that sensemaking is concerned with the creation and interpretation of meaning as a social process, and how these processes are linked to identity construction. Sensemaking is complementary to ideas about learning in the service context already discussed in this literature review, because sensemaking involves meaning-making through human interaction enabling identity construction. Weick's concept emerges from communication processes which were not elaborated on in Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning paradigm or Wenger's (1998b) CoP concepts.

Sensemaking concepts have been used in the area of organisational studies to examine and explain how organisational members make sense of events in the workplace. Research in this area explains how individuals create meaning from these events to guide them in their future actions. Previous studies by Abolafia (2010), Maclean et al. (2012) and Rouleau (2005), focused on sensemaking as an activity conducted by managers and leaders to make sense of changes in the organisational environment.

Sensemaking is about individuals making sense of events around them: how they construct what is sensible for them, why and with what effects (Weick, 1995). At an individual level, it is about reflective activities to extract cues from the flow of events, to place them into frameworks and interpret them to make sense of the environment (Ng & Tan, 2009; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking is also about how cues are extracted from the flow of experience, how they are interpreted in group processes and how they are linked into cognitive structures and well-learned sequences of actions.

Sensemaking lies in communication processes, where creation of meaning is made explicit through words and other symbols. It is reflective, as individuals retrospectively recount past experience to create the meaning of the experience. Sensemaking as an interpretive lens to view learning enables the researcher to explain how learning takes place as individuals shape the meaning of past events into knowledge they can use in the future.

2.5.1 Sensemaking and Identity

Sensemaking is part of an individual's attempt to do "identity work" to bring together their engagement in the world and maintain a coherent sense of self. Individuals generally try to maintain a positive cognitive and affective state about the self (self-enhancement), they need to perceive themselves as competent and efficacious (self-efficacy), and they need to feel coherence and continuity of their identity (self-consistency) (Erez & Earley, 1993).

Individuals make sense of events around them to maintain their sense of self and to construct their positive sense of self-identity (Weick, 1995). An individual's sense of self is socially constructed and goes through constant redefinition. In order to adapt to on-going events in their environment, individuals seek guidance from organisations and their community to constantly redefine and refine their identities. Individuals are concerned about their own perspective of their identity and how others view their identity.

Giddens (1991) argues that identity is not a fixed state, but that it has to be continuously created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. Van Maanen (2010) suggests that individuals re-interpret themselves to situate their identities in the present, and that an occupational community guides development of identity. Construction of identity in the community is similar to Weick's (1995) sensemaking process: individuals offer a story about self which will be confirmed by the community. Feedback from the community either confirms or denies the story about self.

Van Maanen (2010) also suggests that work bestows meaning to self. Individuals refer to historical and cultural perspectives on their occupational status to inform who they are. On the other hand, daily working activities also influence individuals' reflective activities in identity construction. Van Maanen (2010) discusses how individuals construct their work identity, using the police as an example. Work identity is enacted and performed by individuals to other people outside their occupation; that is, organisations and customers. The performance is "akin to claims of personal character" (p. 112) and individuals use it to "stand for a postulated 'real person' who transcends situation and role" (p. 112).

Social interactions in the workplace affect meaning-making processes that contribute to identity construction (Wrzensniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Wrzensniewski et al. (2003) argue that the behaviour of others informs the process of meaning-making in work contexts. To construct work's meaning, individuals actively interpret what others do to them and what they do to others. Individuals engage in sensemaking processes to determine how others evaluate their job, their work and them at work. They have a tendency to seek out certain cues to shape the meaning of their work. Cues are defined

as “meaningful chunks of other’s behaviour that carry signal value for understanding how others view us” (Wrzensniewski et al., 2003, p. 104). They argue that making sense of interpersonal cues means that individuals select what behaviour gets noticed, and thus interpreted. Therefore, others’ behaviour is “created” as individuals take some of the behaviour out of the others’ actions towards the individual.

Tracy et al. (2006) explore how humorous stories facilitate meaning-making in a service workplace, as a part of identity construction. They investigate human service workers involving fire fighters, correctional officers and 911 operators. Results show that human service workers use humour to distance themselves from clients to cope with identity-challenging and hard-to-control events. Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction as individuals make sense of the stigmatised element of work. This study confirms that sensemaking shapes the meaning of the element, allowing individuals to have a positive sense of self as a member of their occupational group (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

In the service context, a customer’s behaviour towards frontline personnel is an input of how frontline personnel make sense of their jobs, roles and identities. They actively make sense of their daily experiences to create the meaning of their work and construct professional identities. In other words, service personnel go through a meaning-making process to construct their professional identities, and this process often involves interpreting a customer’s behaviour in service encounters. Sharing stories about these encounters allows frontline personnel to offer interpretation of their identity to the community. The community’s response to these stories is a form of feedback on those aspects of the identity, validating desired traits. Thus, some aspects of identity are

legitimised over others. This process will be explained in detail in the next section about Weick's (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) Enactment theory.

2.5.2 Enactment Theory

Enactment theory is a sensemaking model, proposed as a guide to research and practice (Weick et al., 2005). The model describes sensemaking processes in an ecological change-enactment-selection-retention sequence. Figure 2.1 illustrates Enactment theory as an individual sensemaking process (blue boxes) involving external feedback from other individuals or groups (purple box). Sensemaking activities begin when individuals become aware of an event or ecological change (green box) in their on-going experience of the world. Enactment theory processes are discussed below.

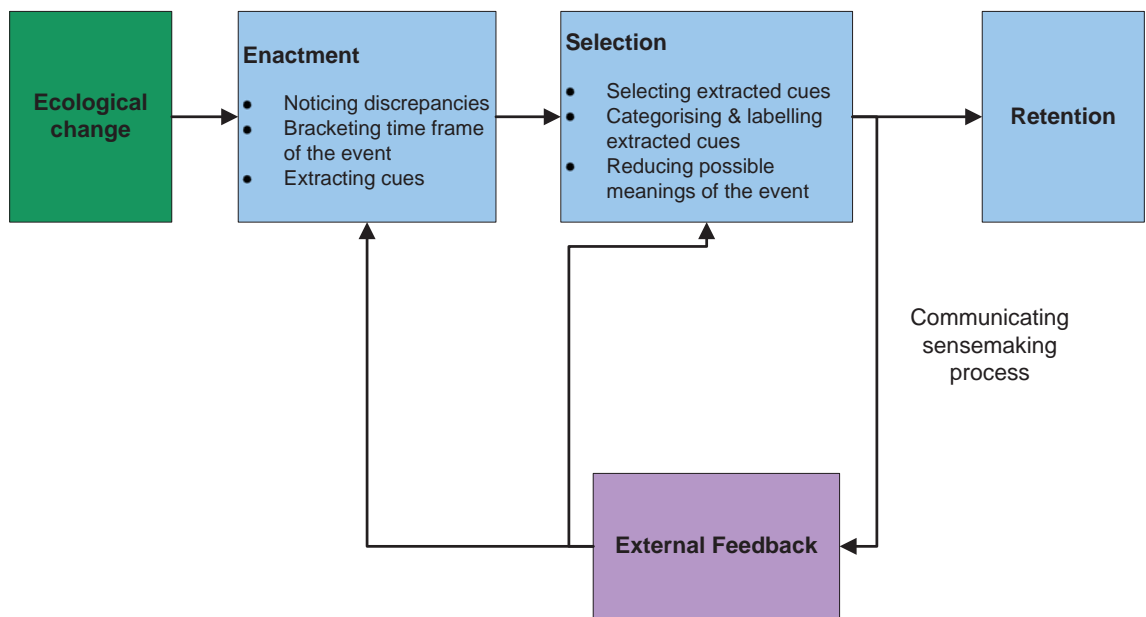


Figure 2.1 Enactment theory (Adapted from Weick et al. (2005))

Enactment makes an event “exist” by noticing and bracketing the event away from the stream of events around an individual. Previous experience and mental models guide

enactment, enabling individuals to focus on certain aspects of the environment that might contribute to the event, making an event “exist” by taking it out of the stream of events in an individual’s environment. The individual starts to be aware of an event, noticing a discrepancy and bracketing the event into a certain time frame. Bracketing creates a time frame by determining when an event starts and when it finishes. Noticing and bracketing processes allow individuals to extract cues from the flow of experience to create a possible story of the event. This process occurs mainly at the individual level.

The selection process reduces the event’s possible meanings, where “retrospective attention, mental models, and articulation perform a narrative reduction of the bracketed material and generate a locally plausible story” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414). The sensemaking process continues as individuals select cues to create plausible stories of the event, make a better categorisation of the event thus enabling them to refine the process of selecting these cues.

Individuals categorise and label extracted cues. Extracted cues allow individuals to focus more on selecting which frame will be used to interpret these cues. These might lead to a new interpretation of old frameworks or assist in the creation of new ones. This process enables individuals to reduce possible meanings of the event. The selection process is similar to creating a story where the individual creates meaning by making sense of the specific element of the event or making connections between parts of the event. In other words, individuals determine plausible stories and assign interpretive devices to make it more sensible (Weick, 1995). Creating the story allows the storyteller

to order events into a sensible sequence with connected elements. (Stories as sensemaking strategy will be discussed in the next section.)

Enactment theory as explained so far, describes sensemaking as an individual process. Collective sensemaking, however, is triggered when individuals communicate their thoughts to get feedback. Collective sensemaking is a process whereby groups interactively create shared meaning (Boyce, 1995). Sensemaking is about plausibility and not accuracy (Weick, 1995). External feedback functions as a test of the story's plausibility, coherence and reasonableness. In the retention stage, a plausible story is retained when "it is related to past experience, connected to significant identities, and used as a source of guidance for further action and interpretation" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414).

2.5.3 Storytelling: A Sensemaking Tool

Weick (1995) draws attention to stories, arguing that stories guide conduct because they facilitate the interpretation of cues represented in the stories. He maintains that stories help individuals to order flux, leading to a frame to interpret cues taken from the flux. Stories and storytelling are essential to sensemaking processes. Sensemaking, in the storytelling context, is an act of placing cues into a story to provide a frame of interpretation (the meaning of a situation) and action (how one should act in the situation) (Colville, Brown, & Pye, 2012). Colville et al. (2012) argue that stories shape sensemaking and sensemaking is represented in story.

Stories as sensemaking tools have been widely researched. At the group level, stories are socially constructed to make sense of environmental change (Whittle & Mueller, 2012), to take action regarding environmental change (Abolafia, 2010), or to make sense of failed decisions (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008). At the individual level, narrative sensemaking has been examined as strategies to cope with changes in the workplace (Bird, 2007; Driver, 2009). It has also been used to explain how individuals make sense of daily experiences in the workplace (Patriotta, 2003), and as an embodied and emotional process (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012).

Gabriel's (2000, 2004) work is particularly useful for making sense of service work because he is sensitive to service work vocabulary. He argues that stories give meaning to events as individuals (frontline personnel) interpret the event through attributing roles to characters and objects in the event; and also attributing motivation to these roles. Thus the event is presented as something that has a meaning for the individual, not something that happened by chance. Story-work describes a process whereby individuals attribute meanings to an event by infusing meaning in the event or discovering it in the facts. Story-work "seeks to transcend the literal truth of events by drawing out a different type of truth, one that may claim to be deeper, more powerful, or even transcendental" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 35). The underlying meaning of the event is discovered through its interpretation. Gabriel (2000) argues that stories can be observed as symptoms providing clues to sensemaking processes and about social reality, but they are not part of any reality. He argues that we should focus on the meaning, not the facts: "the truth of a story lies not in *the facts*, but in *the meaning*" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 4).

Gabriel (1995, 2000, 2004) introduced the term “story-work” to explain how stories facilitate sensemaking. Story-work is a process whereby a storyteller communicates facts as experience, claiming a “poetic licence” that allows him or her to mould the material to give voice to the experience. Gabriel (2000, 2004) further suggests that the storyteller uses “poetic-tropes” as interpretive devices to uncover deeper meaning of the event. Story-work gives the storyteller the “right” to extract some part in the event, ignore others, determine time frame, link parts and create a meaning out of the experience. Poetic-tropes (Gabriel, 2000, 2004) enable individuals to assign a causal chain to two subsequent events (attribution of causal connection), give credit or blame to character or objects (attribution of responsibility), treat an entire category of objects or people as indistinguishable (attribution of unity) and treat people or objects as possessing immutable qualities (attribution of fixed quality).

Stories have also been used in other ways to make sense of events in organisations. Boje (1991) argues that stories are performed, retold and reinterpreted to transform individual memory to an organisational memory. In other words, “storying” facilitates knowledge transfer between individuals and a group. Collective sensemaking allows stories to become the group’s memory. At the individual level, collective sensemaking guides individual learning and construction of identity. So, storying is a two-way process between individual and collective sensemaking, each dependent on and enabled by each other. Organisational stories become personal work stories and vice versa.

A case study of how individuals take sense from storytelling events was conducted by Sims, Huxham and Beech (2009). Results show that individuals learn through taking “snippets” of a story which can be reconstituted later for their own purposes.

The learning is focused around stories that they want to tell to someone else, and much of the learning takes place through rehearsal and retelling of stories, followed by mental simulation of the practices that have been heard about within those stories. The use of the term ‘snippets’ does not imply that these are trivial, but only that they are decontextualised from what the speaker said and can be recontextualised in a way that is meaningful to the listener. (Sims et al., 2009, p. 383)

Learning is achieved by internalising the stories into the ongoing narrative of the listener. The study showed that listeners remember decorative and interesting snippets of the story, which they later use to retell these stories from the storytelling events. Individuals transform these stories into their personal stories, thus internalising them.

According to Boyce (1995), storytelling is an effective form of collective sensemaking, to help negotiate and engage with shared meaning. She shows story-sharing in dancer and athlete communities which allowed dancers and athletes to construct identities as they are reminded of the essence and purpose of their profession. Storytelling in these communities allows participants to collectively make sense of who they are. In another case where stories are told in a religious organisation, Boyce (1995) shows that collective sensemaking is observed in how participants share and compare similar experiences, identify important aspects of shared stories and express understanding of what is being shared. Tracy et al.’s (2006) study confirms the importance of storytelling in a service work setting by presenting a case study set in a fire department, a jail and a 911 call centre. The case study shows sharing stories facilitates collective sensemaking because it guides others to interpret a certain kind of situation, how cues should be interpreted and which frameworks should be used to interpret them (Tracy et al., 2006).

These studies provide evidence that collective sensemaking guides individual learning and identity construction.

Section 2.5 presented sensemaking (Weick, 1995) as a complementary concept to explain learning around service encounters. Sensemaking ideas are relevant to learning in the service context because sensemaking enables a better understanding of how frontline service personnel go through a meaning-making process to interpret their daily workplace experiences. Sensemaking lies in communication processes between individuals and groups, where collective sensemaking guides individuals to shape the meaning of service encounter experiences in communities of practice. In the context of this study, learning in the service context can be explained by investigating how a community of frontline service personnel guides individuals to develop practice and construct professional identities. This process will be discussed in the next section as a part of conceptual frameworks in this study.

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: LEARNING AS PARTICIPATION IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The literature reviewed has shown that communities of frontline personnel provide an opportunity to investigate knowledge and learning in the service context. Communities of practice have been indicated as suitable to facilitate learning in the service context for two main reasons. First, knowledge in the service context is inseparable from understanding of service role and identities. Consequently, learning involves the development of practice and the construction of professional identity. Second, knowledge in the service context is largely tacit. Tacit knowledge is difficult to communicate, and thus the most suitable mode of transfer is through interaction in

occupational communities where experienced practitioners guide a newcomer's learning processes. In addition, previous studies have indicated that frontline service personnel depend on CoPs to solve their workplace problems and cope with emotional aspects of service encounters (e.g., Korczynski, 2003; Raz, 2007; Sandiford & Seymour, 2007). Consequently, online communities provide two key advantages for frontline personnel: online communities provide a "back region" where members can rehearse their "front region" service performance, and learning can occur through participation in an online community of practice.

The following section (2.6.1) presents literature on online communities which is relevant to this study. It is followed by two sections that explain conceptual frameworks guiding this research. The conceptual frameworks provide a way of posing empirical questions by presenting a theoretical frame and an analytic focus to examine learning in an online community of practice.

2.6.1 Online Communities of Practice

The main difference between a face-to-face community and an online community is the way members communicate with each other. An online community can be defined as groups of people with shared interests who interact predominantly in cyberspace to achieve goals (Koh & Kim, 2004; Preece, 2000) or to share similar experiences (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). Online communities are defined as "groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organised way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism" (Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002, p. 273). This study defines an online community of

professionals as a group of people informally bound together by their shared occupation or profession that communicate regularly over the Internet.

Online communities can be classified based on the technology employed to enable communication activities. Technology selected as the main communication mechanism affects members' communication patterns and their presence in the community. Table 2.2 presents technologies commonly used by online communities.

Type	Description
Bulletin Board	Members have to visit the site to post and view messages. Messages and their replies are presented in chronological order of receipt. Old messages are stored and members can easily access them.
Mailing lists (listservers)	Members send an email to the listserve that will distribute it to all members. Members get messages directly into their inboxes. Some listserves allow members to download previous messages.
Chat room	Live conversations between members.
Multi-user dungeons	Live conversations between members who are represented by their chosen online characters (avatars). Members navigate through virtual graphic environments ('rooms').

Table 2. 2 Online communities types based on technology

There are two main communication media in online communities: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous technology enables community members to have live and direct conversations through the Internet, leading to more spontaneous interactions. Chat rooms and multi-user dungeons represent this type of technology use, where multiple members gather at the same time in virtual rooms. Emails are the main communication avenue in asynchronous technology, as community members participate through sending and reading them in bulletin boards and mailing lists. Asynchronous technology presents a less spontaneous communication because members have to

compose a letter to participate in the discussions. Compared with synchronous communication, community members are not expected to give an immediate response through asynchronous technology. This might be the reason why discussions in bulletin boards and mailing lists tend to explore topics in more depth (Kozinets, 2002).

Sharing experiences through the Internet offers several advantages. Sproull and Kiesler (1986) propose that online communities allow people from different organisations and locations to contribute to many different perspectives on work-related problems. They also argue that computer-mediated communication enables individuals to participate without their identities being known. For this reason, people disclose information that they normally would not share in face-to-face communication, and it also motivates them to share their point of view (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). The lack of physical presence encourages individuals to share experiences without worrying about others' immediate responses (Wright, 2002). The use of text as media to share knowledge is also beneficial as it allows discussions to be stored, enabling members to search for and catch up on particular discussions.

Online communities allow people, who are practically strangers, to share information. Trust is an important issue for online communities, as anonymity and lack of physical presence offers fewer guarantees that others will behave as expected (Ridings et al., 2002). Previous studies agree that trust influences individuals' willingness to participate in online communities (Jameson, 2009; Ridings et al., 2002; Young & Tseng, 2008). In a knowledge-sharing context, trust is an antecedent to sharing knowledge in online communities (Usoro, Sharrat, Tsui, & Shekhar, 2007). Usoro et al.'s (2007) study

shows that individuals' trust of an online community encourages them to participate actively by contributing to discussions.

The behaviour of online community members has an effect on the development of trust which leads to knowledge sharing. Research shows that trust is higher when community members confide personal information to the community (Ridings et al., 2002). These authors argue that confiding personal information represents the person's trust that the community will not misuse the information, which encourages them to share knowledge. Community members' responses to shared information also influence trust building. Ridings et al.'s (2002) research shows that community members' immediate and frequent responses are associated with trust. In fact, individuals are encouraged to share more if they are confident they share knowledge that is useful for the community (Usono et al., 2007).

Text as media is often criticised as it is limited in its capacity to transfer ambiguous information; that is, data or information may have multiple interpretations. Rich communication transactions are required to transfer ambiguous information to enable participants to overcome different frames of reference in a timely manner. Face-to-face is a rich medium for several reasons (Daft & Lengel, 1986): it enables immediate feedback that allows participants to clarify ambiguous issues; and it also provides multiple cues with body language and tone of voice. Text as media is also criticised because non-verbal cues are lacking, as non-verbal cues are considered crucial when people share implicit elements of their work (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986).

Despite criticisms of text's limited capacity, research shows that online community members may overcome to some extent the limitation of text-based communication. Swan's (2002) study in an online education setting shows that teachers and students use texts to show social presence required to lessen psychological distance between communicators. Henri and Pudelko (2003) argue that online community members adapt to the limitations and advantages presented by internet communication technologies. A study confirms their argument as shown by members' use of icons, metaphors or commonly known phrases to overcome non-verbal cues (Hemetsberger & Reinhardt, 2006). Desanctis et al. (2003) conducted a study to compare how learning occurs through three internet communication technologies: video-conferenced class rooms, group discussion spaces and online communities. They found that although communication was through mainly textual media, the online community in their study produced complex communication patterns that enabled them to have rich learning experiences. The study demonstrated that learning in an online community of practice allowed declarative and procedural information exchange, transactive learning (knowing community members' expertise, community's capabilities) and sensemaking (developing shared meaning as shown in information interpretation, providing opinion, trying new ideas, reflecting on results, storytelling) (Desanctis et al., 2003). In addition, internet communication technologies enable individuals to submit images and videos in online discussions, making communication richer. These studies suggest that an online community provides a space to exchange workplace knowledge, including learning about the implicit and often ambiguous elements of work through rich media.

2.6.2 An Online Community as a Back Region: Rehearsing Service Performance

Reviewed literature showed that service encounters have been discussed through the dramaturgical metaphor (see Section 2.2.2, Service as Theatre). Following Goffman's (1959) ideas, service encounters occur in the front region (or front stage) where frontline personnel perform their social roles as service providers and customers as service recipients. The present study was initially inspired by a case study of an online community which was similar to Goffman's (1959) concept of a back region. Ross' (2007) study shows that apprentices of London taxi drivers learn by participating in an online CoP. The experienced taxi drivers guide apprentices to rehearse their examination to get their licences as London Taxicab drivers, enabling the apprentices to learn about the examination material (various routes around the London area) and how to handle the examiners. This rehearsal concept is used as an organisational tool to develop service script with frontline service personnel, and can be seen as customer service training which often involves role playing (Harris et al., 2003). In the study, the researchers conducted a drama production workshop as a part of a customer service training program in a retail organisation. The workshop participants developed service scripts from actual unpleasant experiences with customers and re-enacted these experiences to improve customer service skills. Harris et al. (2003) argued that frontline personnel service scripts consist of two forms of script in the theatre concept: playtext and subtext. Ross (2007) and Harris et al. (2003) indicate that frontline personnel rehearse their performance in back regions, and online communities are an area where this rehearsal occurs. The following section will introduce the two script forms in the theatre concept and the role of rehearsals in a drama production.

There are two forms of script in the theatre concept: playtext and subtext. Playtext, commonly known as script, informs the performers about the stage directions and the actors' role: the sequence of actions, the dialogue, the costume and the setting (Pickering, 2005). In the service context, the playtext is similar to the service script which represents an organisation's guide to frontline personnel conduct, particularly the technical aspects of the performance. Frontline personnel often learn this script formally through training or company manuals. Some organisations develop elaborate scripts that address the social interaction aspect of the service. Service scripts might include dialogue and emotion that should be expressed during the interaction; for example, how to greet customers or how to display friendly mannerisms without being intrusive.

According to the drama production concept, the playtext is not the final form. The written script, or the playtext, is merely a guide that must be interpreted by the actors to reveal the subtext (Pickering, 2005; Wallis & Shepherd, 2002). During rehearsals, the actors discuss their roles in order to be able to transform the written elements of the script into a complete performance. The rehearsals result in a final performance which includes the unspoken elements the actors must communicate, such as facial expression, modulation of the voice and body language. The actors interpret and discuss these elements during rehearsals to enable them to create characters they will perform in front of the audience. The result of this process is defined as subtext: "a way of describing the discrepancy between the spoken text and those motivations that result in particular action and modes of behaviour on the part of a character" (Pickering, 2005, p. 56). A subtext is the end "product", the one the audience experiences and reacts to. It contains both explicit and implicit communication performed by the actors: the service personnel and the customer.

One key assumption used in the present thesis, and developed from this literature review, is that learning in an online community of practice is similar to rehearsal in the drama production concept. Online communities are similar to the backstage of a theatre; frontline personnel rehearse their performance and get feedback from fellow service actors. In Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor, backstage is comparable with a back region where social actors work out the aspects of their presentation to perform their roles in society. Sharing workplace experiences in an online CoP invites community members to give their interpretations of the event. In the theatrical rehearsal context, shared experience is similar to a playtext that guides the sharer's actions. Discussion in an online community resembles rehearsal, as community members share similar experiences with the original experience shared by the first sharer, or give feedback on the sharer's playtext. This process enables members to see not only various scripts but also various interpretations of the script.

2.6.3 Learning as Participation in an Online Community: Making Sense of Service Encounters

This study adopts a conceptual framework of learning in the context of a professional community (Handley, Clark, & Fincham, 2007). These authors argue that participation allows individuals to observe the community's repertoire, enabling them to adapt it to suit their needs and thus transform the individual's practice. They adopt Ibarra's (1999) ideas to explain participation in an occupational community as development of practice and identity through observing role models to identify potential identity; experimenting with the provisional identity, and evaluating the experiment against internal standards and external feedback (Ibarra, 1999). A community's role in identity construction is

further described as the community's capacity as a source of identity regulation to guide identity work. Identity work is defined as an individual's interpretive activities to reproduce and transform self-identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) conceptual study about organisational control proposes that organisations provide discourse that employees can use to transform their self-identity. They argue organisations "regulate" identity by providing employees with discourse that they can use in reflective activities to define self. In this study context, discussions in an online community are similar to a source of identity construction, as these discussions guide frontline personnel to construct who they are as service providers. The present study will show how this iterative process of identity construction occurs through learning what it is to be a professional through online communication in the backstage.

The present study draws on Wenger's (1998b) concept of social participation as part of the learning process. Learning is defined as gaining ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful (Wenger, 1998b). Wenger (1998b) is vague about the processes individuals go through in negotiation of meaning, and focuses on the community's activities. Weick's (1995) sensemaking helps to explain how the community guides individuals to shape the meaning of workplace events, shared in an online CoP.

Weick's (1995) sensemaking is a complementary concept, enabling the researcher to describe the learning process which involves interplay between the individual and groups in the community. Figure 2.2 illustrates this process, as individuals communicate

the result of their sensemaking processes by posting a message on the community’s bulletin board. The individual sensemaking process is presented in the blue-coloured boxes in Figure 2.2, as individuals make sense of an ecological change or an event in their environment (displayed in the green-coloured box). This action enables the community to give feedback through collective sensemaking processes (displayed in the purple box).

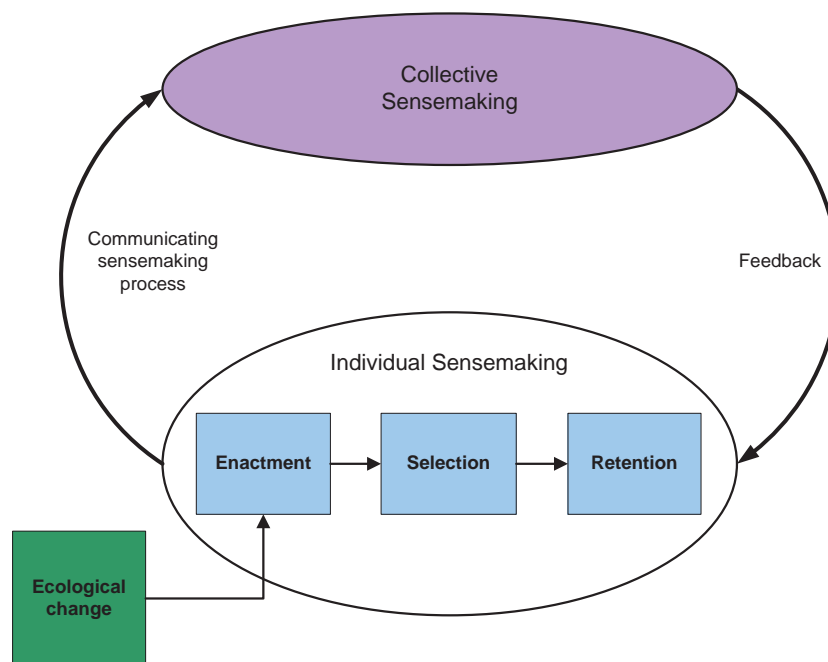


Figure 2.2 Learning as participation in an online community

Enactment theory (Weick et al., 2005) is adapted as a framework to explain learning processes in the online community of frontline service personnel. Enactment can be observed in a post as a member shares their experience. Sharing the experience of a service encounter is aligned with making an event “exist” by articulating it and transferring its form into an explicit or textual form. The individual starts to create some order by noticing elements from the stream of events in her or his environment. Bracketing occurs as the individual determines the time frame of the event, from start to finish. Noticing and bracketing allow individuals to start a rough categorisation and

labelling process to make sense of the event. A rough draft of a story starts to emerge as the individual becomes more focused on a specific time frame and subject matter.

The enactment and selection processes result in a posted story or shared experience in an online discussion forum. The storyteller offers the result of her or his sensemaking processes and creates a meaning from the experience. Individuals will retain this meaning only if the preserved content is believed or doubted through feedback (Weick et al., 2005). The feedback process takes the story to a group level where community members give their interpretation of the content. The story is redrafted to incorporate a more comprehensive framework. This process is similar to Boje's (1991) "story performance", whereby the storyteller and audience engage in a dynamic process in interpreting stories. In the online context, community members offer their interpretation of the initial story in the form of replied messages which may contain suggestions or similar stories. Community members shift the meaning of the initial story by taking elements and cues from the initial story, simplifying them or exaggerating them (Boje, 1991). Therefore, the story is redrafted to be more believable and resilient in the face of criticism (Weick et al., 2005).

Stories should be collected in situ, as an interaction between storyteller and the audience (Boje, 1991; Gabriel, 1998). This is the reason why data collection in an online community is beneficial, because discussion in the community's bulletin board enables researchers to observe how a story is interpreted by community members as the audience and there is a permanent reward of the process.

2.7 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

A limited amount of literature in service management and marketing about knowledge and learning in the service context led to the overview of a number of research areas in this literature review to explore the topic.

This chapter has presented service encounters as complex social interactions involving social actors' attempts to control each other and the situation. Concepts from social sciences studies were drawn on to give richer discussion of service roles involving occupational identity and how it affects social interactions in service encounters. The review has shown that to gain deeper understanding of knowledge in the service context it is necessary to give more focus to how frontline personnel deal with identity issues in service encounters.

Following the cognitive approach in service management and marketing research, knowledge in the service context has been explained as the result of information processing. Knowledge about service encounters was examined through its structure, content and types. The review has shown that knowledge about service encounters is largely tacit, which affects strategies to share and learn about.

Learning in the service context has also been explored through the situated learning paradigm, presenting learning as participation in communities of practice. Learning was discussed as the development of practice and identities.

This chapter has presented a review of sensemaking in the context of identity construction. Sensemaking was discussed as an interpretive lens to investigate the dynamics between individuals and groups that enable learning. Storytelling was also presented as a sensemaking strategy.

The last two sections presented the conceptual frameworks used in the study. This study suggests that an online community functions as a back region, which enables frontline personnel to see and discuss various interpretations of a service script. In other words, participation in an online CoP is similar to a rehearsal process in a drama production. The framework for understanding learning in an online community used in this study is that learning is a dynamic process of collective and individual sensemaking activities, enabled through internet communication technology.

This chapter provided a review of literature, and concepts and ideas that inform this study. The following chapter will present the methodologies utilised to answer the research questions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research approach and methods used in this research. Procedures for each research stage—pilot, first and second phases—will be described, and the rationale for using selected methods discussed. Although presented in this chapter in a linear sequence, the research stages occurred as an iterative and overlapping process. To give context to the research process, the researcher’s reflection is presented first. This describes how the research process evolved. The chapter then discusses how and why the single qualitative case study approach was chosen. This section is followed by the research methodology, and I then discuss procedures used to ensure qualitative standards of quality are reached. Finally the chapter discusses ethical issues in conducting research in online community settings.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the research methodology employed in this study, which will be described in detail in Section 3.4 (see p.87). Research formulation led to a study which consisted of three main stages: a pilot study and two phases of data collection and analysis. Figure 3.1 also shows how the pilot study guided a research design refinement. The first phase of data collection and analysis was led by the three initial research questions. Despite detailed descriptions of knowledge content and its sharing processes, results from this phase indicated that some parts of the learning process remained vague. These findings were explored further in three additional (refined) research

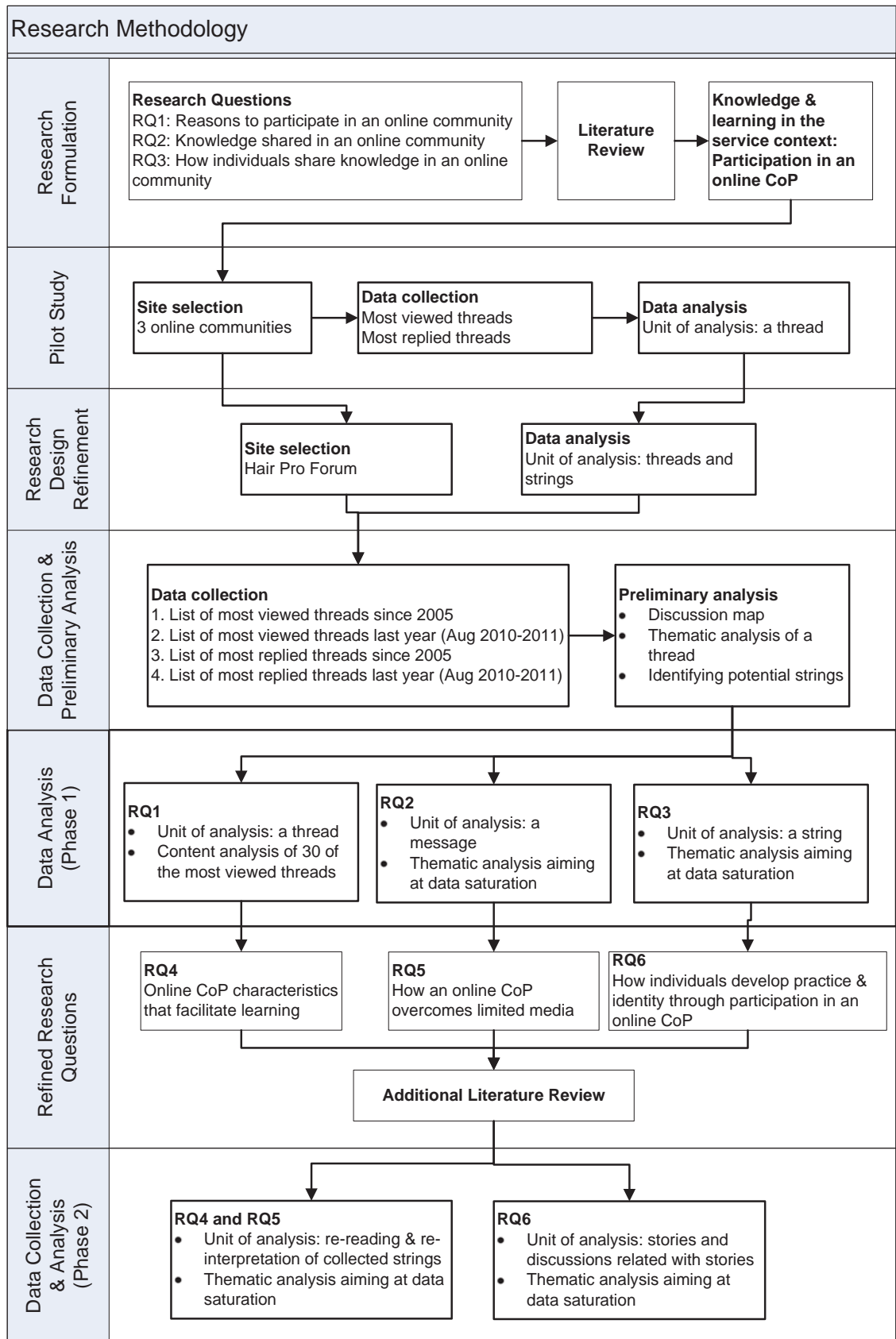


Figure 3.1 Research methodology

questions in the second phase (see p. 107). An additional, indepth literature review led to sensemaking and storytelling as an interpretive lens to investigate learning in an online community. These concepts directed another data collection to include stories shared in the online forum and the community's interpretation of these stories. Data analysis in the second phase involved re-reading and re-interpretation of both the preliminary findings and the new raw data.

Figure 3.1 will be discussed in this chapter, but first it is important to discuss my own role in this research, and how the process actually unfolded, as this thesis was a process of discovery.

3.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In this section I reflect on the research process, including on my assumptions, past experiences, potential biases and sets of beliefs that may have influenced my decisions regarding this study and my interpretations of data. I do this early in this section to situate myself in this study. Although this study is at the positivistic end of the qualitative research spectrum (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), I believe the research process has been a process of discovery and that I should accurately portray and make visible my own decision-making process to add to the credibility and transparency of this thesis.

My interest in service encounters began when I had to hold two seemingly different positions at work. I held a managerial position in a business school where I also tutored a service marketing paper to undergraduate students. As a tutor, my position was

similar to frontline personnel who deliver courses to clients. Teaching was a new skill I had to learn, and I often sought help from my friends to solve class management problems. I was also the department's academic secretary, a post similar to an operational manager in a service organisation. These positions allowed me to gain insights about service encounters from the service organisation's perspective, and from the person who represents the organisation to the customers. I began to wonder how frontline personnel learn to deal with service encounters and how service managers can help them learn.

This led me to choose the focus of my PhD study: frontline service personnel learning the service encounter. Having a background in service marketing, I looked at research in this area to explore learning about service encounters. Service marketing literature provides limited research on this topic. The predominant paradigm is that frontline personnel's knowledge is the result of information processing. One intriguing lead in the literature was the community of practice concept. These discoveries led me to knowledge management.

Knowledge management literature became the next main source of insight in my literature review. Similar to the service management and marketing areas, the predominant paradigm of knowledge management is that knowledge is the result of information processing. Knowledge management does incorporate frameworks for understanding how individuals share and learn as well as the role of CoPs in solving workplace problems. However, the micro processes of knowledge sharing are only vaguely described and have not been examined in depth, although there is some research indicating that storytelling plays an important part in the process (e.g., Brown &

Duguid, 1991; Geiger & Turley, 2005). Stories develop shared meaning (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002). These insights enabled me to develop research questions for my research proposal:

1. How does a community of practice facilitate knowledge sharing?
2. How does sharing knowledge through stories enrich members' knowledge?
3. How are stories shared in a community of practice?
4. What kind of story is useful to facilitate sharing knowledge about service encounters?

Collecting the stories was my initial challenge. I have always been interested in hair stylists' work, but there were too many challenges involved in gaining access to back-stage areas where stories would be told. For several reasons, including my being an international student, doing participant observation study—my first option—was considered impractical (by my supervisors and myself). My supervisor then suggested examining stories shared in online communities of frontline service personnel. I searched publicly available online communities through Google. I found that frontline service employees in all sorts of fields use forums to learn about their jobs: waiters in fast-food restaurants, baristas, customer service officers in retail stores, bank tellers, hair stylists, teachers and flight attendants all provided forums with manifest rich discussion. I found also found that these discussions covered both technical and social aspects of service. I became more and more interested in online communities of practice and extended my literature review on this subject. This phase reflected the iterative process of the qualitative research process as I moved from analysing publicly available discussions in online communities to consulting literature, to going back to

online communities to refine my research topic. This phase marked a significant process of the research as I finally defined my research questions:

1. Why do individuals participate in an online community of frontline service personnel?
2. What workplace knowledge do individuals share in an online community of frontline personnel?
3. How do individuals share knowledge about service encounters in an online community of frontline employees?

The initial research questions guided me to develop a suitable research methodology for the online settings (research methodology is presented in the next section). A pilot study was conducted to test the methodology (see Section 3.4.1 for the detailed description of the pilot study), leading to research design refinements (Section 3.4.2). The pilot study indicated that I needed to focus on a specific service typology to be able to explore knowledge about service encounters, leading to a decision to set the research in an online community of hair stylists.

During the data analysis process in the pilot study, I noticed that identity was an important issue in sharing knowledge about service encounters. The identity issues were more apparent in the online community selected for this study. I was also more curious about the dynamics between individuals and groups that lead to learning. These issues brought me back to the literature review guided by these research questions (research questions refinement is presented in Section 3.4.5):

1. What are the online community's characteristics that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning?

2. How do online community members overcome limitations of online media to share and learn implicit elements of service encounters?
3. How do individuals develop practice and identity in an online community of frontline service personnel?

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning paradigm and Wenger's (1998b) community of practice concepts were reviewed in the first phase of the study. These concepts have not fully elaborated the dynamics between individuals and groups, especially in explaining how participation in CoPs enables individuals to construct professional identities. Further literature review in the second phase of the study led to Weick's (1995) sensemaking concepts as an interpretive lens to examine learning in an online community of practice. This phase allowed me to further develop theoretical frameworks and guide the second phase of data collection and analysis, and led me to reach the conclusions of this study.

3.3 THE QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Literature reviewed in chapter two showed that there is limited research that specifically discusses knowledge and learning in the service context. Service management and marketing research, however, indicates that communities of practice help frontline service personnel deal with service encounter problems. Research in the online communities area shows that people overcome organisational and geographical boundaries to help each other solve workplace-related problems (e.g., Desanctis et al., 2003; Hara, 2007; Henri & Pudelko, 2003). For that reason, online communities of

frontline service personnel presented an opportunity to explore knowledge and learning in the service context.

This study aims to explore knowledge in the service context, and how interactions in an online community of frontline personnel shape it. A bulletin board is the centre of an online community's activities, where members communicate through electronic messages. These messages represent a community members' knowledge and the community's learning activities. In other words, the content of the bulletin board is inseparable from the communication of its members. The case study approach is recommended to examine contemporary phenomena within real-life context (Yin, 2009). This approach was selected because it allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). In this study's context, the bounded system is one online community of frontline personnel.

Qualitative approaches are recommended when studying a phenomenon that is inseparable from its context. The qualitative approach emerges in social sciences studies and is now widely used in management studies. The approach is also widely used in marketing literature on online communities of consumers (e.g., de Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009; Füller, Jawecki, & Mühlbacher, 2006; Kozinets, 2002). A qualitative study aims to gain an indepth understanding of complex interrelationships in a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Stake, 1995). The qualitative approach guided the researcher to develop a research design for conducting a study in a natural setting (the online community), enabling her to explore the topic based on a holistic picture of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Ethnography is a methodological approach commonly used by qualitative researchers. Netnography was introduced by Kozinets (2002) as an adaptation of ethnographic research techniques in online communities setting. The term refers to both fieldwork and the representations based on the fieldwork (Kozinets, 2002). The fieldwork in netnography is similar with ethnography as researchers study the distinctive meanings, practices, and artefacts of online communities as social groups. Netnography uses data from publicly available discussions in online forums to understand the online groups' interactions, perceptions and behaviours observed through discussions in the forums. Kozinets (2002) argues that netnography allows researchers to observe naturally occurring behaviours with minimal obstructions. Thus, understanding of the online community is grounded in the knowledge of the observed social group.

A grounded theory framework is recommended for analysing discussions in online communities (Kozinets, 2010). The grounded theory framework views phenomena as continually changing, and the approach builds these changes into the method by explaining the relevant conditions of the phenomena, how participants respond to changing conditions and the effect of their response to the phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Knowledge in online communities is generated through exchanging messages on the bulletin board. Discussion topics often change because community members have different interests and backgrounds, leading to varied perspectives to look at problems or issues. A message may instigate multiple interpretations, represented in community members' responses to the message. A grounded theory framework enables the researcher to explain what instigate the topic change, how discussion participants respond to the change, and how these processes lead to knowledge generation. The framework is selected because it allows the researcher to

understand how communication processes in an online community shape community members' knowledge about service encounters. Section 3.4, The Research Methodology, will explain in detail how the framework was applied in this study.

This research adopts an interpretivism–constructivism (Creswell, 2007) approach to explain knowledge and learning in an online CoP. The approach views the reality of the world we know as human constructions of external stimuli. Thus, human knowledge is constructed by giving meaning to external stimuli, and the meaning is socially constructed (Stake, 1995). Creswell (2007) argues that constructivism views knowledge as the result of individuals' processes of giving subjective meaning to their experiences, and these meanings are often constructed through interaction with others and include the historical and cultural aspects of the participants' lives. Reality is subjective, and the researcher aims to report this multiple reality by making sense of “the meanings others have about the world” (p. 21), and presenting a theory or pattern of meanings derived from research participants (Creswell, 2007). Stake (1995) proposes that the researcher assumes the role of an interpreter who guides readers to interpret the findings. He also suggests that the aim of a case study is to construct a clearer view of this subjective reality by giving thick descriptions and raw materials that allow readers to understand the case (Stake, 1995). These aims directed the researcher to design the research methodology in the following section.

3.4 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following sections present the research design employed in this study. There were three stages in the study: a pilot study and two phases of data collection and analysis. As

mentioned previously, a multiple case study design was initially planned, involving online communities that represent three different service typologies: mass services, task-interactive services and professional services. The researcher aimed to explain knowledge and learning in the service context by exploring interaction processes in an online community of frontline personnel. The researcher started with conceptual frameworks at the outset of the research which led to preliminary findings that directed further exploration and data collection. Thus, the explanation of the research topic (that is, the theory), is generated from participants' discussion in the community.

A pilot study was carried out in June 2011 and aimed to test data collection and analysis protocols (Section 3.4.1). Section 3.4.2 presents the pilot study results that led to research design refinement. The refined methodology will be described in detail in Section 3.4.3 (Phase One: Data Collection and Preliminary Analysis) and Section 3.4.4 (Phase One: Data Analysis). Data was collected in August 2011. Findings from the first phase of the study are introduced in Section 3.4.5 to give context to the refined research questions that lead to the second phase of the study. The research methodology section concludes with a description of the data collection protocols and analysis protocols for the second phase of the study (Section 3.4.6).

3.4.1 The Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted to help the researcher refine research questions and identify suitable methodologies. The researcher developed data collection and analysis protocols, guided by the three initial research questions: (1) reasons to participate in an

online community, (2) knowledge shared in an online community, and (3) sharing knowledge in an online community.

3.4.1.1 Pilot Study Site Selection

The researcher used search engines, such as Google and Yahoo, to find online communities of frontline service personnel. For the purpose of this study, an online community of professionals is defined as a group of people informally bound together by shared working expertise, who communicate regularly and for some duration over the Internet through a common mechanism as described in chapter two (Section 2.6.1). Three groups of keywords were combined to find online communities of professionals as shown in Table 3.1. For example: “virtual” is combined with “teacher” and “forum” to find online communities of teachers. Keywords listed in the “profession” category represent examples from the three service typologies in chapter two (see Table 2.1, Service Typology), which are mass service, service shops or task-interactive services and professional services.

Online	Community	Profession
- online	- bulletin board	- teacher
- virtual	- forum	- lecturer
- internet	- discussion board	- hair stylist
	- discussion group	- airline crew
		- barista
		- photographer
		- waiter
		- makeup artist

Table 3. 1 List of keywords for online communities selection

Research site selection for the pilot study was based on the online community’s interaction activities, measured by its posting frequency (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling,

2003; Füller et al., 2006; Kozinets, 2002). A posting frequency represents the “traffic”, the number of messages sent by the community members for a period of time. The researcher employed two criteria to identify potential communities: any community’s continuing activities and recent active discussion. To ensure the community’s continuing activity, the forum must have had at least 10 postings per week for each of the three weeks chosen at random. At least 80% of these postings must have had at least one reply. To make sure that the chosen online community had a recent active discussion, the last message must have been posted within one week of data collection.

The researcher made a list of online communities that matched the selection criteria and browsed through the publicly available content. A bulletin board provides space for members’ interaction, enabling the researcher to observe both community members’ activities and the discussion content. The researcher browsed the public discussion archives of online communities and became familiar with various communities’ culture and terms, prior to online community selection. The selected communities were the ones that provided the most relevant and richest information for this study. Another selection criteria were services that did not require a very high technical expertise, such as lawyers, doctors and other similar technical professions with specialised language that would take too long for the researcher to learn. Three online communities were chosen as research sites at this stage. An online community of English as Second Language (ESL) teachers was chosen to represent professional services; task-interactive services was represented by a community of hair stylists, and an online community of flight attendants selected to represent mass service.

3.4.1.2 Pilot Study: Data Collection and Analysis

The unit of analysis in the pilot study was a *thread*. A thread is defined as related messages on a particular topic (Grbich, 2007). The selected online communities provided indicators of thread activities by indicating the frequency of viewings and the number of messages in a thread. The number of views shows how many times the thread is accessed by members or visitors. A higher number suggests that many individuals read the thread, indicating its usefulness.

The researcher used the sorting tool in the selected communities to select threads. The tool allows the researcher to sort threads according to the number of views or the number of replies. The results were narrowed down further by adding two posting time criteria: (1) threads dated from the communities' foundation, and (2) threads active recently, as shown by the date of the last post in the thread (June 2010–2011). The researcher collected 20 threads from these two criteria, resulting in 40 threads for each of the online communities.

Thread collection followed the thread selection protocols (described in detail in Section 3.4.3.1) and thread mapping protocols (described in Section 3.4.3.2). The researcher developed coding schemes to answer the three research questions and trialled them on the collected threads. Content analysis was carried out to answer the first research question: reasons to participate in online communities. (The detailed coding scheme is presented in Section 3.4.4.1). Thematic analysis was performed for the two remaining research questions: knowledge shared in online communities (described in Section 3.4.4.2), and how individuals share knowledge in online communities (described in Section 3.4.4.3). The pilot study's summary of results is presented in Appendix 1. The

following section will discuss findings from the pilot study that led to research design refinements.

3.4.2 Research Design Refinements

Two major refinements were made to the research design, based on the study's results: (1) a decision to undertake a single case study in an online community of hair stylists, and (2) the identification of a string of messages to be considered a unit of analysis. Justifications for these changes are discussed below.

Three online communities were selected, each to represent a service typology in the pilot study. An online community of flight attendants represented services that focused on the results of service delivery with little customisation. Flight attendants deliver mostly the same service for all customers, and the service is dependent on a high investment in facilities and aircraft. ESL teachers represented the other end of service typology: service is focused on the delivery processes and the total time of direct contact with customers is longer than that of the other two service typologies. Teachers have to design a relatively specific service for different customer types and personally deliver it to them. An online community of hair stylists represented services that fall between these two types. A summary of the pilot study research sites is presented in Appendix 1, Table A.1.

A summary of knowledge shared in the selected online communities is presented in Appendix 1, Table A.2. Findings from the pilot study demonstrate that knowledge exchange is the main activity in these communities; however, different knowledge

content is found in each online community. Technical aspect threads are mainly found in online communities of ESL teachers and hair stylists. The ESL teachers online forum provides a space to practice English for teachers who are non-native speakers and to exchange course materials. Similar results are found in the online community of hair stylists as shown by members exchanging tips about hair styling and colouring techniques.

Although knowledge exchange is the main activity in an online community of flight attendants, the recurring topic is generally non-service encounters. Sharing tips about job interviews is popular. Another recurring topic is about how to survive in a hotel while waiting for the flight that takes the flight attendants home. Popular threads collected from the flight attendants' community did not show any discussion about technical aspects of service.

Social aspects of service encounters are found in all selected online communities, particularly about handling the misbehaviour of customers. Flight attendants share tips on how to handle the behaviour of passengers who disturb the flight. ESL teachers exchange advice on how to manage noisy classes. Hair stylists share stories about customers who try to get free services. However, social aspect topics were found more frequently in the online community of hair stylists. Members of this online community also discuss social interactions in regular encounters; for example, how to engage customers in a conversation during service delivery.

The pilot study results indicated that hair stylists could potentially offer the richest source of information to explore knowledge about service encounters. The community

provided an ideal setting to get an indepth understanding of frontline personnel's perspectives of complex service encounters that include both learning technical and social aspects of service. Threads collected for the pilot study suggested that hair styling encounters require hair stylists to perform a complex technical procedure while socially interacting with customers. Each service encounter must be pleasant, making the social aspect of the encounter especially important for hair stylists. Hair styling is an example of a service shop where the work of frontline personnel ends at the conclusion of the delivery. Consequently, customers are not required to come back to frontline personnel when they need the next service. This characteristic offers a unique insight on how frontline personnel deal with power and control in a service encounter.

The online community of hair stylists selected for the pilot study offered an opportunity to investigate complex and multi-layered facets of service encounters. Setting the research in an online community of hair stylists allowed the researcher to understand the service encounters indepth and thus, this was predicted to be a suitable case source (Patton, 1990). Stake (2005) supports the single case study, arguing that it is important to optimise understanding of a single case and what especially can be learned from it. Consequently, it was decided that Hair Pro Forum would make an ideal single case site. In addition, Hair Pro Forum founder and chief moderator gave his agreement for the study to be conducted (see Appendix 3). For these reasons, this research employed a single case study approach, and an online community of hair stylists was selected as the single case in this study.

The pilot study also helped the researcher refine a unit of analysis for the research. The study showed that a thread often has more than one discussion topic. A sub topic is

introduced when a member posts a topic different from the initial problem or issue in the thread starter. The new topic may be related to the initial discussion but it may also be an entirely new topic. For example, a member starts with a question about a new colouring product. The discussion becomes multi-layered as six others introduce a new topic: the colouring application techniques, its effect on the customer and props to apply the chemicals. These topics are all discussed in detail in the strings. (This example will be discussed in chapter six). Findings from the pilot study demonstrated that a thread can be broken into smaller units of analysis. The researcher decided to name it a *string*: a subtopic in a thread. A string is a series of messages within a thread, which represents a subtopic. The subtopic might be a deviation from the initial topic as it presents an indepth discussion of one aspect of the topic. The subtopic can also be a new subject, without any connection to the initial topic.

As it became apparent how rich the data is, in even one thread, the single case method was deemed appropriate for maximum excavation and understanding of the mechanics of a thread in the learning process.

3.4.3 Phase One: Data Collection and Preliminary Analysis

Hair Pro Forum interaction activities are centred in its bulletin board. Therefore, data was collected from the discussion forum's community transcripts. The Forum's bulletin board consists of several sub forums which cover work-related topics for professional hair stylists, such as hair cutting and colouring techniques, training and daily work-related experiences in the salon. The researcher selected sub forums based on two criteria: (1) the sub forum's topics had to be relevant to the study, and (2) the sub forum

had to display discussion activities as shown in its posting frequency. The first criteria directed the researcher to exclude two sub forums: one sub forum with “hair business” topics and one sub forum that provides space to exchange information about “buying and selling hair styling tools”. Three sub forums matched the two criteria above and were selected as sources of data collection: two sub forums which discuss technical aspects of service (“hair styling” and “hair colouring”); and one sub forum with “daily salon life” topics.

As mentioned in previous sections, two types of data were collected: threads and strings. A thread is defined as related messages on particular topic (Grbich, 2007). A thread may consist of more than one string. A string is defined as a series of related messages within a thread, tied to a particular topic.

3.4.3.1 Thread Selection Protocol

Hair Pro Forum is an active discussion forum with thousands of threads in the archives. To be able to collect the most relevant data, the researcher conducted two stages of thread selection. The first stage aimed at reducing the number of potential threads by sorting them according to their activities, measured by the number of views and the number of replies. The number of replies in a thread shows members’ active participation in contributing to the thread’s conversation. A higher number of replies indicates a better possibility of a discussion in the thread. The second stage aimed at collecting threads with the most relevant content from the lists created in the first stage.

The researcher repeated the thread selection protocol in the pilot study in the first stage of data collection. The Forum's sorting tool was used to order the thread according to the number of views or the number of replies. The results were narrowed down further by adding a two posting time criteria: (1) threads dated from the Forum's foundation in 2005, and (2) threads that were active recently, shown with the date of the last post in the thread (August 2010–2011). The second criterion was employed so as to be able to collect recent discussions that represent contemporary issues faced by the community. These criteria enabled the researcher to ensure that the data represented the community's activities across time. Combinations of these criteria produced 12 lists, four lists for each selected sub forum: (1) a list that represented the most viewed threads since 2005; (2) a list that represented the most viewed threads during the last year; (3) a list that represented threads with the most messages since 2005; and (4) a list that represented threads with the most messages during the last year. These lists were the source for selection protocol of threads and strings.

Data was collected in August 2011. The date stamp on the collected threads showed that the oldest thread was posted in July 2005, with 222 replies, and was viewed 3,965 times. The longest and most popular thread were posted in August 2006 and concluded in August 2010. The thread has 662 messages and was viewed 14,737 times.

3.4.3.2 Mapping the Interaction in the Thread

A thread consists of messages listed chronologically according to their arrival time in the online forum. Consequently, a reply to a certain topic in an earlier message is often separated by several unrelated messages. The discussion can appear incoherent

because messages with relevant topics are often disconnected from each other. To be able to observe the discussion flow and pattern, the researcher re-arranged the messages according to topic similarities. Messages with a similar topic were set apart, arranged chronologically and represented in a separate string in a thread map. The thread map allowed the researcher to get a better view of a major theme in a thread and observe the discussion flow.

Figure 3.3 illustrates the thread analysis procedure applied in this study. The researcher began the analysis by reading a thread as one unit of analysis to become familiar with its content. The second step used a message as the unit of analysis as the researcher started to categorise topics found in a thread. The categorisation process enabled the researcher to draw a thread map and identify strings in a thread for further analysis. Results from the thread analysis were used to direct the next collection of threads and strings. Thus, data collection and analysis were interrelated processes.

Following Kozinets (2010), the grounded theory framework (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) was applied to analyse discussions in online communities. Grounded theory framework was adapted through the use of open coding and axial coding processes in thread selection and analysis. Open coding process was used to analyse messages, and the results of this analysis guides the researcher to collect messages that were more relevant with the research topic. This step was taken to reduce the number of messages as discussion topics in online communities tend to be varied. Messages analysed in the first open coding process inducted a refined data collection in the second data collection stage. Axial coding process was used in the next step, which was an analysis

of the selected messages. Thus, an explanation of an online community's activities was grounded from messages as data.

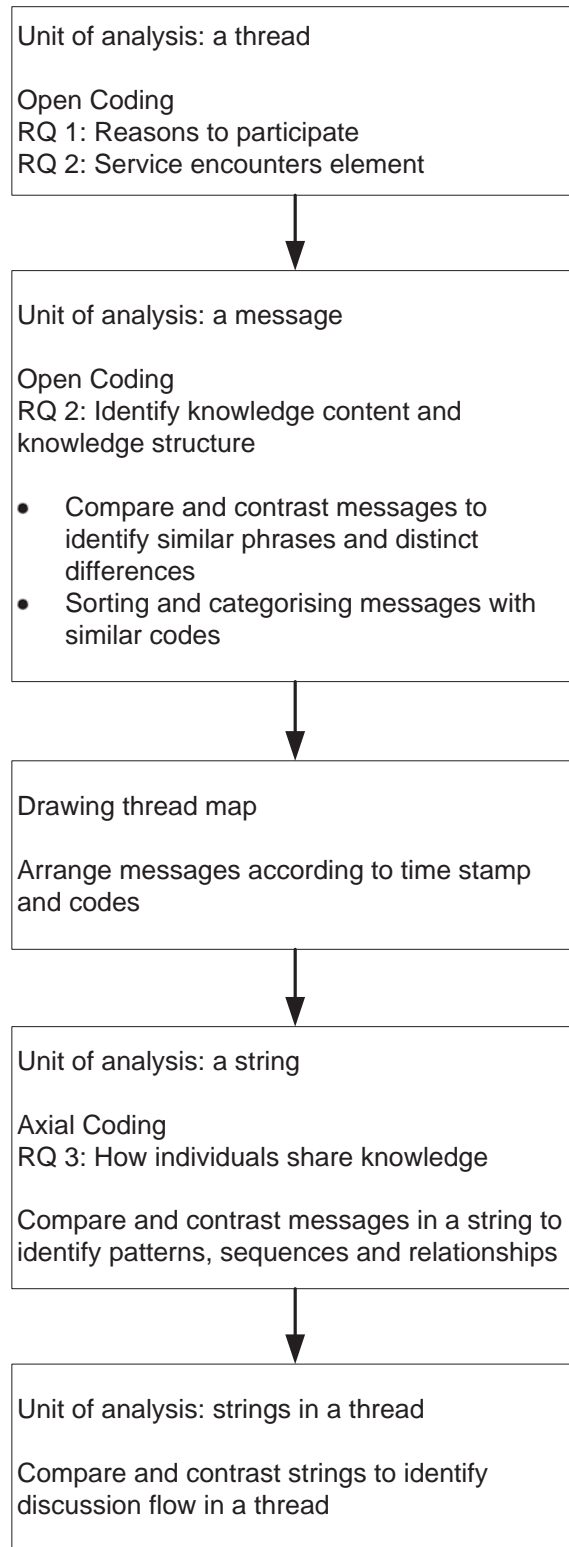


Figure 3.2 Thread analysis procedure

Open coding involves interpreting data by analytically breaking it down into pieces of information. A thread is treated as one large text block which might consist of more than one topic in its messages. A message is treated as a part of the large text block, similar to a paragraph in a document. The researcher repeatedly read a thread to search for meanings and patterns in its messages. Prescribed coding schemes directed the researcher to interpret data, search for similarities and find categories. Two research questions were addressed in this stage: reasons to participate in an online community (coding schemes are presented in Section 3.4.4.1) and knowledge shared in an online community (coding schemes are presented in Section 3.4.4.2). The researcher closely examined messages and noted tools embedded in the message (for example, links, videos, pictures, emoticons, specific phrases or metaphors). Reactions to these tools were recorded to analyse patterns, contexts, conditions, strategies and consequences. Open coding enabled the researcher to draw a thread map and identify potential strings.

Axial coding used categorised messages from an open coding process to search for themes or phenomenon in a thread by focusing on the strings. The researcher re-read the string in a thread as one unit of analysis, focusing on the messages in a string. These messages were compared to identify patterns, sequences and relationships. Themes were defined by their conditions, context, strategies and consequences. This process was repeated for each string found in a thread. The researcher compared strings in a thread to review discussion flows and get the overall story of a thread. Analysis of the threads was repeated for each collected thread.

Data analysis includes data reduction and data representation. Raw data is presented in two forms: a thread map and a table. A thread map represents the summarised content of each message and arranges the messages according to topic similarities and arrival time. The map enables the researcher to track how a topic is progressing by comparing and contrasting each message in a string to earlier ones. The other method is using a table with three columns. The first column displays line numbers. The original transcript was copied and pasted into the second column, and the third column displays the researcher's notes on the message.

The researcher identified a service encounter element in a message, directed by Table 3.2. The researcher noted each member's contribution, the emerging themes in the string, and the discussion patterns. Emerging discussion patterns were noted in the thread map, along with communication tools used, such as pictures, videos and emoticons. The result of preliminary coding was recorded in a research database.

Element	Description	Examples in the study's context
Performance	The behaviours of the service provider (Yagil, 2008)	Descriptions of the hair stylist's actions in a service encounter
Audience	The behaviours of a customer in an encounter	Descriptions of the customer's action in a service encounter, mostly the social interaction
Props	Tools essential to deliver core service	Descriptions of tools and chemicals that are used to deliver service

Table 3. 2 Coding scheme: Service encounter elements

The result of a thread mapping process is illustrated in Figure 3.2 (Thread map example). Each message is represented in a box which displays the sender's screen name, the message summary and the number of participants. This number represents how many different members (identified by different screen names) take part in the discussion by sending messages to the thread. Messages are arranged chronologically

from left to right and are linked with arrows. A new topic starts a new string, and a thread might consist of more than one string. The example in Figure 3.2 shows that Hair Fierce’s message generated three topics. Three members started these topics (DaisyX, NERDYSTYLIST, and X3) by responding to the thread starter. Hair Fierce attended to all these comments by sending his answers as shown in the next boxes.

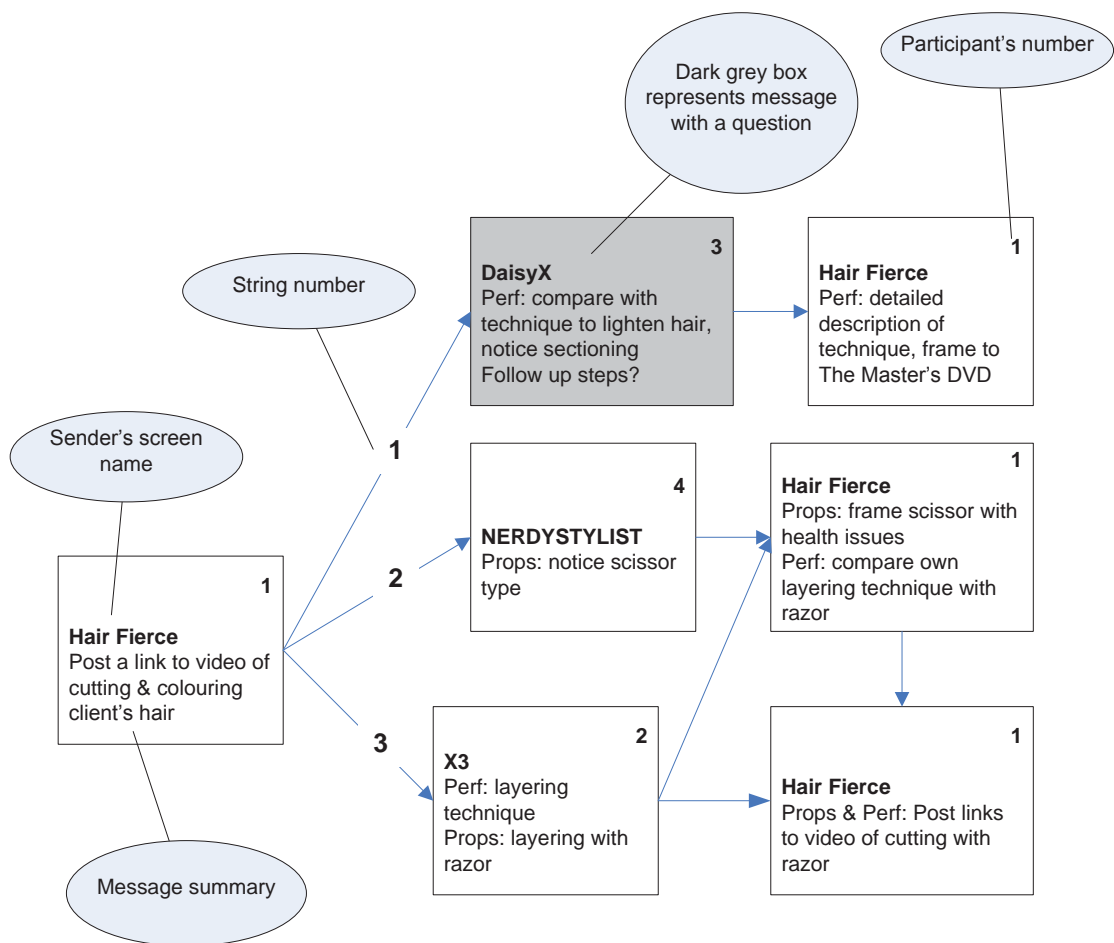


Figure 3.3 Thread map example

3.4.3.3 String Selection Protocol

Purposeful sampling was employed to select strings for the axial and selective coding processes. The purpose of this study is to explore knowledge and learning in the service

context. The researcher browsed the collected data from the lists to find strings that discussed issues relevant to the research questions. Collected strings covered two main topics: service encounters and general discussion about being hair stylists in society. Service encounters topics involved technical aspects such as techniques in cutting and colouring and social aspects such as handling the social interaction with customers during service encounters. General discussions in hair styling topics comprised hair styling careers, life styles and daily salon experiences. Strings that involved rich and complex discussion were selected for further analysis. Data collection and data analysis were conducted until saturation was reached. The researcher collected 31 strings for the first phase of data analysis which involved repeated interpretations of raw data.

3.4.4 Phase One: Data Analysis

The researcher employed a top-down approach in which theoretical frameworks were specified prior to data collection and were put to use in data analysis (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The approach provided frames that enabled the researcher to have an analytic focus in examining knowledge and learning in an online community of practice. These frameworks were represented in prescribed codes which were developed from existing relevant literature. These codes functioned as the basic categories to determine themes and stimulate questions that directed the researcher for the next data collection. Thus, the top-down approach guided the researcher to explore data in order to create an explanation of a phenomenon in an online community of frontline service personnel.

A grounded theory framework is recommended for analysing discussions in online communities (Kozinets, 2010). The framework was applied through open coding and

axial coding strategies in analysing a thread (see Section 3.4.3.2). Selective coding was performed for the collected strings. These strings were collected from different threads that represented various time frames and posters. The researcher analysed the major categories found in these strings in order to isolate, check and refine understanding of the patterns, processes, commonalities and differences across data. The researcher adapted thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gibson & Brown, 2009) to determine themes appearing in a thread. Repeated patterns were identified as a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following sections describe detailed data analysis protocols. The three following sections present data analysis protocols, focusing on the three research questions that guided the first phase of this study: reasons to participate in the community (Section 3.4.4.1), knowledge shared in the community (Section 3.4.4.2), and how individuals share knowledge in an online community (Section 3.4.4.3).

3.4.4.1 Reasons to Participate in an Online Community of Frontline Service Personnel

Online community membership is voluntary, thus individuals participate in an online community because they are interested in its content (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). For the purpose of this study, participation in an online community is defined as posting or viewing messages in the bulletin board (Koh & Kim, 2004; Ridings & Gefen, 2004). The number of views shows how many times the thread is accessed, indicating its usefulness. For that reason, the researcher collected the most viewed threads to investigate the community members' reasons to participate in the Forum.

Data were collected from threads which were included in the most viewed lists for each selected sub forum, comprising (1) lists that represented the most viewed threads since 2005 and (2) lists that represented the most viewed threads during the previous year (August 2010–2011). These lists were generated from three selected sub forums, and each sub forum was represented by two lists. A maximum number of 30 threads were collected for each list, resulting in 180 threads. Table 3.3 directed the researcher to identify reasons to participate in an online community.

Category	Description	Keyword Examples
Exchange Information	Obtain and transfer information about a topic, educate about a topic, learn new things.	Get new ideas Learn about new things Find out about new strategies/techniques Learn about new technologies/tools Share knowledge/information Share successes/failures with others
Social Support	Obtain and give emotional support such as affection, approval.	Can easily let out emotions because others will understand Talk out my problems to people with similar situations Support others going through a rough time Let others know that I have gone through it too
Friendship	To make friends, feeling of being a member of a group	“Hang out” with enjoyable people Talk with people with similar interests and values (not work related) Socialise Find others like me

Table 3.3 Coding scheme: Reasons to participate in online communities

The researcher analysed the data by carefully reading a thread as one unit of analysis. Each thread was treated as one large text block and the researcher read it multiple times to identify a dominant topic in the discussion. Codes were assigned by identifying keywords and topic indicators that appeared frequently in a thread. More than one discussion topic might emerge in a thread, and this shift was noted for further analysis. For example, a member started a thread by posting a video of his cutting technique, which was coded as “knowledge exchange”. A new topic appeared when another

member commented on the thread starter’s appearance in the video, followed with a few messages within the appearance topic. Despite the new topic, the main discussion topic was the cutting technique. Consequently, the thread was coded as a “knowledge exchange” thread. Content analysis was performed to determine reasons to participate in the Hair Pro Forum. The researcher coded 180 threads and counted the number of threads for each category.

Knowledge type	Description	Examples in the study’s context
Knowledge structure: Declarative	A set of facts associated with a category (Weitz et al., 1986)	Description of behaviours associated with a customer type, description of hair characteristics associated with a hair type, description of tools’ characteristics, description of a hair style, description of hair colour
Knowledge structure: Procedural	A sequence of actions or approaches that guide the frontline personnel to handle a situation (Weitz et al., 1986)	A sequence of actions to deliver hair cutting or colouring techniques, sequence of actions in consultation stage, sequence of actions to handle service failure
Knowledge content: Social	Knowledge about social interaction in a service encounter (Grönroos, 1984; Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003)	Interaction approach in a consultation stage, interaction approach during service delivery, interaction approach to handle service failures
Knowledge content: Technical	Knowledge that the service personnel needs to be able to deliver the core service offerings (Grönroos, 1984; Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003)	A sequence of actions to deliver a hair style, a sequence of actions to deliver a colouring technique, a sequence of actions to mix chemical formula for hair colour

Table 3. 4 Coding scheme: Knowledge about service encounters

3.4.4.2 Knowledge Shared in an Online Community of Frontline Service Personnel

The researcher assigned codes to each message to identify knowledge types in a message. Table 3.4 directed data analysis. Any communication tools, phrases and metaphors were recorded. Messages were compared to find similarities or differences across a string. Messages with more than one description of knowledge types were

noted and grouped. These messages were compared to identify any pattern in describing a knowledge type.

3.4.4.3 Sharing Knowledge in an Online Community of Frontline Service Personnel: An Online Community as a Back Region

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical metaphor was used as an interpretive lens to analyse knowledge sharing in an online community of frontline service personnel. Sharing knowledge in an online community is similar to Goffman’s (1959) back region concept, where frontline personnel share their service encounter experiences and get feedback from their colleagues.

Dramaturgical concepts	Definition	Meaning in the study’s context
Playtext	A sequence of actions or behaviour regarding the service process (Tansik & Smith, 1991)	The initial script that begins a topic. It can be shared at the beginning of a thread or a new topic in a thread that creates a new string. For example: a member’s story about social interaction in an encounter, a description of a hair styling technique.
Subtext	The complete performance (Pickering, 2005), the interpretation of the written script (Wallis & Shepherd, 2002)	Online community’s collective interpretation of the playtext as presented in community member replies to the playtext topic.
Role	A cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual’s behaviour in a given setting(Solomon et al., 1985)	Description of how one should behave in a hair styling encounter from frontline personnel perspective. It might cover both customer and hair stylist.

Table 3. 5 Coding scheme: Service script form and element

Discussion flow in a thread was investigated to gain understanding about how knowledge is shared at the group level. A thread may have more than one discussion topic with each topic represented in a string of messages. The researcher analysed each string to follow the development of ideas and members’ contributions to the discussion.

Table 3.5 directed the researcher to analyse an online community in a way similar to Goffman's (1959) concept of a back region, providing space for social actors to rehearse their performance as frontline service personnel. An initial problem or issue in a string was identified as the playtext. Discussions in an online community were similar to actors' interpretation of a playtext that resembled rehearsals in a drama production. Each message in a string was compared to the previous ones to observe the member's interpretation of the previous topics or issues. The researcher focused her attention on members' interpretation of the shared encounter, and how these interpretations revealed more aspects of service. Strings were sorted to identify any emerging pattern, processes, commonalities and differences. The researcher repeated the process for other strings to make a generalisation across threads.

3.4.5 Refined Research Questions

This section introduces findings from the first phase of the study that led to the refined research questions. Figure 3.4 displays a thematic map that represents themes found in the online community of hair stylists. Three major themes were found: friendship, social support and knowledge exchange. This study aims to explore knowledge and learning in the service context, and so the researcher focused on knowledge exchange and learning themes. The researcher's focus was displayed with an elaborate map of knowledge exchange themes.

The friendship theme covers threads and strings that show community members sharing life experiences, involving mainly non-work related stories. Friendship messages display friendly and often humorous tones. These messages were often illustrated with

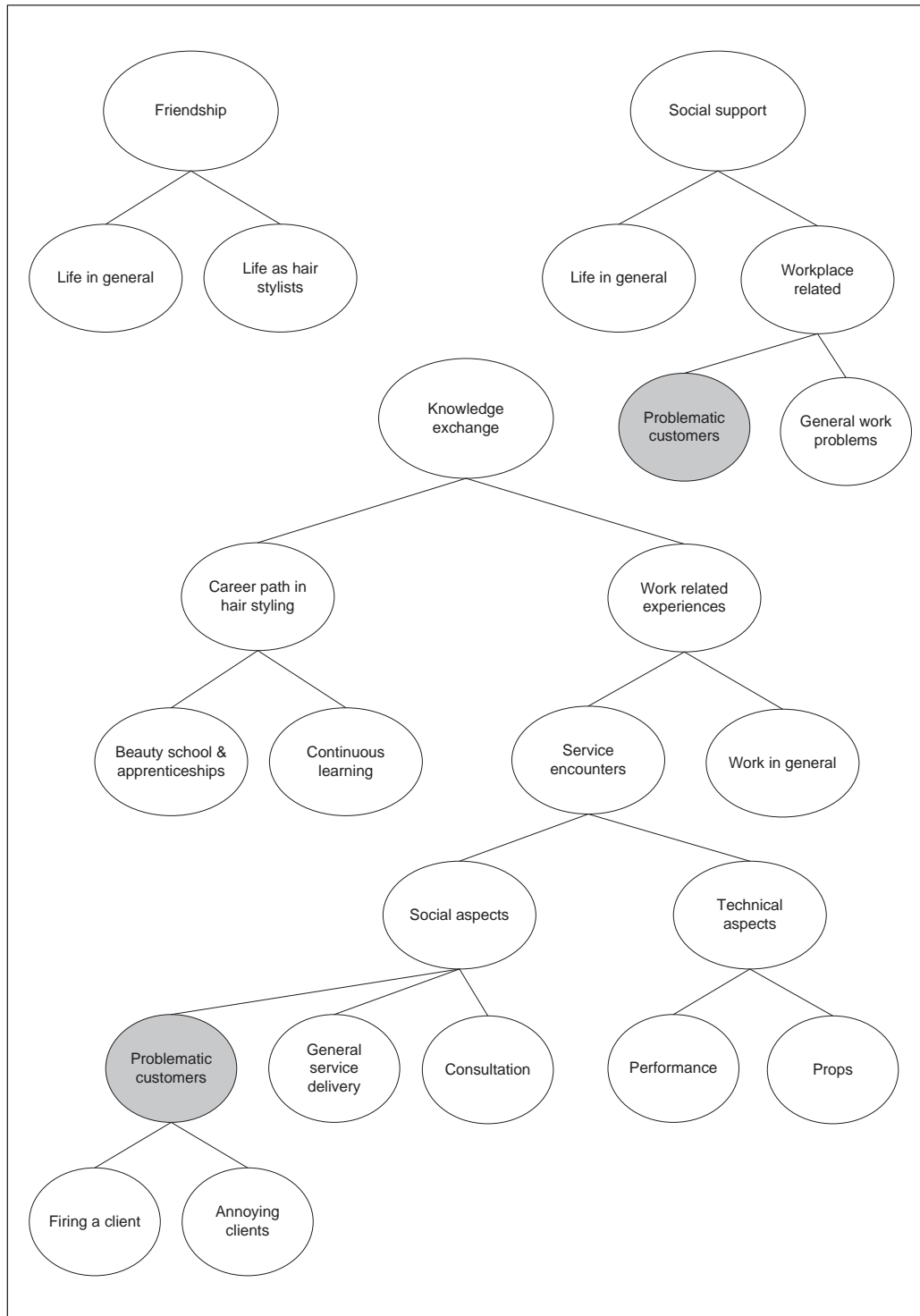


Figure 3.4 Thematic map

emoticons and pictures. This theme generally started with a member sharing her or his non-service encounter experiences. Community members reacted by submitting similar experiences. Two sub-categories were found: life in general and life as hair stylists. The

“life in general” theme displayed members’ sharing general daily experiences, such as the weather, TV shows or celebrity gossip. Hair styling identity as an inseparable part of an individual was the topic of discussion in “life as hair stylists”. Examples of this topic are handling work–life balance, social life as hair stylists, and dealing with society’s perception of hair stylists.

The social support theme covers threads and strings that show community members seeking and giving social support. This theme’s significant characteristic is its display of strong emotional tones such as frustration and annoyance. Cursing icons are sometimes used to express these feelings. This theme generally started with a member sharing events that led to these emotional feelings. Community members responded by sending their affection and approval, or sharing similar experiences, to show the member that they are not alone. This support enabled members to feel better. Two sub-categories emerged: dealing with life in general and dealing with workplace-related problems. Forum members shared personal problems in the community; for example, illness in the family. Workplace-related themes consisted of two sub-categories: sharing general work problems and customer-related problems. General work problem examples are problematic co-workers and dealing with the business side of hair styling. Seeking social support for experiences with problematic customers is presented in a grey-coloured circle because this topic often deviates into knowledge exchange topics.

Knowledge exchange themes cover threads and strings that show community member discussions on topics that directly influence service encounters: hair styling education and workplace-related problems. Messages in this theme are very similar to friendship themes, with friendly and humorous tones. Relevant images were often included to

illustrate hair styling techniques or results. Some messages included videos. Two distinct communication patterns were found in this theme. The first pattern is similar to the other two main themes: community members respond to the thread starter by sharing similar experiences. The other strategy involves a question–answer pattern, where discussion occurs as cycles of questions and answers. This pattern is generally found in technical aspect themes.

In the process of carrying out this first phase of the research, data analysis indicated that exchanging workplace knowledge was the main activity in an online community of hair stylists. On the other hand, messages with friendship and social support themes were also apparent as a part of the knowledge exchange process. Sharing knowledge about social aspects often started with a member seeking socio-emotional support from the community. Threads with friendship themes suggested that the Hair Pro Forum has an encouraging environment to share and learn about being a hair stylist. (These findings will be explained in chapter five). These results indicate that hair stylists have specific cultural and professional ways of exchanging knowledge, and led to a refined research question: What are the online community’s characteristics that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning?

Hair stylists are dependent on visual cues to determine a suitable service and to monitor a customer’s response to social interaction approaches. These cues are difficult to articulate in a textual form, which is the main communication strategy in online communities. Visual cues require rich media, which allows individuals to observe them, for example, through videos and pictures. Findings from the first phase of this study showed that although community members used mainly textual forms to share

knowledge, other tools (e.g., videos, pictures) were also employed to make meanings clear. These tools encouraged discussion in the Hair Pro Forum, which gradually revealed implicit elements of service. Therefore, the next research question is: How do online community members overcome limitations of online media to share and learn implicit elements of service encounter?

One theme kept appearing in the analysed data; concern about the professional identity of hair stylists. The theme was apparent in handling problematic customers, often discussed in friendship threads and also appeared as scattered messages within technical theme threads. Community members discussed how to present their profession to customers, to be a professional hair stylist or to respond to a cultural stereotype of the hair styling occupation. The theme suggested that learning about a service encounter is not only learning about the practice but also developing one's identity as a hair stylist. This led to a further research question: How do individuals develop practice and identity in an online community of frontline service personnel?

3.4.6 Phase Two: Data Collection and Analysis

The second phase of the research was directed by the refined research questions (see Section 3.4.5). The researcher conducted an additional literature review to focus on learning as sensemaking processes. The researcher re-read and re-interpreted raw data, focusing on knowledge sharing and friendship threads, threads with multi-media use (videos and images) and stories. A story can be found in a message as a part of a thread. Stories present community members' experiences in service encounters. Data collection and analysis protocols will be described in the following sections.

3.4.6.1 Stories' Selection Protocol

The first phase of this study directed the researcher to re-interpret the collected data through sensemaking concepts. The second unit of analysis is a story. For the purpose of this study, a story is defined as: the frontline personnel's description of a service encounter, consisting of an original state of affairs, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affairs, which is bound with a plot to make them meaningful (Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1998).

Stories are collected from the existing data threads. A thread contains a story in one of its messages, followed by the community's response and interpretation of the story. A story may also be followed with other similar stories.

The researcher conducted purposeful sampling, whereby the selection of stories focused on the workplace-related experiences of frontline personnel. The researcher adopted Weick's (1995) guide to identify a "noteworthy" story as a story that: (1) describes the actions as difficult, (2) describes a situation that cannot be handled in a routine manner, (3) describes an unexpected event that happens in an otherwise normal sequence of events, and (4) describes a situation as unusual in the narrator's experience. Another criterion is the story's richness, comprising a detailed description of actions, dialogues and emotions from the event. The researcher collected 29 stories from the existing raw data. Relevant discussions that followed these stories were also collected and analysed to investigate sensemaking processes. Some stories were very detailed, followed by rich discussions that became the source of data for multiple interpretations. These stories are presented as examples in chapters five to seven.

3.4.6.2 Sensemaking in an Online Community

The literature review argued that learning in an online community can be seen as a sensemaking process. The researcher adapted Enactment theory (Weick et al., 2005) to examine how collective sensemaking in a community enables individuals to make sense of service encounters in hair styling. Following Herrmann (2007), Enactment theory was used to analyse these communication processes in the Hair Pro Forum.

Individual sensemaking processes were observed by focusing on messages posted by an individual in a thread. The messages were chronologically compared and contrasted to follow the individual's sensemaking processes. The member's messages were also compared to the previous messages of discussion participants to trace the member's response to community members' discussion and to identify how the member used the community's feedback. Table 3.6 directed data analysis. A message may show more than one sensemaking process.

Sensemaking process	Definition	Meaning in the study's context
Enactment	Making an event exist by taking it out of the stream of events in an individual's environment, articulating the event into explicitly comprehended words or symbols	A member shares an event in the community
Selection	Categorising and labelling elements in the shared event, offering framework to interpret the event	The member offers her or his interpretation of the shared event
Community feedback	Community's comments on the shared events	The community members' interpretations of the shared event
Retention	Adopting framework	The member uses framework from previous messages in her or his conclusion

Table 3. 6 Sensemaking in online communities

Interpretive device	Definition	Examples in the study's context
Attribution of motive	An event is given motive by turning individuals into agents who seek to influence events and consciously or unconsciously achieve their purposes. Attribution of motive is important in determining whether the protagonists are cast as hero, victim, villain and so forth.	Hair stylist interprets a customer's misbehaviour as an attempt to get service for free.
Attribution of causal connections	A chronological sequence is turned into a causal chain where previous events cause subsequent ones.	Hair stylist describes a sequence of customer's behaviour that leads to service failure, suggesting previous actions caused the next one.
Attribution of responsibility	Giving credit to praiseworthy events and blame to bad ones. These are attributed to single agents to reduce the influence of chance and accident. This is also important in casting individuals as villain or hero.	Blaming problematic customer for a service failure.
Attribution of unity	Treating an entire class of people or objects as indistinguishable and substitutes for each other.	Classifying customers into a category based on their appearance, age group, etc.
Attribution of fixed qualities	Treating a class of people or objects as possessing natural or supernatural qualities (intelligence, cunning) which are immutable.	Associating a category of customer with a set of behaviours.
Attribution of emotion	Individuals act in emotional ways and derive specific emotions from the events.	Describing an emotional reaction to one's personal encounter experience.
Attribution of agency	Treating inanimate objects as capable of acting in a motivated way or being active, purposeful and conscious.	Associating tools with an active capability to achieve a result.
Attribution of providential significance	Treating events as if they were engineered by a superior benevolent or malevolent intelligence or fate.	Associating service failure with fate.

Table 3.7 Coding scheme: Interpretive devices

Weick (1995) suggests that stories guide sensemaking as they provide a frame to interpret cues. Stories are commonly used as analysis tools to observe sensemaking processes (e.g., Boyce, 1995; Brown et al., 2008; Humphreys, Ucbasaran, & Lockett, 2012; Sims et al., 2009). Stories provide sequencing where events are connected by subject matter and time. Gabriel (2003) suggests that stories are the result of a storyteller's "story-work", by attributing interpretive devices or "poetic tropes" in the sequence of events to uncover deeper meaning in them (Bartel & Garud, 2003; Gabriel, 2000). Table 3.7 presents the poetic tropes that guided data analysis. The researcher

analysed story types to identify how community members made sense of the emotional tone of the shared events. Table 3.8 directed the analysis.

Story type	Description	Examples in the study's context
Comic and jokes	Deserved misfortune to their characters. Emotional qualities encompass amusement and mirth but also disparagement.	Stories about customer's behaviour with a light emotional tone. Misfortune might befall customers or hair stylists.
Epic	Achievement or survival against the odds. Emotional qualities include admiration, approval, pride.	Stories which describe hair stylist's success in handling a difficult encounter situation, such as customer's attempt to get service without paying, service failure or stylist's success in mastering a difficult technique.
Tragic and traumas	Focus on undeserved misfortune and tend to generate horror and pity for the victim. The misfortunes are mainly caused by a villain. These stories involving deeper psychic injuries than gripes and are associated with feelings of anger, outrage and despair.	Stories describing hair stylists as victims in a service encounter.
Gripes	Less sorrowful than tragic stories and usually focus on personal injustices and injuries experienced. Some have jocular quality. They are generally associated with feelings of self-pity, disapproval, sadness and resentment.	Stories describing an unpleasant service encounter with a lighter emotional tone than tragic and traumas stories. Hair stylists perceive these encounters as annoying but do not feel as strongly as tragic and traumatic stories.

Table 3. 8 Coding scheme: Story types

3.5 ADDRESSING THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STANDARDS OF QUALITY

This section presents methods that were used throughout the study phases to ensure that qualitative research standards of quality were reached. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), Creswell (2007) suggests judging qualitative work on its trustworthiness; involving credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This study adopted Miles and Huberman's (1994) and Creswell's (2007) guidelines to address these issues.

Credibility deals with the truth value of the conclusion. To ensure credibility, this study presented context-rich descriptions that enable readers to follow the research processes and trace the researcher's logical processes, from research questions to conclusions and vice versa. Data analysis protocols were presented in the previous sections (Section 3.4.4 and Section 3.4.6), involving thematic analysis procedures that lead to the theory presented in the research findings. To ensure the credibility of this research, the researcher used two strategies: replication of data sources and member checking. Data source replication was performed by searching for similar patterns in threads from different time frames (e.g., popular threads at the beginning of the community's lifeline, and threads posted in the last year of data collection process in 2011), and in threads from different posters. Member checking was carried out by contacting the online Forum's moderator to present findings during the report writing stage.

Transferability deals with transferring research results to other contexts. This study ensured transferability was achieved by providing thick descriptions that allow readers to determine if the findings are transferable to other settings and thus enable them to make their own interpretation of the external reality presented in the research report. The researcher presented detailed data collection and analysis protocols in chapter three to give context to how raw data was interpreted into the findings presented in chapters five to seven. Prior to the presentation of these findings, the research context was given in chapter four to provide a detailed description of the research setting: the hair styling service and the online community of hair stylists selected in this study. These contexts are provided to enable readers to compare the research to other settings.

Dependability deals with consistency of the research process; that it is reasonably stable and can be repeated with the same results. To ensure dependability, two strategies were used in this study: case study protocols and peer review. The researcher developed data collection and analysis protocols and followed them throughout the study. These protocols were presented according to their relevant research questions to allow readers to follow the consistency between the research questions and the research design. A form of peer review was performed by the supervisors of this PhD research, who continuously gave feedback. The researcher also presented the first phase of the research at a peer-reviewed ANZAM 2011 conference and doctoral workshop (see Appendix 2 for publication).

Confirmability deals with the inquirer's objectivity of the findings that represent freedom from the researcher's biases. To ensure confirmability, the researcher presented her reflection of the research process in this chapter so readers could understand the researcher's past experiences and biases that shaped the research process and data interpretations. Another strategy was performed by presenting a sequence of data processing that led to a specific conclusion. The researcher presented how the data was collected, processed, transformed and displayed in the threads' analysis procedures (Figure 3.3) and thematic map (Figure 3.4). Tables were also used to display raw data and the researcher's notes to allow readers to follow data transformation processes that shaped the interpretation of the study.

3.6 ETHICS

The researcher followed Massey University's research ethics to ensure the study was conducted in a responsible and ethical manner. The university developed *The Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants* to protect all research participants, the researcher and institutions. The code covers major ethical principles to guide researchers to design research that abides by an evolving understanding of the rights and duties of human beings, which include an understanding of justice, truthfulness, confidentiality and respect for persons. The researcher followed the code in the research design and applied it to online settings. This research has been recorded on the "Low Risk Database" in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics committees. (See Appendix 4 for the letter of notification from the Massey University Human Ethics committees).

The research was set in an online community of frontline service personnel. The Internet and online communities are often good sources of data for researchers. However, as a relatively new site, the Internet presents new ethical issues which are still being debated. There are several ethical issues about examination of a bulletin board's content for research purposes. These issues are: informed consent from participants; avoiding harm to community members, and ethical concerns in presenting research results (Kozinets, 2010). The researcher's attempt to include these issues in the research design is presented below.

The researcher contacted the online community's moderator to seek permission to use community transcripts prior to analysing the data. Seeking informed consent from each member of a community is impractical in internet research settings, just as it is in

ethnographic study. Online discussion sites can be highly transient. Members who are active in the particular month may not visit the site for the next few months. Many participants may no longer be active, making it difficult to seek informed consent. Following Walther (2002), Kozinets (2010) suggests that archival documents and community transcripts are similar to historical and public documents, and so permission from individuals is not required. A decision not to seek informed consent from each community member was also made based on the topics discussed in the bulletin board. Kozinets (2010) argues that informed consent is required to avoid harm for members of vulnerable communities, such as stigmatised or marginalised groups. Examples of these groups are drug users and people with serious diseases or stigmatised social status, such as homosexuals and sex workers. The main discussion topics in the selected online communities for this study are workplace-related, and hair stylists are non-stigmatised. For that reason, informed consent was not sought from each member of the online community, although informed consent from Hair Pro Forum's founder and moderator was gained (see Appendix 3).

The main data in this study are publicly available, historical, community transcripts. Although there is no direct interaction or intervention with human participants, there is still potential harm through the publication of the research results. Kozinets (2010) suggests the researcher carefully weigh the public benefit of publishing results against potential harm to the subject. The researcher must be aware that community members might not expect that their posts to be read by people outside the community, and they might not expect their posts to be quoted in research publications. Pseudonyms do not guarantee anonymity because it is possible to input parts of a text into publicly available search engines, therefore linking the pseudonym created by the researcher to the

original post. Following Bruckman (2002), Kozinets (2010) suggests methods of concealment to protect community members' identity, in terms of using pseudonyms, not quoting posts verbatim and omitting material that could be harmful for participants. The researcher decided to change names but retain the full quotes. All names, including cities, organisations and brands, are pseudonyms. Messages that could be harmful for the community members were not collected as data. Community members discuss tips to solve workplace problems. These discussions often include specific technical procedures or coping tips, which can be taken out of context if not presented properly. For that reason, the researcher decided to retain the full quotes, as the potential harm was considered minimal compared to the public benefit.

3.7 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

This chapter described research methodology for the study. The rationale to select a qualitative case study approach was discussed, followed by a detailed description of the research design employed in the study. Because of the emergent nature of the research, some preliminary results have been briefly revised to show how design refinement occurred and to make the decision-making process transparent.

Findings and discussion will be presented in the next four chapters. To give context to the research findings, chapter four will present the research setting through a detailed description of the hair styling service and Hair Pro Forum. Chapter five focuses on the Forum as an online community of practice, aiming to answer two related research questions: reasons to participate in online CoP and the characteristics of the Forum that facilitate participation. Chapter six presents most of the findings from the first phase of

research. It also discusses knowledge shared in an online community of hair stylists and describes how knowledge is shared at the group level. It also presents answers to the refined research question: how community members adapt to computer-mediated communication to share implicit elements of service. Learning in the service context will be discussed in detail in chapter seven. This chapter extends the discussion on sharing knowledge in chapter six by describing how the community facilitates individual learning through guiding them to make sense of a service encounter experience. A detailed map of how each chapter relates to the research questions is given in chapter one (see page 14).

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH SETTING: AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF HAIR STYLISTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three presented the selection process leading to setting the single scene for the focus of this thesis; a case study of Hair Pro Forum. This online community of hair stylists was selected because their bulletin board presented rich information about customer–service provider interactions. Hair styling encounters provide a setting where interaction between customers and service providers are layered and complex. Hair stylists are required to perform complicated technical operations of service while handling the social dimensions as they work with customers in providing a service.

This chapter presents a detailed description of the Hair Pro Forum research setting. To understand the context of the study, this chapter begins with a literature review specifically focusing on hair styling and an illustration of typical hair stylist careers. The literature review is focused on the complex interactions of the client–hair stylist. Because hair stylists’ interactions have not been researched previously, I draw on literature that has examined hair stylists’ interactions more generally. After discussing hair stylists specifically, this literature review focuses on a description of the Hair Pro Forum as an online community of frontline service personnel. An overview will be presented involving the community’s history and an illustration of the bulletin board as the main communication mechanism of the online CoP. The Forum’s history,

community maintenance and interaction patterns will also be presented. Excerpts from discussions are taken from threads to provide a rich description of Hair Pro as an online community of professional hair stylists.

4.2 THE RESEARCH SETTING: HAIR STYLING SERVICE

Service management and marketing literature classifies the beauty salon service as involving task-interactive encounters (Mills & Margulies, 1980). Task-interactive encounters are service encounters where service providers perform mainly technical aspects of the job to accomplish the customer's needs. Customers of this service category are generally clear about the results they want from the service providers but they do not have the technical skills to do the operation themselves. The service providers do have these skills, and their job is to help customers achieve their goals. These goals are almost always delivered in one appointment. The hair styling duty is essentially completed at the end of the current encounter, enabling customers to change providers when they need or want another service. Consequently, each hair styling encounter determines the customer's decision to repurchase the service, heightening the significance of the social interaction aspects of the encounter.

Hair styling encounters are complex because they require a particular amount of face-to-face interaction, where hair stylists perform complicated technical aspects of service in front of customers. The following sections will explain hair styling encounters as multifaceted social interactions between service providers and their clients.

4.2.1 Training and Learning

A hair styling career typically starts with a formal education in a beauty school or cosmetology school where students learn basic theory and practice. Cosmetology school curricula generally cover basic techniques in cutting, colouring, perming and styling. Students must learn chemistry in the hair styling context: colouring and perming formulas; tool sanitation and sterilisation; chemical compositions of colouring, shampooing and other styling products and many other topics. Safety procedures are taught because hair styling often exposes both stylists and customers to potentially hazardous chemicals. Some cosmetology schools include basic management courses in their curriculum, such as salesmanship and professional attitude. Cosmetology students have to master theory before practising their skill on mannequins, and ultimately, the school's salon customers. After cosmetology school, newly graduated hairstylists are expected to develop their own skills by learning in the workplace.

Apprenticeship is an important part of hair styling learning. This stage enables recent graduates to apply the basic techniques to various customers' hair characteristics. There are generally two options for being an apprentice: work in an independent or high-end salon, or work in a chain salon, which can be likened to working in a fast-food chain restaurant. A chain salon is more similar to mass service where the aim is to give fast-service delivery. Newly graduated hair stylists are allowed to handle customers right after they start work. In countries that require a licence to practise hair styling, this option enables recent graduates to get more hours with customers and therefore less time to obtain their licence. Stylists deliver a relatively standard service to customers—there is very limited customisation—and hair stylists mainly practice their basic skills in cutting and colouring. Hair stylists are not expected to build a relationship with

customers because interaction time is limited. However, some stylists use this phase to build a “following”, or loyal clients who will follow them to other salons.

The other apprenticeship track is working in an independent or high-end salon. Customers are fewer, and the apprentice is required to customise the service, giving more attention to fulfilling customer requirements. The apprentice stylists usually have to spend some time observing the more experienced stylists before they are allowed to deliver any service to the customer. A smaller number of customers allows the apprentice to observe social interactions between the experienced stylists and their regular clients. They are expected to learn how to maintain a professional relationship with customers. The apprentices generally start with minor tasks, such as washing and blow drying. After some time, they will be allowed to cut and colour customers’ hair under close supervision of more experienced stylists. An apprenticeship in an independent salon means a longer time to get a licence; however, the recent graduate will learn more because they have to expand their basic skills by applying techniques to more varied and discerning customers.

Hair styling is a fast-changing industry where trends and innovations evolve all the time. Continuously learning new styles, tools and techniques are an inseparable part of a hair stylists’ life. The Internet, general media and hair styling magazines provide the newest trends in the beauty industry, and so hair stylists follow the latest fashion trends represented in magazines and other media. Hair stylists also attend classes offered by colour manufacturers or well-known hair stylists to improve their techniques. Industry conferences enable stylists to update their knowledge and widen their networks. Hair stylists who work with high-end franchised salons can also attend classes in the

organisation's training programmes. Learning is a continuous part of being a professional hair stylist.

Learning in hair styling is discussed in the context of workplace learning in a study by Lee et al. (2005). The study shows that hair stylists are trained to observe and learn, from cosmetology school to learning in the salons. Apprenticeship is a significant stage in their education, as the social aspects of hair styling are generally learned during this period. For learning the technical aspects, an apprenticeship enables recent graduates to apply the basic techniques they learn at school to various customers' hair. Learning about a technique depends on the customer's demand, the apprentice's willingness to ask questions and the mentor's ability to teach. On the other hand, apprentice stylists can also be a source of knowledge for the mentor because they have learned the newest techniques at school.

There are three main types of employment status for professional hair stylists: work in a salon, become a booth renter or open a home salon. Junior hair stylists generally apply for jobs, in independent or chain salons. The salon does the business side, such as promotion and client management. Hair stylists get the salon customers; some of the customers will become attached to the stylists and become their regular clients. Stylists aim to get loyal customers or a "following" whose custom stays with them even if the stylist chooses to work someplace else. They get their income from the salon, as a salary and/or commissions. Hair stylists can also be independent by becoming a booth renter. These stylists rent a work space in a salon, which in turn provides equipment and some basic services such as telephone lines. Booth renters are a form of self-employment because they manage their own business: client bookings, promotions and supplies of

chemicals and other hair styling tools. Another type of self-employment is running salons at home where the stylist is the sole worker. Unlike booth renters, these stylists own their salon equipment and work alone from their homes. Self-employed stylists usually work in salons before gaining experience and confidence to be on their own. Some successful hair stylists become salon owners, where they are both the manager and the stylist in their own salon. Highly successful hair stylists can become “celebrities”, develop huge followings and promote their own brands, products and service styles.

4.2.2 Hair Styling Encounters

Social sciences literature discusses hair stylist services in the context of identity. Hair stylists have a cultural image as an “occupation” requiring “manual skill”, compared to a “profession” such as a dentist or teacher (Shamir, 1980). Hair styling can be considered an occupation with relatively low occupational prestige. Key facets of occupational prestige are governed by income, required educational preparation, perceived importance of the job and the kinds of responsibilities discharged by people who do the job (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Volti, 2008). A hair stylist’s income is generally lower than their customers, unless they are celebrity hair stylists. Transforming a client’s appearance is regarded as lower in importance than for examples other professions, such as teachers and doctors. Educational preparation to be a hair stylist is often considered to be superficial: formal education can be completed in a short time (less than one year) and does not require special enrolment qualifications (anybody at any age can start at any time). Hair styling is also a feminised occupation, which is often associated with being of low status (Lindsay, 2004; Shamir, 1980).

These stereotypes affect social interaction in hair styling encounters as will be discussed below.

Hair stylists all deal with similar service encounters, regardless of their employment status. Stylists who work in salons may employ salon receptionists to deal with administrative aspects of the job (e.g., client bookings and receiving payments from clients). A customer can book an appointment or simply walk into the salon and ask for anybody who is available. Encounters usually begin with a consultation, where stylists offer services, discuss alternatives and inform customers about the course of delivery. Stylists typically perform all sequences of core service delivery in front of the customer. More experienced stylists usually leave minor jobs such as washing hair to their assistants. At the end of the encounter, customers are encouraged to go to the receptionist to pre-book their next appointment. There are three supporting aspects in hair styling encounters relevant to the occupational status of hair stylists: receptionists, assistants and pre-bookings. These aspects are discussed below.

Creating a beauty salon as a professional setting is an attempt to influence customers to behave according to the social expectations of client–professional interactions. Receptionists, assistants and pre-bookings have symbolic meanings for hair styling encounters. Receptionists and assistants are tied in to the historical and cultural contexts of professional settings. Professionals handle the core service, such as giving medical or legal advice, while receptionists and assistants deal with the peripheral aspects of the service. Previous studies show that these attributes (that is, having a receptionist and assistants to deal with peripheral aspects of the service) are an attempt by hair salons to create hair styling as a profession (Eayrs, 1993; Gimlin, 1996). Pre-

booking is a promise of future income, showing a trusting relationship between hair stylist and client (Eayrs, 1993). In the hair styling context, receptionists and assistants handle trivial jobs, while hair stylists are responsible for the more important hair styling tasks such as cutting and colouring.

A hair styling encounter typically consists of two main stages: consultation and service delivery. A stylist and her or his client first discuss a customer's initial request in a consultation, which typically involves the client's suitability for the "look" they want, the stylist's description of the delivery process and the expected result. Social skills are required to communicate the whole process so that customer and stylist have the same understanding of the service result. Various references are used, such as celebrity people's hair styles, pictures from magazines or pictures from in-store hair styles (a look book). A hair stylist must be able to "read" the customer's perception of beauty to be able to offer a style which is coherent with the client's perception of self-identity (Sheane, 2012). A hair stylist considers consultation as an important stage in an encounter. This initial consultation has been construed by researchers (e.g., Gimlin, 1996; Yeadon-Lee, Jewson, Felstead, Fuller, & Unwin, 2011) as a site of a power struggle between customers and hair stylists. Appearance is an important part of an individual's identity, therefore the client wants to gain control in defining it. On the other hand, hair stylists want to claim their status as hair experts. Some stylists even consider customers as models that represent their professional competence to the public. The consultation stage becomes a negotiation between hair stylist and customer about their identity as hair experts and hair novices (Gimlin, 1996). From the hair stylists' perspective, the consultation stage presents an opportunity to construct professional identities by showing their knowledge about style and technical skill. A display of hair

styling expertise and professionalism can be used to control customers' behaviour during service delivery (Yeadon-Lee et al., 2011).

Hair styling delivery is complex, as hair stylists perform multiple roles in front of the customer. Social skills are required to create a comfortable environment while stylists work in close proximity to their customers and invade their personal space. A study by Eayrs (1993) demonstrates that hair stylists have to play multiple roles as a customer's friend, risk-bearer and caretaker. As risk bearers, stylists must manage potential chemical hazards and hair styling tools near the customers' body. As caretakers, a salon environment is often described as a place to pamper oneself, as hair stylists take care of the clients. As friends, stylists often engage in pleasant conversations during the delivery to reduce the feeling of being strangers who invade the clients' personal space by touching their hair. Enacting a "friend" role is important in building loyal customers. However, it can also be emotionally exhausting as hair stylists continually engage in deep acting (Cohen, 2010; Hochschild, 1983). Understanding these multiple roles enables stylists to gain customers' trust, leading to customers allowing stylists to see their imperfections (Sheane, 2012).

Stylists perform their roles while monitoring customers' reaction to both the social interaction and the hair styling process. Customers often claim hair expertise relating to their appearance, undermine stylists' capabilities and participate actively in the delivery process. These actions place hair stylists in ambiguous situations where they have to please customers without losing control of the service delivery and their sense of identity. They have to appear in control of the encounter while pleasing the clients, gaining their trust and eventually developing a following. A recent study shows that

enacting professional identity is important to control a hair styling encounter (Yeadon-Lee et al., 2011). The study shows hair stylists present their professional achievements to their client in the consultation stage. When customers try to control the encounter, hair stylists remind them of these achievements to show that they are the expert in hair styling. The study indicates that from a hair stylist's perspective, professional identity is important to manage the service encounter. Enacting professional identity allows hair stylists to claim their status as hair experts and maintain control of the hair styling encounters.

4.3 HAIR PRO: AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PROFESSIONAL HAIR STYLISTS

Hair Pro is a website for professional hair stylists, providing industry-related information in the form of weblog articles and a discussion forum. The Forum's discussion board is a source of technical knowledge where members find detailed steps in cutting, colouring and styling. It is also a forum to exchange information about the latest innovations in "looks", tools and techniques. Almost all of Hair Pro's content is submitted by members, with a few posts from experienced guests. The website's main page displays recent blog entries and links to recent messages in the Forum's discussion board (Figure 4.1). A blog entry is an article, mainly in text form, and is often illustrated with pictures, links or video. A link is provided at the bottom of a blog entry to enable members to submit their comments about the post. The number of comments of the blog post is also displayed to indicate community members' response. Blog post comments are generally low, which signify the discussion forum as the main interaction space in the Forum. The main page also displays links to the website's various services, with one of them leading to Hair Pro's bulletin board or discussion forum.



Figure 4.1 Hair Pro Forum: Home screen

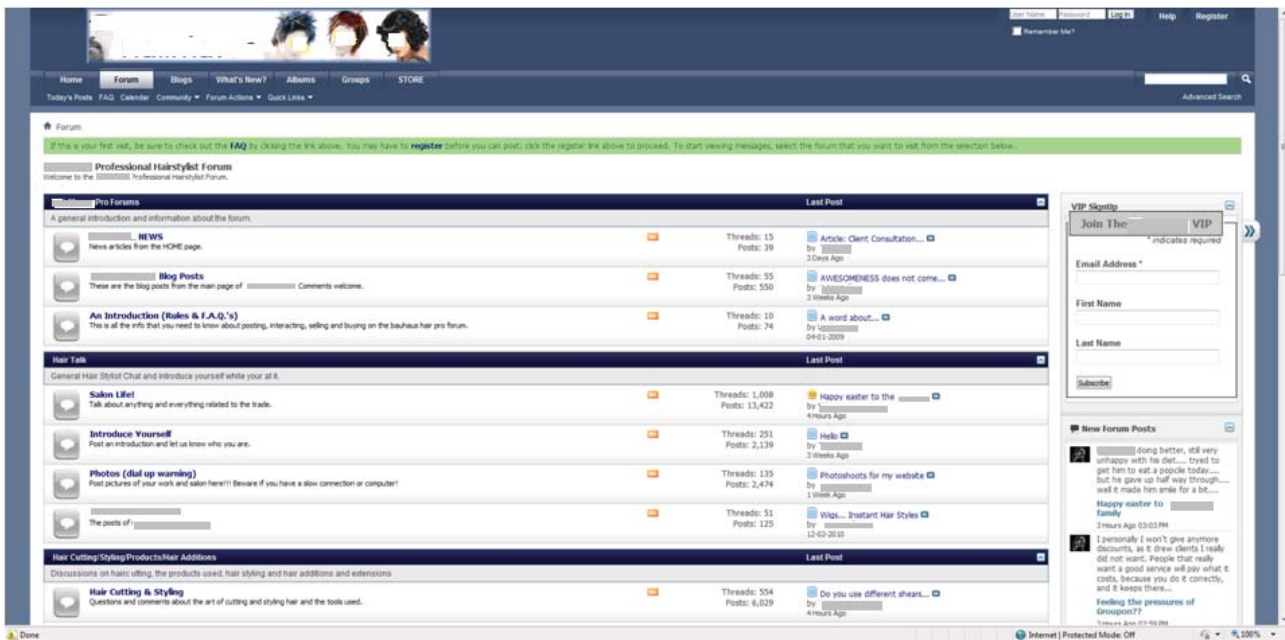


Figure 4.2 Hair Pro Forum: Bulletin board screen

The Hair Pro bulletin board provides space for members' direct interaction. It represents the community's active communication as shown in the number of posted messages: 40,408 since 2005 (data collected on August, 2011). Various subjects are classified and placed in the sub forums which cover work-related topics; hair styling education, hair styling trade and other topics about life in general (Figure 4.2). Each sub forum link has its own description, allowing members to navigate easily to find what they are looking for, or to start a thread if they do not find it. Members are encouraged to place their posts according to topics they consider relevant. The summary of website statistics and content is presented in Table 4.1.

Forum	Hair Pro
Statistics	Founded: 2005 Threads: 3,494 Posts: 40,408 Members: 2,502 Active Members: 179
Employment status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students in training (their customers are customers of their beauty school) - Hair stylists who work for a salon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Senior stylist: colour, cut, style + Junior stylist: shampoo, blow dries, simple styling + Apprentice/assistant: administrative responsibilities - Independent hairstylist (rent space in a salon) - Hairstylist/salon owner - Salon owner (rent space for independent hairstylists)
Topics	<p>Hair Talk Sub forums including salon life (daily experiences with customers and co-workers), introduce yourself, photos</p> <p>Mechanical Hair: Cutting, Styling & Additions Topics about technical cutting and styling skills Sub forums: Hair Cut & Styling; Professional Hair Product; Hair Cut & Styling Tools; Hair Extensions</p> <p>Chemical Hair: Colour, Perms, Curls & Thermal Straighteners Topics about technical skills involving chemicals Sub forums: Hair Colour General; Hair Colour Specific; Perms & Curls; Thermal & Straight</p>

Table 4. 1 Research site description

The bulletin board or discussion forum is the central activity in the Hair Pro community, where members find information they need or send messages to ask others to help them. Each sub forum main page displays a list of thread titles which can be retrieved by clicking the texts (Figure 4.3). The list also displays how many times a thread has been viewed and how many replies are in the thread. Messages in a thread are shown chronologically, the thread starter at the top followed by replies.

The sender's profile is presented as a header in each message (Figure 4.4). The profile displays information about the member's joining date, location and age. It also shows how many times the member submits messages and blog entries to the Forum. Another feature in the header is the rep power. Rep power stands for reputation power—the number of votes given by community members, indicating response to the post's quality. Hair Pro Forum uses little green boxes to indicate a member's rep power. More boxes mean more votes, therefore suggesting the sender's post quality. An avatar (graphical representation of the member) is also displayed on the message header. Members use various characters to represent themselves in the Forum, and some members use photos of themselves. Figure 4.4 also shows that pictures are often used to illustrate messages. These messages often have animated images (animated GIFs image); for example, the cars in Figure 4.4 crash into each other and the yellow smiley-face is laughing and rolling on the floor.

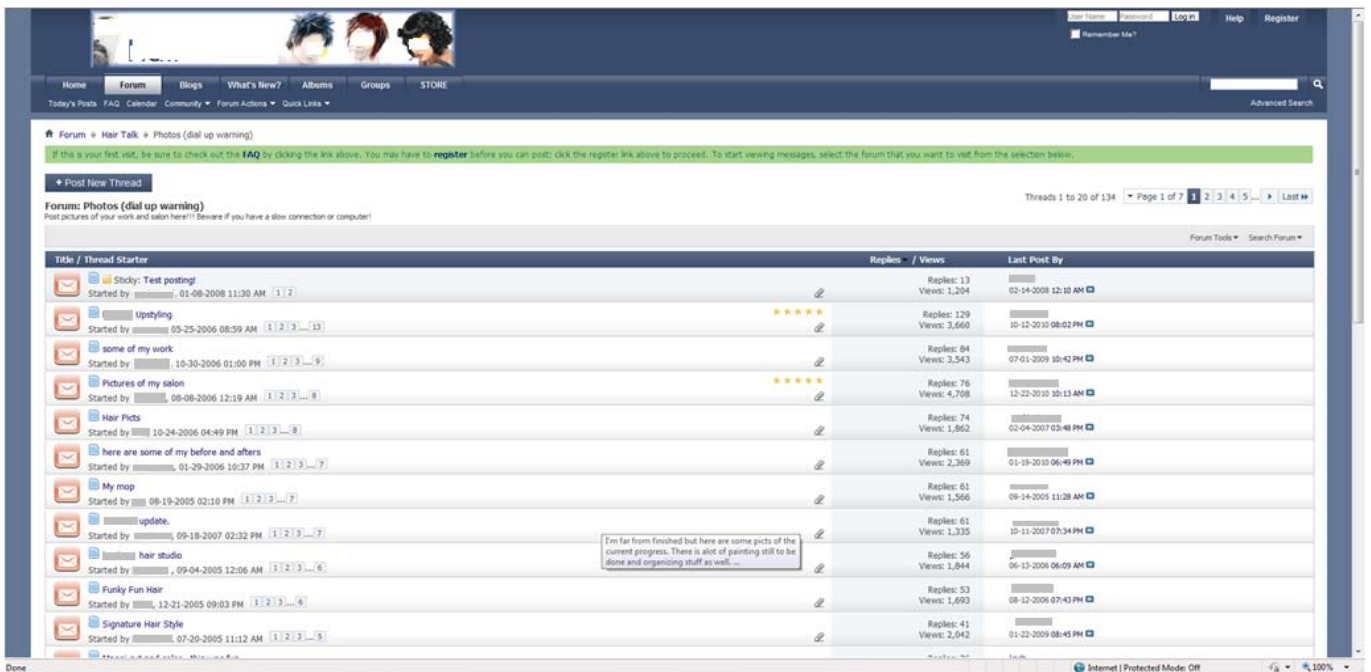


Figure 4.3 Hair Pro Forum bulletin board: Thread list display



Figure 4.4 Hair Pro Forum bulletin board: Message display

A member's profile is publicly accessible by clicking the name in the header which leads to personal pages. Members are known by their screen names, which they created specifically for the community. Some create new identities; for example, The Master, stylecontent. Some members use their own names, such as DaisyX or jenniferB. Screen names and avatars are used to represent individuals' identities in the Forum. Members' profile pages consist of customised information, allowing members to choose the information they want to display. Most members present basic information, such as

biography, location, interests and employment status. In the contact section, they can display links to websites, emails or other contact tools, such as Skype or Yahoo messenger. Members can also upload pictures in the picture page. Some members upload pictures of their work, such as colouring or styling. Some members present their professional identities by posting their work's website or personal websites, such as blog, facebook or MySpace pages.

Although discussion is publicly available for anyone, membership is restricted to individuals in the hair styling industry. Individuals have to show proof that they are a professional hair stylist or a cosmetology school student. The Master, the site owner, established this rule to stop salespeople using the Forum to sell products and customers using it to get a free consultation. Most of the members are not active, as shown in the board's statistics: only 179 out of 2,502 members are shown as active at the time of data collection. Active members tend to participate for a long period of time, as shown in their posts across the Forum's lifeline. Members mostly reside in North America (USA and Canada) with some active members in Australia. Some of these members meet offline through professional hair stylist conferences in the USA. Members' working experience is varied, ranging from beauty school students to hair stylists with more than 20 years of experience.

Posting and reading messages are the main interactions on Hair Pro's bulletin board. Most members are passive participants who take part by reading messages, as indicated by the number of views of the thread. An active participation is indicated by a message post, whether starting a new thread or posting a reply. A thread is typically started by posting a new subject, which ranges from asking for advice for work-related problems

to sharing work-related experiences, or even personal experiences. Replies are promptly posted, sometimes within hours. Long and detailed messages are common, both in the thread starters and posted replies. Members' replies contain the sharing of similar experiences, asking questions to clarify context or posting a one-line message. Different perspectives are discussed in a civil manner, sometimes disagreement is only hinted at. *Flaming*, or posting a personal attack towards a certain member, happens rarely in the Forum. In one incident, a heated argument is found in one of the long threads. The Master quickly uses his moderator authority to disable anyone posting any further message to the thread. Experienced members are willing to explain even the most basic question from inexperienced stylists. (These questions are usually from cosmetology school students).

The following section presents Hair Pro's history, interaction pattern and community maintenance as a background to the community's culture. Thread excerpts will be quoted to illustrate the community's history, maintenance and interaction. All messages are written verbatim, with misspellings and punctuations.

4.3.1 History

The Hair Pro discussion forum was established in 2005. The Master founded the website as an alternative to an established online bulletin board, BeautyForum. He invited some members from the previous forum to join his board. Most of the founding members knew each other from the previous forum and were not satisfied with the community, as illustrated in these messages from three different threads:

- Thread 1:
1 "Ok I'm Venting!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I just went to visit BeautyForum for the fist time in

2 *at least a week an it is the same OLD s@#Tas before, ... Everytime I go over*
3 *there is nothing but fights and whinning.I think BeautyForum has gotten all the*
4 *has been stylist there that just whant to be Jonny and not the next up and*
5 *comming great stylists. ... Thank god for this forum!!!! Thank you The Master,*
6 *fixedhair, and others that have helped to put this together!!!”(Lady Lacey, 09-23-*
7 *2005)*

Thread 2:

8 *“I found this site through the hairmaster web site and heard of BeautyForum*
9 *through this site so if I found it that way so how many others found out about all*
10 *these sites the same way.. I saw all of the posters here on both of those web sites*
11 *and from all the past topics on both of those sites it seems like some of the topics*
12 *on the other sites got into heated debates on issues that were from people from all*
13 *different parts of the country that learned differently and had different ideas on*
14 *how to handle things But the one thing this site has is respect and that is*
15 *because the founder of this site made it clear on how he wanted to run it with*
16 *respect for each other and to not get into debates that get out of hand.. But the*
17 *main thing he seemed to want was to learn from each other and make it as a*
18 *place for us to come to talk about everything we all deal with and get help.. And*
19 *now you have to register to become a member here is the icing on the cake that*
20 *will keep our discussions here only with the professionals, yea 😊.. I am hooked*
21 *on this site and have found a family of hairstylists that I can trust for true advice*
22 *and encouragement and not feel talked down too.. So I do applaud The Master*
23 *for this site because he obviously saw what was out there and knew we needed*
24 *some help as hairstylists to go to for comfort and guidance and most of all to*
25 *relate with one another.. God bless the The Master!!! 😊” (HarrietX, 10-29-2005,*
emoticon included)

Thread 3:

26 *“I've been reading quietly for the last part of the year, this is a great site and your*
27 *are all right about BeautyForum they do have a lot of nonsense bickering on it.*
28 *Once in a while you'll catch some informative info. I'm a little late to the show so*
29 *I'm just gonna dive in.”(flow, 12-13-2006)*

These messages show members prefer the Hair Pro discussion forum because it has a better environment for exchanging workplace knowledge than the “*fights and whinning*” (Lady Lacey, line 3) and “*nonsense bickering*” (flow, line 27–28) in BeautyForum. In the second example (lines 8–25), HarrietX compared the Hair Pro Forum with another online hair styling forum and concludes that Hair Pro’s clear vision and leadership play an important role in maintaining the Forum’s learning environment (lines 8–11). HarrietX’s message illustrates that the Forum’s friendly environment affects members’ participation. She contributes the encouraging environment to the site

owner's leadership (lines 15–18) and the community members' supportive behaviour (lines 21–22).

HarrietX's (lines 8–25) and Flow's messages (lines 26–29) present examples of typical members' participation. These members used to be passive members who got information without contributing to the Forum. During their passive phase, they learnt the community's interaction rules and environment. These posts demonstrate that the community provides a friendly environment, allowing passive members to feel safe to express their opinions and contribute to discussion without being attacked by others.

Threads and topics expanded with the growing membership. Messages in the archives suggest that the bulletin board started with one forum where topics were not specifically separated. Sub forums with specific topics were created later so members could find it easier to get the information they needed. The Master appointed several experienced members to be a moderator in each sub forum. "Hair Fierce" oversees technical aspects of cutting and "gennaro", an expert in colouring, monitors the colouring sub forum. These members became the core community members and monitor discussion. New features, such as chat rooms and blogs, were added later. However, most activities remain in the discussion forum.

4.3.2 Interaction Pattern and Community Maintenance

Growing membership presents benefits and problems for the Hair Pro community. Members have different backgrounds and experiences, which are beneficial as a source of knowledge. Various knowledge backgrounds allow the bulletin board to pool

members' knowledge and offer many approaches to solve hair styling problems. (This topic will be discussed in detail in chapter five). On the other hand, heterogeneity is a source of disagreement due to members' different backgrounds. Hair Pro Forum handled this problem before it disturbed the Forum's environment. The following example is taken from the earliest threads in the Forum. The thread starts with a member showing her negative opinion about a chain salon, describing it as low quality hair styling which threatens independent salons. The following excerpts show a part of the discussion:

1 *"In our area, they are just looking for warm bodies. Most that are at these places*
2 *could never make it in a private salon."* (Lady Lacey, 09-20-2005)

3 *"wow legalized slave labor..... maybe they could change the name from*
4 *SmartHair to SlaveTradeSecrets.....:X"* (X3, 09-21-2005)

5 *"yup and as long as minimum wage is \$5.35 an hour, they will get away with it.*
6 *Just like Walmart, KMart, fast food, lube shops, etc...."* (HS, 09-21-2005)

7 *"I am a manager at a HAIR Corp., started as a stylist and worked my way up. I*
8 *love the company I work for, even if I am just a social security number to them. I*
9 *have seen a lot and experienced a lot. I make good money, especially in tips. I*
10 *guess everyone has different experiences, but mine has been positive for the last 9*
11 *years. ... Money is not always everything. I enjoy what I do and I love to see*
12 *people happy. With my bonuses(monthly) and yearly bonuses I will have a lot*
13 *of money saved. I just wanted to let you know of my GOOD feedback.*
14 *I am sorry if there are those who have been treated poorly. I do agree that it*
15 *seems like a monopoly, though. In the malls they own 3 salons. If we happen to*
16 *turn away a client, they really do not lose when the client leaves and goes to*
17 *another HAIR Corp. owned salon. Go figure.....lol"* (Scientificbeauty, 09-23-
2005)

18 *"I don't think that a corporate salon is a bad thing, it depends more on who*
19 *specifically is the manager you are working for or under that makes the biggest*
20 *impact on what the salon experience is like.*
21 *It takes all types to make the world go round"* (The Master, 09-23-2005)

22 *"Knowing people at Master Cuts and HAIR Corp. I have found that it is just*
23 *another place to work and that they have their super stars and the people who*
24 *come in and just exist. I think because they dominate we get scared and think that*
25 *all of them are not like us. But in fact they are very much like us, they just get*
26 *corporate checks while we get mom and pop checks."* (Hilarious Joe, 09-28-2005)

Lady Lacey's message represents members' support for the thread starter's opinion: people who work for chain salons have relatively lower skill than those who work in private salons (lines 1–2) and consequently are willing to work for low pay (lines 3–4). These members refer to services in chain salons as mass produced, associated with low price retail stores (“*Walmart and KMart, fastfood, lube shops,*” line 6). A member who works for a chain salon posts her differing opinion on her working conditions, indicating that although it is not ideal (line 8), it provides a good income (lines 12–13). She defends her work by suggesting that her customers are satisfied with her work (line 11–12). Scientificbeauty defends her status without using harsh words to attack these members, and even adds jokes at the end of her message (lol = laughing out loud, line 17). The Master, as the site owner, follows Scientificbeauty's message and shows a neutral stance towards these differences. He suggests that working in chain salons is not necessarily a bad thing (lines 18–20) and motivates others to be open (line 21). His example is followed by Hilarious Joe who makes it clear that different working status is not a threat (lines 24–26). These messages illustrate a common pattern of how the Forum handles different opinions. For readers, the messages demonstrate the Forum is open to varying perspectives. This approach is supported by the light emotional tone and politeness in the messages, giving examples of the community's interaction rules in expressing different opinions.

The Master, as the site owner, makes explicit his point of view to maintain an open environment in the Forum, as shown in a message he posts in the community rules sub forum:

- 1 *“I would just like to say that members should feel free to post their opinion here.*
- 2 *No one should ever be timid about posting what they feel or think.*
- 3 *...*
- 4 *Please, if you don't agree with what I'm saying, that is ok. I will never hold*

5 *anything against you for having a different opinion than mine and I want you*
6 *guys to be free to express yourselves. That interaction and expression is truly the*
7 *only thing that we have and can give each other. I welcome it.*
8 *But, if you do disagree with me, it just goes to prove that you have no idea what*
9 *your talking about.... Ha Ha..that was a joke!*“(The Master, 05-01-2006).

The Master was reflecting on his previous message, showing him disagreeing with another’s opinion. He quickly follows up with the above message to reassure the Forum that he supports an open but polite interaction. He posts these rules in a dedicated sub forum and encourages members to read them before joining the community. His statement describes his intention to welcome stylists from students to experts. He also warns members that textual messages are easily misunderstood. His warnings are given more emphasis later by Hair Fierce, who was recruited later as one of the moderators:

1 *“You know, we are very creative people. And the one thing that makes us so*
2 *creative, is our keen sensitivities. Most of the time, these sensitivities work in our*
3 *favour and we can sense what a client needs, or wants, or means, by the*
4 *observation of body language, tone, inflection, or just reading their "vibes".*
5 *Sometimes, however, these sensitivities work against us; when we can't see these*
6 *other signals, we might just make-up our own.*
7 *When we post and read posts in this forum, we are generally just writing/reading*
8 *text ... no tone, no inflection and we can't see facial expressions. Oh we have*
10 *smilies, but sometimes even they are not helpful in conveying the "emotion" of*
11 *our statements. Being visual creatures, "text-only" puts us at a disadvantage*
12 *sometimes.*
13 *Some suggestions (not rules):*
14 • *QUOTE what you are responding to. When you say "that sux" and you are*
15 *referring to a statement several posts above, it would be helpful to know What*
16 *Sux? (I might even agree with you ☺)*
17 • *In one of his posts, gennaro pointed out that there is a ten character minimum*
18 *in any post, methinks it's for a reason. We could use those characters to*
19 *explain our comments a little more fully.*
20 • *When you read a post take into consideration that the author probably didn't*
21 *pay any attention to anything I just said. So maybe if you read it a couple of*
22 *times (a break in between wouldn't hurt either) you might find it could be*
23 *taken a differnt way. Maybe even a nonconfrontational PM(Personal Message,*
24 *personal email exchange not posted on the forum) asking for a little more*
25 *clarification would work.”* (Hair Fierce, 06-06-2007, emoticon included)

Hair Fierce posts his message in the sub forum dedicated for community rules. He reminds readers of the stylists’ nature to be sensitive (lines 1–2) which often leads to misunderstanding in communication, especially in textual media where one cannot

observe non-verbal signs (lines 5–6). His message is clear and detailed, with examples (lines 14–16). The Masters’s and Hair Fierce’s messages show the core members’ attempt to maintain a friendly environment. The core members try to soften the tone in The Master’s use of humour with his last word “*Ha Ha..that was a joke!*” (line 9). A similar approach is shown in the second message as Hair Fierce uses a smile emoticon (line 16) and gives emphasis that it is merely a suggestion (line 13). These messages subtly establish interaction rules in the community without being overtly domineering.

Thread analysis demonstrates that the community maintains the friendly environment as shown in the lack of flaming where members personally attack others. The following excerpts present an example of the community’s behaviour towards a member with unpleasant behaviour. A cosmetology student starts a thread with his or her intention to move to another school because he or she found the current school was not suitable to his or her personality. The member asks for the community’s information about beauty schools’ teaching methods and learning environments. The discussed thread is the student’s second post on the same topic. Both of these threads generate replies containing members’ experience during beauty school years, and advice to get through this challenging period. The member’s second thread indicates he or she does not follow the community’s advice and stands by his or her opinion. The second thread illustrates that although some members support this member with advice, others show their negative feelings toward the member’s stubbornness:

- 1 *“Hasn’t even gone and hates Awesome School already..... Buy a clue! Or a*
- 2 *mirror then you can bask in the wonder that is you all day long.*
- 3 *People are about as interested in what you babbling about, as you are interested*
- 4 *in their opinions.”* (gennaro, 03-01-2010)

- 5 *“I’m starting to think y’all are getting punked.”* (magicalhair, 03-01-2010)

- 6 *“I thought that myself! LOL but it has made for interesting conversation hasn’t*
- 7 *it??? hahahaha.”* (stylecontent, 03-01-2010)

Gennaro's negative comment (lines 1–4) is toned down by magicalhair's suggestion that the member's unpleasant behaviour is an act ("*punked*", line 5). Although there is a possibility of being deceived, Stylecontent's message shows that there is a positive benefit in the discussion (line 6) and takes it lightly as she laughs (line7). Using jokes to tone down differing opinions is a common tool as shown in previous examples: The Master and Hair Fierce use it to establish rules, and Scientificbeauty uses it to defend her opinion. These examples demonstrate the community's ability to stay friendly despite differences and unpleasant behaviour. Hostility is toned down with jokes, allowing the environment to be nice without losing its frankness.

4.4 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

This chapter presented the research setting in two main parts. The first part described hair styling in general, from training to hair styling encounters. Literature in hair styling encounters is discussed with an emphasis on client–hair stylist interaction as social actors. General hair styling encounters are complex; whereby hair stylists perform complicated hair styling techniques while handling social interactions with customers. Research in hair styling encounters show that hair stylists' social roles are multifaceted. They have to deal with society's perception of hair styling as a low prestige occupation, which influences customers' expectations of the hair stylist's role. Knowledge in a hair styling context is gained mostly through learning in the workplace by observing others and gaining experience with various clients. Learning in a hair styling context involves expanding technical capabilities and having social interactions with different customers.

This chapter also introduced Hair Pro Forum as an online community of practice. The community represents hair stylists from different backgrounds, years of experience, working status and educational background. Despite this, the community has been able to maintain a friendly environment that facilitates knowledge sharing. The next chapter will present a detailed discussion of this topic as part of examining the reasons to participate in an online community of frontline personnel.

PARTICIPATION IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY: SHARING LIFE AS HAIR STYLISTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four introduced Hair Pro Forum as an online community of frontline service personnel. The online bulletin board facilitates sharing workplace experiences for hair stylists with different training backgrounds and work experiences. Despite this heterogeneity, the Forum manages to maintain a friendly environment that encourages members' participation. This chapter discusses the topic further by presenting findings and analysis from discussions in the Forum. Two research questions will be addressed in chapter five: (1) Why do frontline personnel participate in a professional online community?, and (2) What are the online community's characteristics that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning?

Literature reviewed in chapter two indicated that frontline service personnel participate in CoPs to share workplace experiences (e.g., Geiger & Turley, 2005; Lundberg & Mossberg, 2008; Sandiford & Seymour, 2007; Seymour & Sandiford, 2005) and to cope with emotional aspects of service work (Korczynski, 2003; Raz, 2007). These reasons are investigated with the first research question addressed in this chapter: Why do individuals participate in an online community of frontline service personnel? Answers to this question will be presented in two sections. Section 5.2 (Findings: Reasons to Participate in an Online Community of Hair Stylists) aims to give a general picture of

reasons to participate in the Forum. This section focuses on the general themes found in popular threads. A deeper examination of the discussion content will be presented in Section 5.3 (Findings: Sharing Life as Hair Stylists).

Section 5.4 will present an analysis of the findings, which include answers to the second research question in this chapter: What are the online community's characteristics that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning? This section also introduces Hair Pro Forum as the source of occupational identity development.

5.2 FINDINGS: REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF HAIR STYLISTS

The researcher collected the most popular threads to identify reasons to participate in the Hair Pro Forum. Content analysis was performed to determine themes found in the threads, directed by a prescribed coding scheme. Three main themes were identified in the bulletin board: knowledge exchange, social support and friendship. The knowledge exchange theme covers threads that show hair stylists exchanging information about service delivery in hair styling encounters. The social support theme presents threads with emotional tones, where members obtain and give emotional support, such as affection and approval. The friendship theme comprises messages where members show positive feelings to being a member of Hair Pro Forum, and generally involves non-service encounter related topics.

Figure 5.1. (Themes found in Hair Pro Forum) shows themes found in the Hair Pro discussion board as a percentage of total collected threads (180 threads were collected). The last column, All Sub Forums, summarises the percentage of the three highest

themes found in the threads: knowledge exchange constitutes the largest percentage (66.1% of all analysed threads from three sub forums), with lower figures for friendship and social support themes (20.3% and 13.6%, respectively). A closer look at the composition of themes in each sub forum shows a different percentage. Salon Life sub forum consists of various themes as shown in a relatively small percentage range (26.3% to 44.7%). Most threads in the Cutting and Styling sub forum are about knowledge exchange (77.5%), some are about friendship (17.5%), and a low percentage are on obtaining social support from the Forum (5%). Friendship themes are not found in Hair Colour General, which mostly consists of knowledge exchange (92.5%) and a small percentage of social support themes (7.5%). These findings indicate the main reason to participate in a discussion board is to exchange workplace knowledge. Other main motivations are to find friends and to get social support from the online community.

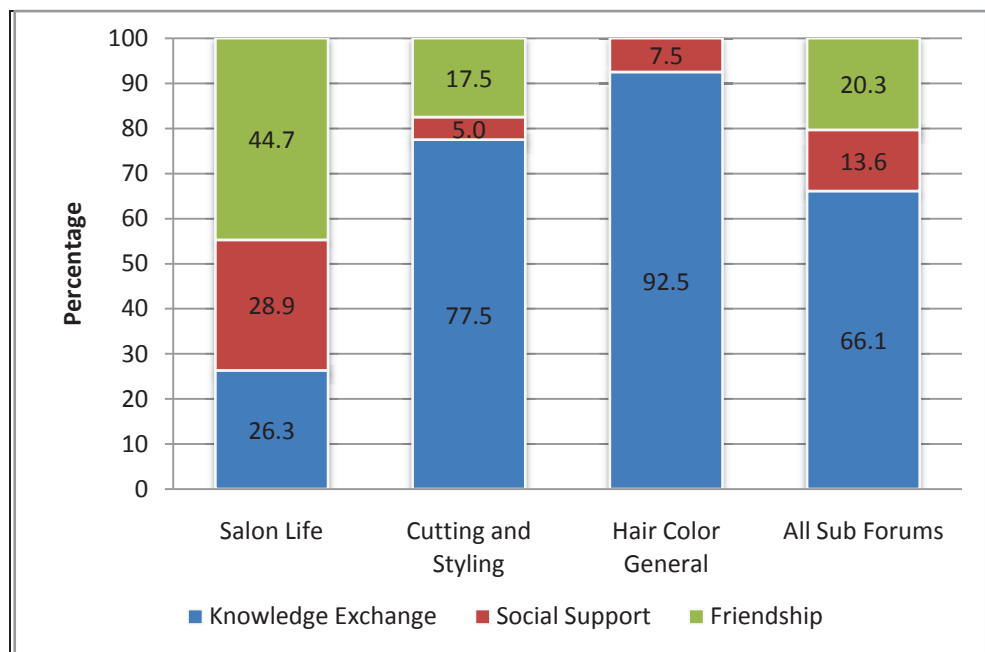


Figure 5.1 Themes found in Hair Pro Forum

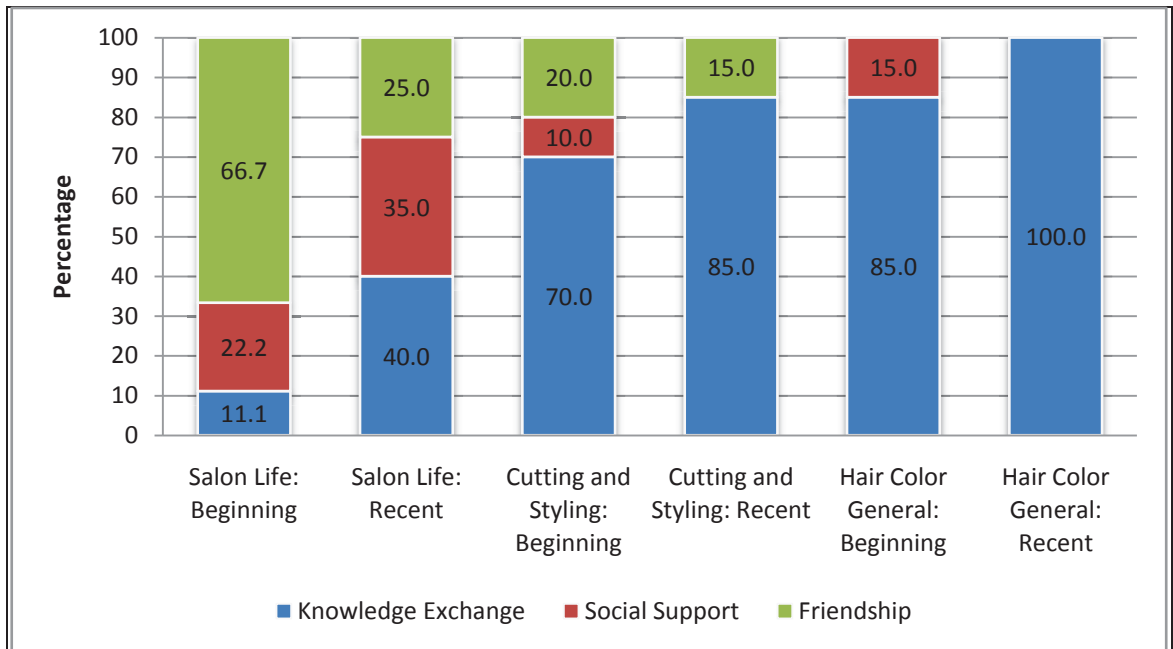


Figure 5.2 Themes found in Hair Pro Forum according to a time stamp

A thread's posting time was employed as sorting criteria to be able to cover wide selections of data. Threads were selected according to the time stamp of the last message, from the beginning (since 2005) and most recent threads (August 2010–August 2011). Figure 5.2 (Themes found in Hair Pro Forum according to a time stamp) shows a summary of themes found in threads within these criteria. Columns with 'Recent' labels show each sub forum's composition for the most recent threads, while the ones with 'Beginning' labels show most popular threads with a time stamp dated since 2005. Theme composition in the Salon Life sub forum is more fairly distributed in recent threads. It shows friendship themes are considerably lower (66.7% at the beginning to 25% in the most recent thread), with a higher percentage in recent threads for social support themes (from 22.2% to 35%) and knowledge exchange themes (11.1% to 40%). Social support themes were not found in recent Cutting and Styling threads, while all the recent threads in Hair Colour General were about workplace-related knowledge exchange. Compared to threads from the beginning for each relevant

sub forum, these diagrams show that, generally, recent threads were more focused on knowledge exchange themes, as shown with their slightly larger percentage. These findings are consistent across the three selected sub forums; a strong indication that the main motivation for members to participate in an online community of hair stylists is to exchange workplace knowledge.

5.2.1 Knowledge Exchange

Members obtain knowledge by starting a thread about workplace-related problems. They actively solicit knowledge by posting questions about a specific technique or what social interaction approach to use. Knowledge is exchanged when members share similar experiences or offer guidance to handle a situation. Some threads turn into a lengthy discussion when members notice different aspects of technique or have different interpretations of a story shared in the bulletin board. Detailed discussions about knowledge content and exchange are presented in chapters six and seven.

5.2.2 Friendship

The second largest percentage shows friendship themes in the discussion board. Friendship themes constitute messages that show companionship, socialising and networking among members. Unlike social support, the theme generally shows members' motivation to be together with people in similar situations, in order to be part of a group and spend time together online—or sometimes offline, such as at hair styling industry conferences. Some members share their personal life in the context of their identities as hair stylists. This theme was mostly found in the Salon Life sub forum

(44.74%); a small percentage appeared in the Cutting and Styling sub forum (17.5%) and none in the Hair Colour General sub forum.

Friendship themes in the Hair Cutting and Styling sub forum typically start with sharing personal information such as stories about birthdays or families. The theme represents the forum as a meeting space for members to spend time together and share stories about their life as hair stylists. Members frame their posts without any emotional distress; some even frame the stories in humorous tones as is shown with the often-used abbreviation lol (LOL, Laugh Out Loud). Message replies show members' appreciation of these themes, illustrated in the similar use of abbreviation: LMAO or Laughing My Ass Off. These examples indicate that members find friendship in the hairstylists' online forum. They spend time together in the Forum, socialise and feel that they are a part of the Hair Pro community. They participate in the Forum to find other people in a similar situation, people with similar perspectives towards their experiences as hair stylists.

5.2.3 Social Support

Social support threads generally deal with members sharing their workplace experiences to get socio-emotional aids. Most of these threads were found in the Salon Life sub forum (28.9% of the threads, Figure 5.1.), which is dedicated to topics related to daily life in a salon. This theme typically started with a member sharing her or his experience as a stylist, followed by messages containing supportive words or members sharing similar experiences. Most of these experiences were about unpleasant interactions with customers. Social support was also found in the Cutting and Styling sub forum (5%) and

Hair Colour General (7.5%). Members solicit support to gain more confidence in doing a technique, which often includes a description of their own technique. Others send their support by giving approval or sharing similar experiences. Giving social support is demonstrated by members' understanding of the situation, giving approval to others' actions and sympathising that the member has to go through unpleasant and often emotionally demanding experiences.

5.3 FINDINGS: SHARING LIFE AS HAIR STYLISTS

Analysis of threads in the Hair Pro Forum shows hair stylists' perspectives about work and life in general. Workplace experiences are a dominant theme, such as sharing stories about daily experiences in salons involving customers and colleagues. However, threads about life outside work are also welcomed, as can be seen from their popularity. Sharing personal life events often leads to members' perspectives about being hair stylists as a part of their identity as an individual. These themes allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of hair stylists' perspectives about service roles and dealing with society's perspectives of their occupation. Sharing life as hair stylists is described in these themes; continuous learning and apprenticeships, service encounters and life in general.

5.3.1 Continuous Learning and Apprenticeships

Continuous learning and apprenticeships are recurring themes found in the Hair Pro Forum, thus demonstrating the Forum as a source of knowledge for cosmetology school students or junior stylists. The Forum provides space for apprentice stylists to share

their experience and insecurities. Community members support them with encouraging words and share their personal career paths in hair styling. The following transcript excerpts were taken from a thread, and illustrate advice given by experienced stylists on how to get a good apprenticeship:

1 *“The kind of salon I would be looking for, if I were you, would be one that allows*
2 *me to continue my education, either through in-salon training or classes outside*
3 *the salon, Cosmetology school only educates in the basics; just enough to give*
4 *you the fundamentals of the industry, and the basic knowledge to pass your state*
5 *board examination.*

6 *When I was graduated from school, I got my first job through the schools'*
7 *placement office. I was lucky enough to get a job in a small private chain whose*
8 *flagship salon was headquartered on Newmarket street (Easton). I worked in one*
9 *of it's suburban salons, and the salon manager was a brilliant, Steveson trained*
10 *cutter. I learned more in my first month as his assistant, than I did in the whole 2*
11 *years of cosmetology school. 32 years later, I am still attending classes.” (Hair*
Fierce, 03-16-2010)

12 *“Find a school you can deal with, finish it to the best of your ability and then*
13 *mentor under someone you respect, or continue on with advanced training*
14 *somewhere. The learning really starts AFTER beauty school anyway.*

15 *Beauty school is an introductory for things to come. Learn the finger waves and*
16 *roller sets and don't worry about the little things. Of course I'm not the youngster*
17 *I was back then either, so maybe things have changed a lot. In fact I'm sure they*
18 *have. But one thing never changes, and that is the basic fundamentals that are*
19 *needed to make it in the job. So get basic school out of the way and then move on*
20 *to bigger and better things.” (stylecontent, 02-27-2010)*

21 *“I have a hairdresser friend that went through the same training that I did, but*
22 *not at the same time. This training came after beauty school. Anyway, to make a*
23 *long story short; Anastasia worked at FastCuts and because she was so well*
24 *trained, she built a following super fast. The pay was crap, but the tips were not*
25 *because she was very good at what she did and they knew it. People knew she*
26 *was different. She listened to their needs and worked hard. Her goal to build a*
27 *clientele there came to fruition in a matter of months. Eventually she moved on*
28 *and brought most of them with her.*

29 *When I first started out, I was told to expect 3 years. But if you hussle and pay*
30 *attention to details in your work, and dress for success.... then you will succeed.*
31 *Be confident. If you don't feel it, fake it. Teach your clients about products. Teach*
32 *them how to style their hair. They will walk away feeling like they got great*
33 *service. Be interested in them....because that visit they're paying for, is not for*
34 *just a cut but for pampering, therapy and feel good time and some people want to*
35 *be left alone when you do their hair, so learn to read body language and get good*
36 *at it. Some are huggers and some are not. When someone sits in your chair, find*
37 *something about them to compliment on. I like your earrings or cut perdicure or*
38 *nice car ect. Be interested not in just cutting their hair, but them as people. On*
39 *that note....careful not to expect a friendship even though with some clients it will*
40 *become that way, because in the end if they don't like your cutting or you get*
41 *lazy....they won't come back.*

42 *Go to fitness places and leave business cards in the ladies locker rooms. Find a*
43 *receptionist somewhere like a hotel and do their hair for free in exchange for*

44 *referrals. Facebook your friends for referrals. Get a face book page going with*
45 *pictures of your work. I know you can do this, and none of the above advice will*
46 *cost you anything but time and some extra effort. Go for it!!” (stylecontent, 05-*
20-2011)

These transcripts demonstrate that learning in a hair styling context is a continuous process. Although cosmetology schools provide basic formal education, hair styling skills must be refined and honed during apprenticeship. The first example shows Hair Fierce’s advice to a recently graduated student: find a good salon, learn from a good mentor and continue learning from any resource. The second example was taken from a long thread that involved a member complaining about her or his beauty school. Stylecontent points out that it is important to understand the fundamental knowledge in hair styling to be able to make it in the fast-changing industry (lines 18–19). The third example illustrates Stylecontent’s stories about apprenticeship and what one should learn to be a good stylist. This time she highlights the importance of gaining a following (lines 26–28), enacting professional behaviours (line 31), and she adds social interaction approaches for different client preferences (lines 31–39). She warns members that despite their efforts to maintain good relationships, stylists can easily lose their clients (lines 39–41). These examples represent the community’s opinion of the importance of a good apprenticeship and continuous learning in the hair styling industry. These messages show apprentices what to expect during this period of learning and draw attention to important things they should notice in hair styling encounters. Stories about apprenticeship experience allow cosmetology students to get a glimpse of a career path in hair styling. They also implicitly convey what constitutes a good service encounter. These messages demonstrate the community’s definition of professional hair stylists and the path to get there.

Professional hair stylists continue to improve their knowledge after their formal education in cosmetology school. The community motivates members to continue learning, as shown in these examples from three different threads:

Thread 1:

- 1 *“I’ve been in the business almost 2x as long as you, and I’m still learning.”*
(stylecontent, 08-25-2009)

Thread 2:

- 2 *“I think most of us strive to always be better and the beauty part is that this craft*
- 3 *of hair lets us always be learning something new.”* (alluregirl, 06-05-2008)

Thread 3:

- 4 *“You have to master one thing at a time, in the hair world they say your not really*
- 5 *grounded in the basics of color and cutting until your 5th year of doing it full time.*
- 6 *But hey we are all learning every day, even The Master learn new things each*
- 7 *day!”* (Lady Lacey, 11-23-2007)

These messages demonstrate the community’s perspective that being a professional hair stylist means continuing to learn to be better. They show that being an expert does not mean one has to stop learning, as shown in Lady Lacey’s referral to The Master (line 6) as an inspiration to keep learning.

Stylists learn technical knowledge from industry conferences, DVDs, magazines or attending classes held by known styling educators, as shown in the following example:

- 1 *“As for me Raymond, RD was my first big influence, then it was Michael*
- 2 *Rodriguez. Then it was Tom Garner. I am taking a course in November with*
- 3 *Michael, so he may move back into my number one. The thing I do is I only take*
- 4 *classes with people who are where I want to be. Where the rest of the group is*
- 5 *trying so hard to do the cut properly, I am watching their mannerisms and seeing*
- 6 *the intangibles that have helped them become who they are. They all have really*
- 7 *great things to offer if you look past the subject matter of the actual class. In*
- 8 *Tom’s class a few years ago, someone walked out because there was no colour*
- 9 *being taught. I just shook my head in disbelief. I was there just to listen to them*
- 10 *talk or to hear how they troubleshoot or to figure out what motivates them. I don’t*
- 11 *think I actually finished a single look on my block.”* (fixedhair, 09-17-2007)

Fixedhair, a successful stylist and salon owner, shares names of well-known hair stylists who influenced his career. He draws attention to their *“mannerisms and seeing the intangibles”* (line 5) to be able to learn their technique. The Master has different

approaches to learning about hair styling. As an educator and expert in hair cutting, he shares his systematic views of learning:

1 *“It is a common misconception that haircutting is just some freeform art and it*
2 *just simply is not.*
3 *Haircutting is more akin to architecture. Look no further than the most famous of*
4 *all haircutters, Vincent Smith. His greatest inspiration was the architectural*
5 *movement of Bauhaus. Look at the work of Michael Harrington from Vincent*
6 *Smith Corp. and it is some of the absolute best hair done today, both creatively*
7 *and technically. I guarantee you that his work is built upon the technical*
8 *foundations that you are struggling to learn. Michael Harrington and Smith*
9 *inspires or has technically been the foundations for almost every other hairstylist*
10 *and artistic group in existence today. Peter Marcus from Smith Corp., Travis*
11 *Skaarsgard from Smith Corp., Violet Macewan from Smith Corp., the list is full.*
12 *My point being, you can't get 'higher end' or 'avantgarde' than Smith Corp. and*
13 *the basis for everything they do is technical.*
14 *Someone who tells me the technique of haircutting is 'feeling' or 'visual' is just*
15 *telling me that they have no idea why they do what they do and because of that*
16 *their results are not repeatable, and because of this this will limit their success*
17 *behind the chair.*
18 *Yes, it's difficult. Yes, you have to learn right brain thinking in order to cut hair.”*
(The Master, 11-05-2009)

The Master challenges a common view that hair styling is a free form (line 1) which largely depends on instinct (line 14). He uses famous hair stylists to stress his opinion and suggests that one should be able to articulate the hair cutting process (line 14–17) to continuously deliver good results. In other words, a good hair stylist must have good technical skill and understand the reasons behind the techniques they perform.

5.3.2 Sharing Service Encounter Experiences

Threads in the Hair Pro Forum represent general workplace experiences found in hair styling encounters. Findings show that community members follow common hair styling encounters, consisting of consultation and core service delivery. This topic will be discussed in detail in chapter six.

Stories about unpleasant encounters are popular in the Hair Pro Forum. These threads show the community's support in helping members cope with emotional experiences involving customers' abusive and quirky behaviour. The following example was taken from a thread where a member actively seeks advice for future encounters with a problematic regular client (the thread will be discussed in detail in chapter six). Her message shows that she knew she should not have seen this client but was not sure how to do that without being unprofessional. Community members offer support by sending encouraging words:

“you are a professional, you know what you are doing, and please don't let a psycho client ruin your faith in yourself!” (tinkerbell, 07-27-2010, 09:22 AM)

“What you are going through is part of the hairdresser life. It will make you stronger and better! :)” (The Master, 07-27-2010, 12:13 AM)

“Your words of encouragement are music to my ears. ... Thanks for making me feel better about not calling her back.”(jenniferB, 07-27-2010, 01:20 PM)

These replies make the member feel better, ensuring her that her decision not to call her customer is supported by the community.

Co-workers can also be a source of unpleasant working experience. Results show that hair stylists often feel insecure about their capability in hair styling. The following example demonstrates the community as a source of both information and social support as a member shares insecurities about her colouring technique. Although she delivered a better result, she felt unconfident due to her co-workers' comments about her speed:

“is this way too slow, or am I too anal, or what? Im beginning to get a complex.”
(Whiterose, 03-05-2006)

Members support her by sending encouraging messages and tips to improve her skill, as presented in the example below:

1 *“i would say if you're work is quality and you're making a good living-is there*

- 2 *really a problem? if it bothers you, practice on timing, placement, techniques etc.*
- 3 *you may be able to achieve a similar effect with less foil, different pattern*
- 4 *placements and so on. the fact that your foils don't bleed is a good sign.” (X3, 03-05-2006)*

X3 ensures that quality is the priority (line 1), and speed can be gained by a lot of practising. She also suggests techniques to improve Whiterose’s colouring technique (lines 2–4) and shows indicators of good quality (line 4). The example illustrates a common pattern in the Forum where sharing technical knowledge is given along with social support.

Findings demonstrate that community members are aware of society’s image of their occupation, and discuss hair styling practice in the context of constructing professional identity. The following example shows the community’s interpretation of tipping. A member asks for the Forum’s opinion about a rule in which a tip is *not* given to a stylist who is also a salon owner:

- 1 *“I don't agree with this either...what people don't think of is what our expenses*
- 2 *are, and the fact that we do more than just make their hair beautiful, most of the*
- 3 *time we listen to all their problems, deal with trying to cut or color their hair*
- 4 *while they are answering their cell phones...a lot of stress in our jobs and we*
- 5 *deserve the tip for all the "extras" we provide.” (fashiongirl, 02-01-2010)*

- 6 *“... Tips are a bonus for me. I always say to my clients that the best tip is their*
- 7 *referrals. I work hard to dress professionally, to act professionally and to give*
- 8 *the best service I can. Each client gets 100% of my undivided attention. I draw*
- 9 *the line when I don't get the same respect from a client that that I have given to*
- 10 *them. I work hard to be honest, fair and generous with what I say and do. A tip is*
- 11 *a thank you. It comes in many forms outside of money. Just my 2 cents.”*
(stylecontent, 02-01-2010 08:26 PM)

- 12 *“Getting your pricing right is a primary step in having a successful business. If*
- 13 *you're relying on tips to make up the short fall of what you are charging to what*
- 14 *you should be charging you will never succeed.*
- 15 *A gratuity is just that, an expression of gratitude! It is not supposed to round out*
- 16 *your service charge. Work on the costings of running your business and reduce*
- 17 *your expenses and then charge like you will NEVER receive a tip again.*
- 18 *Then every tip you receive is a BONUS not something you come rely on.”*
(gennaro, 02-01-2010)

- 19 *“I remember a while back hearing that some stylists, I think in Colorado, wanted*
- 20 *to be taken seriously as professionals, and wanted tipping to stop. You don't tip*

21 *your dentist, and you go for a service. I do enjoy my tips, but like Gen says, I try*
22 *to charge enough so that I feel I am getting paid what I am worth and don't really*
23 *stress or care so much about the tip or lack of...I do love those added little*
24 *bonuses though, but I feel properly paid for my service by charging what I think*
25 *the service is worth.” (alluregirl, 02-07-2010)*

Fashiongirl illustrates the hair stylists’ commonly shared opinion that customers should tip stylists, regardless of their status. Her message represents stylists’ point of view that their roles are more than delivering hair cutting and colouring services. Hair stylists deserve a tip as extra payment because they not only style hair but also pamper customers (lines 1–5). This perspective is challenged by more experienced stylists: stylecontent, gennaro and alluregirl. Stylecontent suggests that being professional is giving a good service without expecting monetary reward (line 11). Gennaro put tipping into a business perspective by framing the problem with service pricing (lines 12–14). Alluregirl draws attention to tipping as a symbol of an occupation, comparing hair styling with the social perception of a profession like dentistry (line 20).

5.3.3 Life as Hair Stylists

Hair Pro Forum provides space to share stories about being hair stylists. Members share their experiences outside of the workplace and their opinion on life as hair stylists in general. They share personal stories, such as dealing with a family member’s illness or dealing with crimes in the neighbourhood. Long and popular threads discussed various topics which flow like a conversation. Members raise new topics in these threads, initiating a string of messages around the topic which ends when another topic is submitted. The following example represents members’ feelings about the conversational nature in the Forum:

1 *“LMAO, i love the natural progression of threads. We go from The Master being*
2 *overbooked, to Fixedhairs pimp status, to Lady Lacey 's disturbing post (lol) and*

3 *her birthday, till "Prebooking is a good idea, I do recommend it." Not an exact*
4 *quote, but it was a funny progression."*(Mallory, 01-15-2006)

5 *"I like that we are allowed to do so without fear of being ridiculed by our peers*
6 *or reprimanded by the moderators. Sure it's crucial to keep topics in the right*
7 *areas and the topic at hand alive but most conversation always progresses into*
8 *other areas and then back again."*(Agnes, 01-16-2006)

9 *"Yes Agnes, The Master had a dream. A dream that one day a member and a*
10 *moderators children could walk hand in hand up a hill together. Wait, sorry,*
11 *wrong person. But yes it is nice to have a message board, that one doesn't need a*
12 *couple shots before logging in to."*(Mallory, 01-16-2006)

The example is taken from a long and popular thread, consisting of 89 messages from various members. The Master, the site owner, starts the thread with a short message about his annoyance towards a late customer because it disrupts his schedule. He then shares an update post reporting that he is able to catch up. The thread deviates to various topics, as illustrated in Mallory's post. Mallory describes the progression and shows her positive feelings towards the casual nature of the conversation. Similar feeling was shown in the next post, by Agnes, who agrees that flexibility is the reason she actively participates in the community (lines 5–6), comparing the Forum with face-to-face conversations (lines 7–8). As in a face-to-face interaction, Mallory personally addresses Agnes in her reply (line 9) to support her opinion (lines 11–12). The thread progresses to a different topic, where members express their preference for sharing their working experience in the online community of hair stylists, as illustrated in these examples:

1 *"I don't think people realize who exhausting this field of work is! At the end of a*
2 *busy day; all I can do is slouch on the couch. Saturdays are always booked for*
3 *me and because I have a family to deal with at the end of the day, we rely on*
4 *leftovers. This girl won't cook. It's either take me out, warm it up or*
5 *starve!!!!:P"*(stylecontent, 03-05-2006)

6 *"People think I lead this interesting life outside of work and always want to know*
7 *what restaurants I've been to and what clubs are happening. It's embarrassing*
8 *because I honestly don't socialize outside of work at all. After giving yourself to*
9 *clients and co-workers all day, I literally don't speak to anyone unless I have to*
10 *on my time off."*(fixedhair, 03-05-2006)

11 *"LOL! you too? and my hubby always complains that I don't have any friends and*
12 *I never go anywhere...LOLOL!"*(HS, 03-05-2006)

- 13 *“Glad I'm not the only one also, I get home I don't want to vistor soicalizeat*
 14 *all.”(Lady Lacey, 03-06-2006)*
- 15 *“I need to have my fiancé read this post. When I come home he wants me to talk*
 16 *about my day and hang out with him and TALK. I talked all day!”(Alicia, 03-06-*
 2006)
- 17 *“So nice to see my wife and I aren't the only ones.”(Fixedhair, 03-06-2006)*
- 18 *“HS and Fixedhair, That is so funny. I feel like after a week like I have talking to*
 19 *my clients/friends at work I don't need to go out much on the weekend. My*
 20 *daughter (17) says "Why don't you ever go out with friends" HA. I am glad to*
 21 *hear I am not the only one.”(talentedfingers, 03-08-2006)*
- 22 *“After giving 150% to my clients I really don't want to talk for at least an hour*
 23 *when I get home. And rarely want to go out. I still love to catch up with friends,*
 24 *which I do every weekend but I do need some down time to catch my breath and*
 25 *recharge for the next week.”(gennaro, 03-10-2006)*

Stylecontent starts a new topic with her message that points out how people outside of the hair styling profession do not understand this life. Members share personal experiences; how they are so exhausted because they have to talk to clients as part of their job. A member, Alicia, stresses this point by intending to show the thread to her partner so that he can understand her point of view (lines 15–16). The example demonstrates that the Forum provides a virtual space to hang out and talk about small things in a hair stylist’s life. The feeling of being in a group of friends shows members being comfortable to share idiosyncratic stories as indicated in this recent thread:

- 1 *“Ok It may sound dumb but when I cut a lot of men hair I get hair all over. I even*
 2 *had a hair go under my finger nail. It hurt like the devil lol. Anyways can I get*
 3 *any infections or any germs that these people have? It grosses me out.*
 4 *Blah!”(sophiepriscilla, 01-16-2010)*
- 5 *“I got an infection from a hair getting lodged in the skin. And, yes, it hurt like the*
 6 *devil too, but it went away.*
 7 *I get headaches from ratchet-jawing clients, jabbering incessantly about*
 8 *something I have absolutely no interest in. Those don't go away as fast. (but,*
 9 *luckily, I'm losing my hearing as I get older)”(Hair Fierce, 01-16-2010)*
- 10 *“LOL Performer!!!*
 11 *I've gotten hair in my fingernail under the cuticle...infection and then a wonky*
 12 *nail till it grew out. I've also gotten hair in my toe from when I have bare feet and*
 13 *sandals.*
 14 *I'm not worried about getting "something" since I wash all clients' hair*

15 *firstly.*”(style4u, 01-16-2010)

Sophiepriscilla frames her story as “*sound dumb*” (line 1) to point out how trivial she thinks her topic is. However, she is comfortable enough in the Forum, without being afraid of members’ scolding her, to share what she considers an unimportant topic. Members share similar stories and laugh at each other’s jokes, as shown in the use of the abbreviation LOL. Sharing life as hair stylists in the online community resembles personal talk between friends in real life; for example:

“nice Fierce-you remind me of some actor on tv...can't figure out who yet.”(X3, 07-10-2007)

“Probably Jackson Knighthleyat an all you can eat buffet :P” (Hair Fierce, 07-10-2007)

This excerpt is part of a long thread where Hair Fierce posts a link to his video, demonstrating a cutting and colouring technique. X3 comments on Hair Fierce’s appearance, which reminded her of an actor. Hair Fierce replies to X3’s message and humorously refers to himself as a fat version of a famous American actor. This is reinforced by his use of “:P / :-p” emoticon (represents action: showing a humorous, joking tone). These examples show that the community provides space to gather as friends who happen to be in the same occupation.

Thread analysis shows that the Hair Pro Forum provides a space in which to handle society’s perception of hair styling. Community members are aware of the image of stylists in the general public, as shown in the following examples taken from two different threads:

1 *“...we as hairstylist need to have a little thicker skin. We know that the world*
2 *thinks of us as just a step above a prostitute in the skill level, we also know that*
3 *many think we have no brains and it doesn't take any skill to do what we do. It's a*
4 *card that is too easily played. We cannot continue to judge ourselves through the*
5 *eyes of Joe Public, because Joe doesn't give anybody respect because he doesn't*
6 *respect himself so he tried to bring everybody down.”* (The Master, 09-23-2005)

7 *“I used to feel like hairdressers were always stereotyped as women being*
8 *airheads and party animals and men were either gay or perverts.. I worked in*
9 *salons that seemed to have that reputation and was tired of not being recognized*
10 *as a professional. I got the airhead reputation when I was younger and liked to*
11 *party and was a bit airheadish, lol... But I only got that way because I didn't take*
12 *what I did seriously. I just made ends meet and wanted to have fun. But now that*
13 *I am older and have a child to support through the years since my daughter was*
14 *born I realized I had to make myself respectable and act like a professional. I*
15 *noticed how the industry changed through the years and not all of us are like we*
16 *once were portrayed.”* (HarrietX, 09-16-2005)

These messages show members are aware of and do not like the negative image of their job. The Master shares his opinion on the general public's perspective on hairstylists' lower social status (lines 1–2). He suggests that hair stylists have to respect themselves to be respected by other professions. HarrietX elaborates on the general public's perspective of the hair stylist profession (lines 7–8) and suggests that the way to counter the image is to “*act like a professional*” (line 14). A similar topic is found in a recent thread where members share personal stories about how they started their hair styling careers:

1 *“i was 19 when i decided to go to cosmo school. my dad was upset because he*
2 *didn't think i was living up to my potential, whatever. i told him i was passionate*
3 *about doing hair and making people happy, and that school was only 9 months*
4 *and relatively inexpensive. i won the argument when he realized i was serious*
5 *about going, and that it would be less money than traditional liberal arts college,*
6 *and i'd be working within the year. i don't know if other people took me seriously*
7 *or not, but i was driven and very into cutting hair in the 80's when i graduated. it*
8 *was a great time to be in the salon, lots of different looks coming out. i have*
9 *never regretted my decision to be a 'hairdresser'.”* (tinkerbelle, 04-28-2010)

10 *“I didnt start doing hair until about three yrs ago, (Im 30 now) ive always been*
11 *into hair and makeup and when i was way younger wanted to go to beauty school*
12 *but my family wasnt too supportive of that, i had a scholarship to university and*
13 *was potentially going to be the first to finish college, blah blahblah so i listened*
14 *and didnt go, but ended up pregnant and married not long after and stopped*
15 *going to college well into my second yr. a few yrs ago when my husbands job*
16 *moved us and i was able to stay home instead of work for the first time since we*
17 *had been married, i jumped at the chance to go to cosmetology school. i think it*
18 *was the best decision i made and i am thankful every day that i am finally able to*
19 *do what ive always wanted for a living. ...”* (harmony, 04-28-2010)

20 *“I got married in October and started school nov.I was 23. I had gone to college*
21 *and taken a business two year diploma before that. I have never regretted taking*
22 *cosmetology. I love it more today than ever. My family never wanted me to take*
23 *it, but my hubby knew it was a passion, and he pushed me to go for it. I will*
24 *always love him for being such a great support.”* (jenniferB, 04-28-2010)

25 “Wow...so many of you sound almost like a carbon copy of my experience. I too
26 always wanted to be a cosmetologist... but like so many, my family was not
27 supportive of the idea when I young. I was 37 when I started cosmo. school. ...
28 One day I got so tired of just sitting behind a boring drab desk and small office
29 that I decided to give it one more last shot and try and go back to cosmetology
30 school. I finally enrolled after twenty plus years of always wanting to go and feel
31 that I should have stayed with my first instint and did this 20 plus years ago...but
32 like they say...always better late than never. I can finally say that I'm completely
33 happy with what I'm doing now and can't even think of wanting to do anything
34 else. ...” (jasmine, 04-29-2010)

35 “It's interesting that so many of you had the same negative reaction from family
36 members regarding hairstyling as a career. I'm glad you all followed you
37 dreams! Life is boring without a little risk to spice things up a bit.” (harmony, 04-
29-2010)

These messages demonstrate that community members have similar reactions about their decision to become hair stylists. Their description of family members' negative reactions to their job choice illustrates society's image of hair styling as a low prestige occupation. However, these members all stand by their decisions, regarding hair styling as their passion and being a hair stylist as their calling. The passion towards hair styling as the chosen career is commonly found when community members describe their feelings about their profession.

5.4 DISCUSSION

Section 5.2 presented Hair Pro Forum's ability to maintain knowledge exchange activities in the online community. The researcher analysed date stamps from six lists of the most-viewed threads to observe posting activities in the online community of hair stylists. Posting dates on the lists demonstrate that popular threads are spread along Hair Pro Forum's lifeline, which covers messages from 2005 to 2011. The most-viewed number indicates how many times a thread was accessed, suggesting the content's usefulness. Viewing counts demonstrate Hair Pro Forum's ability to maintain its content

as being useful, as shown in the number of times threads are accessed. Distributed posting dates in popular lists suggest readers find useful topics across the Forum's presence, as opposed to popular threads concentrated in a particular year. This finding also indicates that the Forum manages to involve members in contributing to discussion on the bulletin board as all contents are generated by members. Case study findings show that Hair Pro members' involvement and engagement in the hair stylist online community are continuous along its lifeline. Thus, the Forum's viewing and posting activities demonstrate the online community as a successful community, which continuously provides value for its members.

The next section discusses Hair Pro Forum's activities in order to show the Forum as an online CoP. The characteristics and design of the Forum is examined to explain how it engages members to actively participate in the bulletin board (Section 5.4.2 and Section 5.4.3). This will be followed by an analysis of the Forum's discussion content, to introduce an online community as a source of identity development (Section 5.4.4).

5.4.1 Hair Pro Forum: An Online Community of Practice

Knowledge exchange is the main reason for participation in this online community of hair stylists, as is illustrated in the large percentage of threads with this theme across time. This finding shows that Hair Pro's discussion forum provides space to share workplace-related problems and to find various approaches to solve these problems. It also supports results from previous research in face-to-face communities of frontline personnel, which shows that service personnel turn to their CoPs to solve workplace-related problems (Geiger & Turley, 2005; Orr, 1990). Findings from a study comparing

reasons to participate across various online communities show that knowledge exchange is the main reason professionals join the communities (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). Findings from the present study confirm that hair stylists participate in the online community to exchange workplace knowledge.

The Hair Pro Forum is a community of practice as it consists of a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise in hair styling and passion for joint enterprise, which is to become professionals in their practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Hair Pro Forum's main activities are sharing hair styling encounter experiences and solving each other's workplace problems. Members' sense of community in the Forum can be described as identity-based (Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007). Members are attached to the Forum because they identify themselves as hair stylists who are committed to sharing and learning to be good in their field.

Community of practice is essential in learning about practice and professional identity. As a CoP, the Hair Pro Forum guides members to solve their workplace problems, enabling them to engage in a world of practice and allowing them to be aware of professional activities valued by the community: what is worth pursuing and how to do it (Wenger, 1998b). Community members are aware of society's perception of hair styling as a low prestige occupation. They passionately discuss this issue, enabling members to talk about the community's definition of professional identity and answering the fundamental question: "who are we?" (Identity development will be discussed later in Section 5.4.4.)

Sharing experience in an online community requires hair stylists to transfer their knowledge into textual form, thus making their practice explicit. This is aligned with Wenger's (1998b) concept of "reification". To reify a practice, in this case articulating knowledge about a service encounter in written messages, hair stylists can give "thingness" to their experience. This form enables the community to focus on elements of hair styling encounters, negotiate their meaning and thus allow them to give new interpretation to the hair styling profession. For example, sharing experiences of problematic clients allows community members to focus on certain aspects of the encounter, enabling them to share their interpretation of the event and discuss the meaning of enacting professional behaviours, according to Hair Pro community's values. This process will be discussed in detail in chapter seven.

As already stressed, threads with friendship and social support themes are very apparent in the Hair Pro Forum. Friendship themes are illustrated with messages conveying members' feelings that they are a part of a group of friends, sharing jokes and disclosing personal information. Some threads with knowledge exchange themes contain minor friendship themes, in which members have a short conversation about their personal life before the topic goes back to workplace-related problems. Members welcome off-topic messages, as represented in this statement: "*Sure it's crucial to keep topics in the right areas and the topic at hand alive but most conversation always progresses into other areas and then back again.*" (Agnes, 01-06-2006). One way members seek socio-emotional support is to vent and share stories about unpleasant service encounters. Forum members show their support with encouraging words and tips to handle these situations. By sharing stories about unpleasant encounters, members forge friendship links, confirming previous studies about reasons people often join professional

communities. For instance, Ridings and Gefen (2004) argue that friendship is the reason people join an online community of professionals, aside from knowledge exchange. In a service context, studies in a community of service personnel confirm that frontline personnel join informal face-to-face communities to seek social support from their peers (Korczynski, 2003; Raz, 2007). Case study findings show that although knowledge exchange is the main reason to join Hair Pro Forum, hair stylists share off-topic themes which lead to friendship and social support. These themes have important roles in a community's knowledge sharing activities and will be discussed in the following section. It is important to note, however, that there is a connection between social support and knowledge exchange: knowledge exchange occurs in the context of social support and vice versa.

5.4.2 Online Community Characteristics and Sustained Knowledge Exchange

This study demonstrates that the reasons for participating in the Hair Pro Forum are to exchange knowledge, find friendship and get social support from fellow hair stylists. Thread analysis shows members not only share work-related problems but also personal life in the context of their identity as professional hair stylists. Disclosing personal information in the Forum plays an important role in building a sense of community. The Forum allows members to feel they belong to a community of professional hair stylists, satisfies members' needs to get help for work-related problems and provides them with social support and friendship despite the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Hair stylists' sense of community in the Hair Pro Forum can be explained through the nature of conversation shown on the bulletin board. Thread analysis shows members

build a sense of presence in their messages with greetings and salutations; addressing others by name, referring to the community as “we”, “us” or “our” and sharing information unrelated to their profession. For example, off-topic themes are commonly found in threads in which members veer to discuss their personal life. Another example shows the discussion about Hair Fierce’s video changing direction to his looks, which resemble a famous American actor. Members enjoy the conversational nature of a thread. A sense of social presence is shown as members often address others by their name:

“nice Fierce...” (referring to Hair Fierce)

“Hey theitstyle, I’m new to the whole balayage thing” (asking more information on new technique)

“Amelia – razor channeling...” (giving advice to a member).

These examples demonstrate members addressing others as if they are actually present in the conversation, as opposed to the general public or strangers. This action shows social presence, and reduces the psychological distance between communicators, leading to a development of the sense of community (Swan, 2002).

A sense of community is presented in HarrietX’s statement: *“But the main thing he seemed to want was to learn from each other and make it a place for us to come to talk about everything we all deal with and get help.”* HarrietX compares the Forum with the other hair styling forum (BeautyForum), using words such as “us” and “we” to show a sense of community. These findings show linguistic activities that acknowledge individuals as a part of an online community (Swan, 2002). Case study findings indicate that these activities allow readers to feel included in a group, as shown in HarrietX’s statement. In other words, friendship and social support themes in the discussion forum show a sense of belonging to the community in Hair Pro Forum.

Friendship and social support themes have another important role in creating a suitable environment to encourage knowledge sharing. This study supports findings from a previous study that shows sharing confessions and personal identities in an online forum built individuals' trust in the community (Ridings et al., 2002). Confessional sharing shows a person's trust that the community will not misuse this information against the poster (Ridings et al., 2002; Usoro et al., 2007). These actions build a reader's trust and encourage them to actively participate in the community (Usoro et al., 2007). Pseudonymity in the online community encourages hair stylists to share the imperfect image of themselves, demonstrated in sharing insecurities about their skill or stories about service encounter failures.

5.4.3 Online Community Design and Sustained Knowledge Exchange

Hair Pro Forum is a successful online community as shown in continuous knowledge exchange in the bulletin board. The success could be attributed to the online community's design, which encourages commitment and voluntary participation from its members. Hair Pro Forum's online designers refer to The Master as the site owner and his co-moderators as gennaro, Hair Fierce and Fixedhair for example. The core participants change across time; however The Master's and gennaro's posts are continuously present. The design of the online community will now be discussed to describe how technology influences group communication and learning.

Participation in the Hair Pro discussion forum can be classified as "closed" (Desanctis et al., 2003), which in this case study means limited to individuals who work as hair stylists or who are learning to be one. The Master's decision to ban salespeople and

non-stylists to become members of his bulletin board enables members to have a similar background, which leads to stronger ties between members. These ties are illustrated in messages of friendship and social support themes, where members show support for each other and an understanding of what others are going through. For example, a discussion shows community members share their personal stories about family reactions to their decisions to be hair stylists. Limited membership also supports the communicating of technical dimensions of hair styling as shown in hair colouring topics. Messages in these topics are written in an almost cryptic language, where members use jargon and specific terms to describe the state of a customer's hair, chemical formulas and colouring techniques. Closed participation in the community helps members to engage in a focused discussion about their work without having to explain hair styling jargon.

Hair Pro Forum continues to be an active and encouraging online space to learn about hair styling since it was established in 2005. The Master, as the site's owner and leader, has had a critical role in creating and leading this knowledge-sharing environment. This finding confirms a previous study about the central role of leadership in online community success. These studies mainly agreed that the success of an online community is related to the leader's role as facilitator (Desanctis et al., 2003; Gray, 2004). The Master is the founder, moderator and a member of his community. Although he established the community's interaction rules, he is not controlling these rules rigidly. His participation in the discussion is often in the form of short messages, indicating that he follows them. However, he often writes long messages for the topics he is passionate about; for example, being a professional hair stylist. Although he is a well-known and respected hair stylist, he is not being judgmental nor highlighting his

authority as owner of the site. In fact, he explicitly states in one of his messages that he is open to members with different opinions and never personally attacks them. He allows discussions to deviate from workplace-related topics and often contributes to these friendly conversations. These actions are essential in maintaining an environment to support knowledge sharing in an online community, as shown in Jameson's (2009) study where forum members felt safer when they were aware of the leader's activity in the discussion, leading to diminishing aggression between members. On the other hand, a leader's invisibility allows members to lead the current discussion without the feeling of being monitored. The Master's messages allow members to be aware of his presence; however the brevity of these messages makes members more likely to express their opinions openly. In other words, The Master's online community leadership supports the community's knowledge sharing activities.

Hair Pro Forum's success can be contributed to The Master's decisions in designing the online forum. This study shows that the Forum's design choices create a balanced environment to attract new members, keep old ones and sustain knowledge exchange activities. The Forum's success can be explained by these aspects: socialisation of newcomers, discussion moderation and the role of core members (Ren et al., 2007).

Newcomers are an important source for an online community because of their potential to contribute to the community's content. However, newcomers can drive existing members away because they don't know the community's norms and often bring old topics back. On the other hand, many members may feel limited in what they are able to contribute to the community due to the lack of confidence that their knowledge is useful to the community (Ardichvili et al., 2003). The Hair Pro Forum provides interaction

rules in a separate sub forum, which contains rules and frequently asked questions. The Forum also allows readers to access old threads in the archives. These decisions enable readers to become familiar with the Forum's rules and culture before they join and contribute to the community's knowledge exchange activities.

In the context of discussion moderation, The Master appointed some expert members to be Forum moderators. Moderators' duties are to monitor topics so they generally fit in with the hair styling context. However, off-topic discussions are not explicitly forbidden and moderators often contribute to off-topic messages to flavour a thread. Ren et al. (2007) suggest that individuals' motives for joining an online community might change, along with their familiarity with community members, from seeking information to gaining friendship. The core members' contribution to off-topic conversations demonstrates flexibility in catering for members' preferences, which might change during their activities in the Forum, thus keeping individuals who seek friendship along with those wanting to gain knowledge.

5.4.4 Development of Identity: Being Hair Stylists in Society

Sharing life as hair stylists shows the Forum as a source to deal with cultural aspects of the occupation. Discussions about being hair stylists in society informs community members of the social identities of the occupation, and gives them ideas of what hair stylists might be (Watson, 2008). Talking about being hair stylists in the Forum guides hair stylists to define who they are. This finding supports previous research that shows an occupational community as a collective resource that members draw on to reinforce the positive view of their occupation (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Participation in the

Forum is an attempt to seek interactions that reinforce the positive view of the hair styling identity. Participation is an indication that the Forum is a source of identity construction (Wrzensniewski et al., 2003).

Finding people with similar experiences is one of the reasons that members participate in the Forum. These experiences involve handling social perceptions of the hair styling occupation, both in or outside the service setting. Messages in the Hair Pro Forum show that members share life as hair stylists to discuss how to handle society's perception of their occupation. The Forum provides a discourse of social identities that informs hair stylists of occupational notions of who or what a professional hair stylist might be (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Watson, 2008). Two main topics are presented below: continuous learning and being hair stylists in society.

That learning is valued in the Forum is shown in messages that encourage members to continue learning after formal education in cosmetology school. Experienced members motivate apprentices by sharing their apprenticeship experiences and going to classes to improve hair styling techniques. Members share detailed stories about their hair styling career, presenting examples of what one should learn in the workplace to achieve a certain level of expertise. These stories support Wenger's (1998b) proposition that CoP inform inexperienced members about the history of the practice, what is possible and how to get there. Placing learning as a valued enterprise can also be interpreted as the Forum's attempt to shift society's perception that hair styling is a low-skilled occupation with a relatively minimal educational requirement. In other words, learning is used to reinforce the positive view of the occupation of hair styling: although the

formal education is relatively short term, being professional hair stylists means being knowledgeable about their practice and continuously improving it.

With its social construction as a low-skilled occupation, hair styling is also associated with low pay and income dependency on customers. These stereotypes put hair stylists in a relatively lower social status than their customers. Discussions in the Forum present the community's attempt to shape client–hair stylist relationships as equal. A discussion about tipping illustrates this topic clearly, as the thread shows readers that hair stylists should value their work as professionals and represent this value to customers through the right price that covers standard services. The community suggests stylists should calculate their rates correctly so that tipping becomes the customer's token of appreciation of excellent service. The discussion demonstrates the community's attempt to reframe the hair stylist's dependency on customers. The hair stylist should focus on delivering an excellent service so that customers feel that it is worth paying a certain amount for. Thus the discussion frames the client–hair stylist relationship as based on status equality.

5.5 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

This chapter addressed the reasons to participate in an online community of hair stylists. Three main reasons were found: knowledge exchange, social support and making friends. The Forum's ability to maintain active participation was discussed to investigate an online community's characteristics that facilitate knowledge sharing. Therefore, this chapter has provided answers to two research questions: reasons to

participate in an online community by frontline service personnel and the community's characteristics that facilitate sharing knowledge online.

This chapter also presented the Hair Pro Forum as an online community for professional hair stylists. It provides a virtual meeting space to share workplace-related experiences and life in general. Interactions in the Forum's bulletin board are friendly and open, allowing members to freely express opinions and share problems. Community members share workplace-related experiences involving common hair styling training and practice. Apprentice hair stylists get advice about career paths to become professional. More experienced stylists share daily hair styling practice, enabling members to discuss and solve common problems.

An introduction to development of identity was discussed as sharing life as hair stylists. Community members share personal life experiences to talk about being hair stylists as a part of self-identity. They are aware of society's perception of the hair styling occupation, and discuss this issue to counter its negative image. In summary, the Hair Pro Forum provides references for members to develop their notion of being professional hair stylists.

The next chapter discusses knowledge in the service context by presenting findings and an analysis of discussions in the Forum. It also discusses how knowledge is shared in the community, with an emphasis on sharing knowledge at the group level.

KNOWLEDGE IN THE SERVICE CONTEXT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter five discussed knowledge exchange as the main reason to participate in the Hair Pro Forum. Knowledge in the service context will be discussed further in this chapter by presenting findings and analysis of knowledge shared in the Forum. This chapter mainly aims to answer two research questions: (1) What workplace knowledge do individuals share in an online community of frontline service personnel? and (2) How do online community members overcome limitations of online media to share and learn implicit elements of service encounters? These topics will be complemented with findings and analysis of how knowledge is shared at the group level. So, this chapter will also partially answer the research question: How do individuals share knowledge about service encounters in an online community of frontline personnel?

In the analysis discussed in this chapter, a dramaturgical framework (Goffman, 1959) was used as an interpretive lens to guide data analysis. Service encounters are likened to a theatrical performance where frontline personnel perform service delivery for customers. Service encounter elements will be discussed as performance (service delivery), actors (frontline service personnel), audience (customer) and props (tools). Knowledge about service encounters will be discussed to show frontline personnel's knowledge of content and structure. The online community will be discussed as providing a back region to present how the community shares knowledge about hair styling encounters. A back region, or backstage, provides space for frontline personnel

to rehearse the performance to be performed in front of customers (the front stage). Excerpts from community transcripts will be presented as examples, along with an analysis of the discussion content.

Analysis and findings will be presented in three main sections. Section 6.2 will answer the first research question addressed in this chapter: what knowledge is shared in an online community of frontline personnel. It will explain knowledge shared in the Forum in two topics: the technical dimension and the social dimension of service encounters. This section will be followed by a discussion examining knowledge's content, structure and type (Section 6.3). Section 6.4 presents answers to the second and third questions addressed in this chapter. The third question, how individuals share knowledge in an online community, will be answered by proposing that Hair Pro Forum's bulletin board functions in a similar way to a rehearsal performance. The Forum's adaptation to computer-mediated communication will also be discussed, to answer the second research question addressed in this chapter: how the community adapted to limited media to share implicit elements of service encounters. These sections will be followed by a discussion to present the community as a resource for development of hair styling practice and professional identity.

6.2 FINDINGS

Members use various approaches to share knowledge about service encounters in the Hair Pro discussion forum. A thread typically begins with a member sharing her or his problem and this is followed by several replies. It may start with a short and straightforward question, or with a long, detailed message describing the context before

presenting the problem. Thread starters are followed with replies from members of the community. Solutions are offered in the form of step-by-step descriptions of techniques or sequences of actions for social interactions. Members share similar experiences; some are in the form of a detailed script with dialogue between the customer and the stylist, particularly in sharing the social dimension of an encounter. Replies may turn into a string of messages with a more specific topic. These strings typically begin with a message containing questions about specific aspects of the discussed encounter. The cycle is repeated when members send replies to the specific question.

The following sections present knowledge shared in an online community of hair stylists. Findings are classified into two main dimensions of a service encounter: technical and social. Each section will display thread examples in a table that contains excerpts from community transcripts and notes from the researcher.


6.2.1 Technical Dimensions of Service Encounters

Shared knowledge about the technical dimension of hair styling encounters is commonly found in the Hair Cutting and Styling sub forum and the Hair Colour General sub forum. Members typically solicit knowledge by posting questions about possible techniques that can be used to deliver core services such as layering, hair cutting with specific tools and applying colouring formula to hair. Reply messages typically consist of a sequence of actions that can be used to solve the problem, often together with detailed descriptions of relevant encounter elements.

Community members use various tools to share knowledge. Most of the messages are in textual form, however popular threads often contain multiple communication methods such as links to other online sources (e.g., YouTube videos or relevant websites); step-by-step pictures of a technique; videos embedded in the message; pictures or head diagrams of a technique; pictures of colouring results, etc. This leads to discussions as members draw attention to aspects of the shared knowledge.

Performance dominates discussions in the Hair Pro Forum as hair stylists describe and discuss a sequence of actions to deliver hair cutting and colouring outcomes. These discussions represent the hair stylist's knowledge of technical aspects of a service encounter as a sequence of actions or an approach to deliver core service.

Table 6.1 presents examples of sharing service encounters about technical aspects in hair cutting. The first column of the table displays the line number of the transcript excerpts. The second column displays transcript excerpts taken from the richest discussions that illustrate sharing technical aspects of a service encounter. The third column displays the researcher's notes; for example, the theatre element discussed in the thread (e.g., performance or sequence of actions; props or hair styling tools), knowledge sharing strategy (e.g., video, metaphor, image), or other communication strategy (e.g., emoticon, internet abbreviation). The first example (lines 1–29) shows two members sharing different approaches to a technique (lines 6–10, 16–19). These members describe two action sequences using their respective hair thinning techniques, specifying the relevant hair category (lines 12, 20) and required tools (lines 9, 16).

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	<p>Amelia (03-06-2011) 1 the hair is neckline bob length and it's all pretty much one length-no 2 layers. Like how do you get ride of that bowling ball head look that 3 they tend to get if you don't flat iron every strand?</p>	<p>Performance: thinning technique Line 2: Metaphor (bowling ball head)</p>
	<p>bananas (03-06-2011) 4 Depending on the hair type, the movement of the hair, curlyness etc, I 5 use different techniques... 6 But more often than not what I end up doing is using thinning shears 7 and just hacking out a whole bunch of weight under the occipital, and 8 then on the rest of the hair I'll either fan out the ends and point cut in, 9 notch with thinning shears, backcomb with my shears, or use my razor, 10 or some combination. 11 ... 12 If they really have a ton of hair, and that isn't enough thinning, I will go 13 through with my thinning shears and take weight out where I feel it 14 needs to be taken out (avoiding the top layer), but I try not to use my 15 thinning shears if I can accomplish the same thing any other way</p>	<p>Lines 4-5: Associate procedure with category Lines 6-10: Performance with Props (shears and razor, line 9) Line 12: Performance for specific hair type Lines 16-19: Performance with Props (razor), with length reference.</p>
	<p>The Master (03-06-2011) 16 Amelia - razor channeling is a good way to remove a lot of hair if you 17 take very thin strokes. I would not go deeper than half of the hair 18 length (So if the hair is 6 inches long, you start your razoring at the 19 2.5/3 inch mark). 20 If the hair is curly, fuzzy and cannot take the razor I point cut internally 21 (you see this a lot in my Modern haircut DVD and on the Modern Shag 22 on the Video Magazine)</p>	<p>Line 20: Performance for specific hair type Lines 22-23: Reference (video) Line 29: Emoticon :) (smile)</p>
	<p>Amelia (03-07-2011) 23 Okay thanks so much bananas!! I have tried pretty much everything 24 that you've described-I just wanted to double-ck on if there was some 25 'best' way out there I wasn't aware of! 26 And yes, The Master, I absolutely do remember from your DVD and did 27 wonder if you thought the vertical channeling was a really good 28 technique, but I didn't know the ratio of where to start razoring vrs. 29 the overall hair length-that's really good to know-thanks!:)</p>	
	<p>The Master (07-07-2010) 30 Look at the shape of the cut 31  32 This first picture shows even silhouette. 33 Now, look at the second picture, you will see where the layering has 34 collapsed and the weight has not been evenly distributed within the 35 layering.</p>	<p>Declarative knowledge: Results Pictures as reference to compare results.</p>


Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
36		

Table 6. 1 Sharing technical aspects of a service encounter: Hair cutting

Sharing technical aspects of colouring service is presented in Table 6.2. The first example (lines 1–18) was taken from a long thread about *balayage*, which was a new colouring technique at the time of posting in 2008. The technique presents a new approach as hair stylists apply colouring formula directly to sections of hair without foils, like painting. These two examples show that knowledge about service encounters entails knowing the “how”, or procedural knowledge. Examples also demonstrate procedural knowledge as related to a specific set of facts about the customer’s hair condition. For example, bananas points out that he examines customers’ hair type to determine which technique he will use to deliver service (“*Depending on the hair type...*”, line 4). These examples show that from the hair stylists’ perspective, procedure is associated with the relevant category, or declarative knowledge.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	theitstyle (03-30-2008)	Performance: Colouring technique
1	Carrie:	
2	<i>“Hey theitstyle, I’m new to the whole balayage thing, how do you</i>	
3	<i>refresh the touch up balayage??? I’m intrigued.”</i>	Lines 1-3: Quoting previous message
4	I usually try to visually blend any demarcation by taking a good look at	
5	the hair and figuring out where the new highlights would be most	
6	effective. If I see any bigger streaks or weaves in the frame, I pick	Lines 4-8: Performance for specific hair condition
7	those up first and do a new growth only application, and then work	
8	around them.	
9	On thick, curly hair I pick up single curls and highlight them. On finer	Lines 10-11: Performance for specific hair type
10	hair I weave and do a new growth only application just the same way	
11	as a foil but with less of a set pattern.	
12	The goal with this technique for me is not so much about getting a	Lines 12-18: Description of expected result
13	perfect root to end highlight like you do with a foil, it’s more about an	
14	all over visual blending with slightly lighter ends and a strong frame	
15	around the face. I describe it to the client as having a beachy, surfer	

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
16 17 18	girl effect. It actually looks better when the roots have a little shadow left in the end result. Like Sarah Jessica Parker.	Lines 15-16: Reference (“beachy, surfer girl”) Line 18: Reference (“Sarah Jessica Parker”, an American actress).
	gennaro (12-21-2007)	Props: Chemicals for colouring pre-treatment
19 20 21 22	On Shanice’s advice, I have been using a 5 step pre and post colour treatment. Although some of the products I have been using have been, well lets say in basic form, the results have been absolutely outstanding.	Lines 19-22: Provide context and results
24	I will out line what I have been doing in the salon:	
24	1. ...	Lines 25-27: Props characteristics
25 26 27	2. . AQU Clarifying Treatment safely removes mineral deposits, chlorine, metal salts, styling aids and other build-up without damaging the hair. ...	Lines 28-31: Props with performance
28 29 30 31	3. This is where it gets all high tech, I mix half demineralized water and half white vinegar this is then applied to the hair for a couple of minutes, then rinsed out. ... After the vinegar solution is rinsed out, then the hair is coloured as normal.	Lines 32-34: Provide context and results
	theitstyle (02-24-2008)	Lines 36-40: Hair condition prior to service
32 33 34 35	I tried my own version [of] the pre-treatment yesterday with the products I had available to me in the salon. The results were magnificent! ...	Lines 42-44: Props variation with Performance. Refer to gennaro’s treatment (lines 25-27)
36 37 38 39 40 41	Here are the clients situations and formulas: One client is Latina, early thirties, with a natural level 4 base. She likes warmth but a has a red-gold brass problem, 10% gray. Her formula is Color Perfect 1 ounce 6/07, 1 ounce 6/73 and one half ounce 6/2 with 20 volume. ...	Lines 47-50: Results of improvised performance
42 43 44 45 46	To start we didn't have a demineralizing treatment in the salon. so in place of a demineralizer I saturated the hair with clarifying shampoo while the hair was dry ... I towel dried the hair and completely coated in Conditioning Chem. ...	Lines 52-54: Characteristics of alternative to props
47 48 49 50 51	My Latina client had a perfectly balanced cool caramel tone at the most even yet dimensional level 6 I have ever seen outside of nature. Not even a trace of brass. Her formula was working for her before, but this really took it to the next level. I wish I had taken pictures! ...	
52 53 54	Conditioning Chem is the post color balancing conditioner from GreatBrand. It smells really good and has a very low pH, so I used it in place of the vinegar and water rinse.	

Table 6. 2 Sharing technical aspects of a service encounter: Hair colouring examples

Results from this study show that props are an integral element of hair styling service, and that community members have a deep understanding about this element. Community members discuss hair styling tools in association with the relevant procedure. The second example in Table 6.2 illustrates the frontline personnel’s knowledge about hair styling tools or props (lines 19–54), which are colouring

chemicals. The example represents a typical message about sharing hair colouring chemicals. It shows a member describing props in relation to a procedure (lines 28–31). In other words, declarative knowledge is discussed in the context of its use in a procedure.

Community members use metaphors, references and pictures to share knowledge about a service encounter. For example, the phrase “bowling ball head” (Table 6.1, line 2) is used to describe a hair style. In another example a member refers to a famous person (Sarah Jessica Parker, American actor, in Table 6.2, line 18) to ensure readers share a similar idea of how a colouring result should look. The second example in Table 6.1 (lines 30–36) uses embedded pictures of Jennifer Aniston to point out the results of hair cutting techniques. The member probably took publically available images of the famous actor from the Internet and added pointers to draw attention to the result. Metaphors, references and pictures represent the community’s adaptation to the limits of text by itself. These tools allow members to overcome ambiguity to transfer rich visual cues.

Figures 6.1 to 6.4 present examples on how members of an online community use images to transfer rich visual cues. These figures demonstrate how a technique is shared through the combination of educational material of a member’s own creation. These pictures were taken from a long and popular thread (51 replies, 2583 views). Hair Fierce, an experienced member who is also good at creating digital images, combined educational material with his own creation. It can be assumed that pictures with two models (representing a hair stylist and a client) were taken from formal instructional material. Hair Fierce added his own illustrations: a picture of a rock star to illustrate the

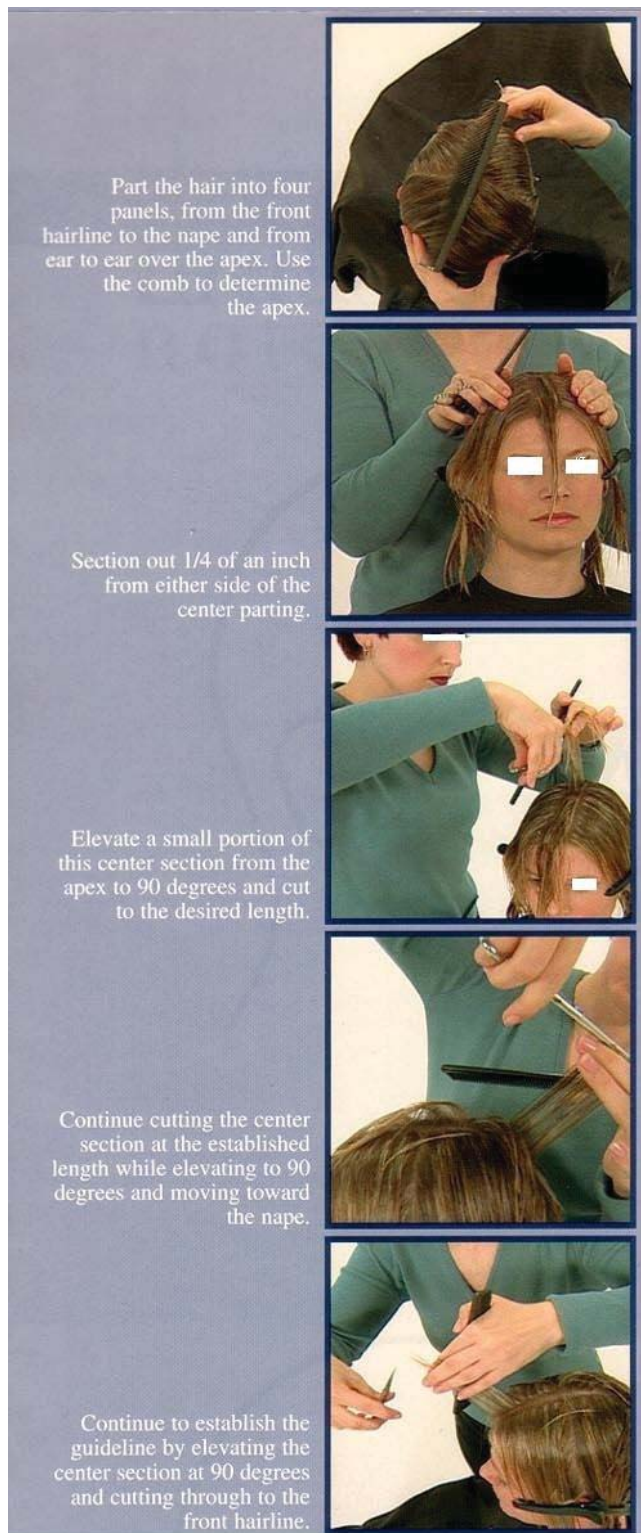


Figure 6.1 Sharing step-by-step cut: Square layering 1

Essentially, she just cut a “mohawk” guideline. all hairs are exactly the same length, from nape to hairline



Once the center guide is cut, re-establish the four panels to maintain control. Release one panel at the back of the head. Take a small pivoting section that begins at the apex and exits at the hairline. Elevate at 90 degrees, and cut following the guide. Continue with pivoting sections using half of the previous section as a guide until the back of the head is completely cut.



She just cut the Master's “Pizza” sections. All sections radiate from the Apex.

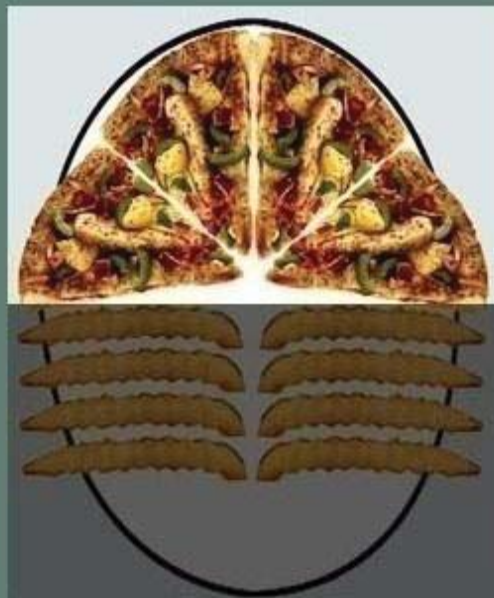


Figure 6.2 Sharing step-by-step cut: Square layering 2

Use a small section from the back to serve as the guide to move into the front sections. These will now be travelling sections until the curve of the forehead is reached.



Elevate to 90 degrees and cut.



Continue to the hairline elevating to 90 degrees before cutting.



She is traveling forward using the Master's "French Fry" sections

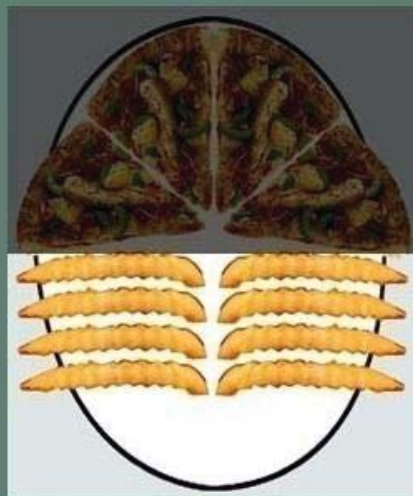


Figure 6.3 Sharing step-by-step cut: Square layering 3

At the curve of the forehead, revert back to pivoting sections.



Elevate to 90 degrees and cut at the established guide.



She ends by pivoting around the temples to the center hairline using a few more slices of Pizza

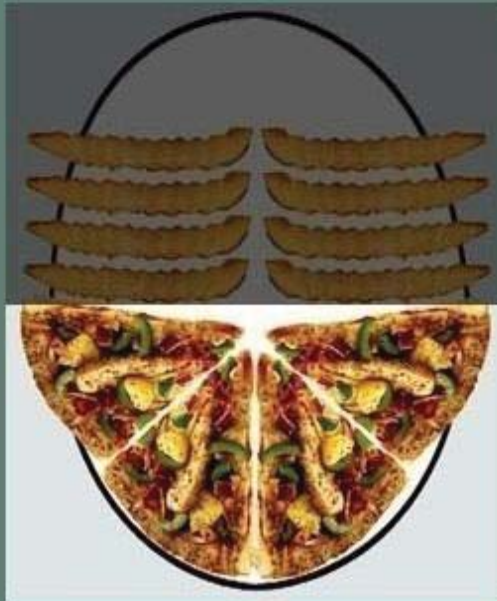


Figure 6.4 Sharing step-by-step cut: Square layering 4

result and a picture of food to illustrate a sectioning view from the top of the head. These pictures represent the community's adaptation to transferring visual cues. The use of food as a metaphor makes learning fun, attracts readers and eventually makes it easier to remember the technique.

Sharing knowledge in an online community often involves a complex flow of communication, involving many topics and participants. Figures 6.5 and 6.6 display examples of discussion flow. The researcher categorised messages according to topics, separating each into its own string. Diagrams were drawn to allow the researcher to investigate the discussion flow, as shown in Figure 6.5 and Figure 6.6. Each message is represented in a box containing the sender's name and a summary of her or his message. Service elements are labelled according to dramaturgical metaphor: props (physical aspects), perf (performance or service delivery sequence), actors (service personnel) and aud (customers). The number at the top right-hand corner of the box indicates the participants' number. The thread starter is represented with the number one, and its first reply gets the next number and so on. For example, the first box in Figure 6.5 shows Hair Fierce as the thread starter, with a link to his video in the content. String 2 shows DaisyX as the third participant in the thread (indicated by the number 3). Her message contains a reflective observation on her own technique in the context of Hair Fierce's performance in the video.

The thread analysis shows Forum members discussing a specific aspect of an encounter and typically associating it with its relevant elements. Shared encounter experiences frequently lead to a discussion that reveals interaction between service elements. The performance of service personnel or actors is a common theme in the online forum, as

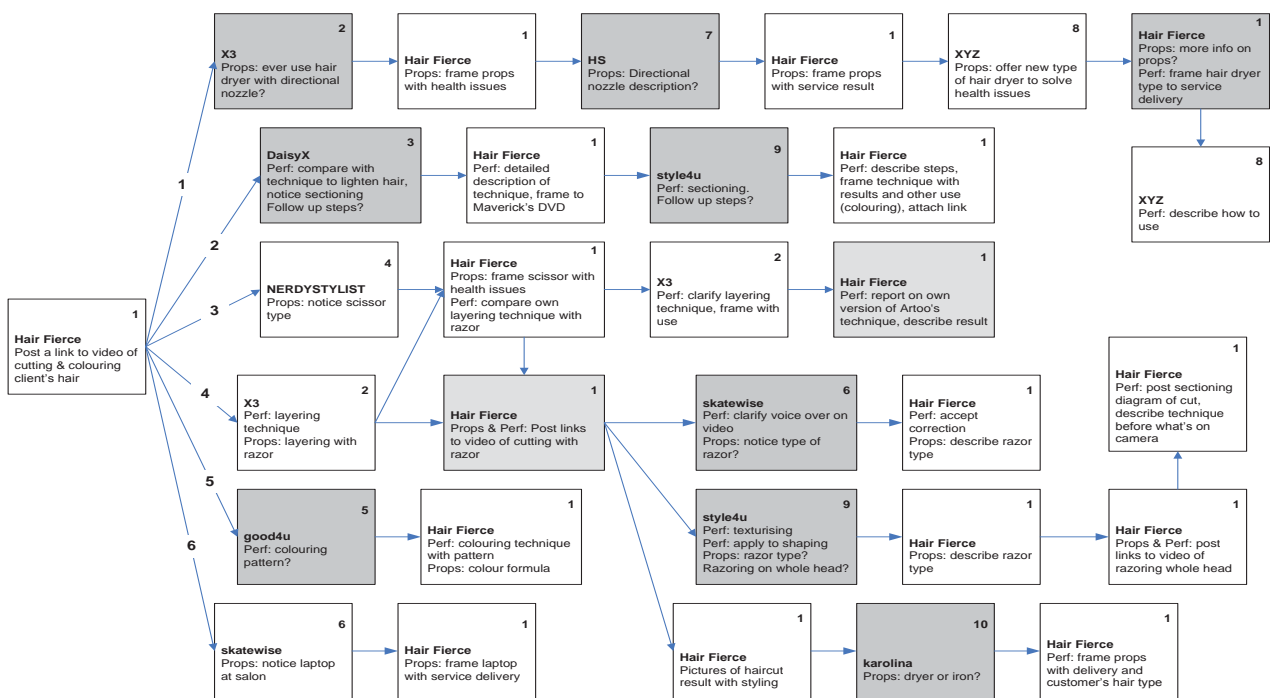


Figure 6.5 Discussion pattern example 1: Hair cutting video

shown in the various discussions about sequences of actions needed to deliver a desirable encounter.

The first example, Figure 6.5 (Discussion pattern example 1: Hair cutting video) is part of a long and popular thread from the Hair Cutting and Styling sub forum. Hair Fierce posts a link to a video that shows him delivering a cutting technique to his client. Figure 6.5 illustrates members' responses, according to the topic, consisting of six major strings. Two encounter elements are discussed in this thread: service delivery (performance) and the tools used in the delivery (props). Forum members notice different aspects of Hair Fierce's service delivery. Three members are interested in the props shown in the video: X3 notices Hair Fierces's hair dryer and wonders if he ever uses a different type of dryer, specifically one with an attached directional nozzle (shown in string no.1). NERDYSTYLIST is interested in the scissors (string no. 3), while skatewise notices a laptop in the salon (string no. 6). The first string leads to a discussion in which members share information on a category of props—hair dryers with nozzles. Hair Fierce posts an answer to HS' question about a description of the directional nozzle, as presented in the message below:

- 1 *“The concentrator thing-ee that you put on the end of your blow dryer to fan out*
- 2 *(direct) the airflow. It fans out the air into a line, rather than a circle. It helps*
- 3 *direct the air AWAY from the scalp so it's smoothing down the cuticle (making the*
- 4 *hair more shiny and silky). When you blow air toward the scalp, the hair gets*
- 5 *frizzy. (Think teasing)” (Hair Fierce, 07-10-2007)*

Hair Fierce describes a directional nozzle and shares its functions in the context of the service delivery result. He describes the tool's characteristics (directional nozzle, a cylinder attached to hair dryer), framing his explanation with the dryer's function to create a desirable result (line 3–4).The above example illustrates a typical sharing of

knowledge about props, in which a category of tools is explained in relation to results and procedure.

A typical question–answer pattern in sharing knowledge is presented in Figure 6.5 (Discussion pattern example 1: Hair cutting video). The grey-coloured boxes represent questions in the message. These boxes are followed with answers in white-coloured boxes. For example, DaisyX (string no. 2) notices star sectioning in Hair Fierce’s video. She reflected on her own use of the technique and found that the video showed results she had never thought of before:

- 1 *“was that a star section for the point cutting? I’ve never thought of that just to*
- 2 *lighten it up without having to layer it all. After you had the blunt line, what guide*
- 3 *were you following to lift up and graduate.”* (DaisyX, 07-10-2007)

The example shows the member’s intention to get more information based on what she had seen in the video. Hair Fierce’s answer to this question (the following white box) lead to style4u’s post, inquiring about follow-up steps to apply the technique to a particular cut (“*a graduated bob*”). Hair Fierce replied, describing the steps and adding that the sectioning technique can also be useful in the colouring process. The string showed a typical question–answer pattern, which resulted in the detailing of follow-up steps associated with the technique’s various uses.

The last two paragraphs demonstrate how community members often notice different aspects of a performance, leading to discussions that reveal detailed elements that were not previously clear. These strings allow readers to notice specific elements in the video and to see various interpretations of the performance.

Sharing technical dimensions of knowledge inspires members to do their own experiments and improvise techniques (Figure 6.5, string no. 4). X3 notices Hair Fierce's layering technique in his video, which reminds her of a layering procedure with a different tool (a razor):

- 1 *"I love that layering technique for the top-I use it all the time. also do a little*
- 2 *'back razoring' on dry hair for invisible lift."* (X3, 07-10-2007)

Her message intrigues Hair Fierce who then asks her to describe the "back razoring".

She describes the procedure in the following message:

- 1 *"you take small section, and gentle shave the blade back towards the scalp taking*
- 2 *off just a little of the hair. it's actually quicker though bringing the blade forward*
- 3 *towards you in a light scooping section"* (X3, 07-11-2007)

Hair Fierce replied to her message to report his variation, drawing readers' attention by using capital letters to signify the difference and point out the result:

- 1 *"scraped BACKWARDS toward the scalp, then forward end... a LOT of lift and*
- 2 *the appearance of thicker hair"*(Hair Fierce, 07-11-2007)

These messages represent members' shared techniques with props (X3's razor layering) and noted variations (Hair Fierce's scraping backwards). These messages allow readers to follow the process of two members being inspired by each other. Hair Fierce's layering attracts X3's attention, which leads to a description of a similar layering technique that X3 uses. In turn, X3's technique inspires Hair Fierce to experiment. This conversation enables readers to see how a member extends a technique, therefore allowing them to learn about variations of technique.

The thread analyses show how members explain their performance in the context of its relevant service encounter aspects. This is apparent in the more complex encounter, such as hair colouring, as shown in the next example. Figure 6.6 (Discussion pattern example 2: New colouring product) is presented in the second example, which was taken from a thread in the Hair Coloring sub forum. Lovey-dovey starts the thread with

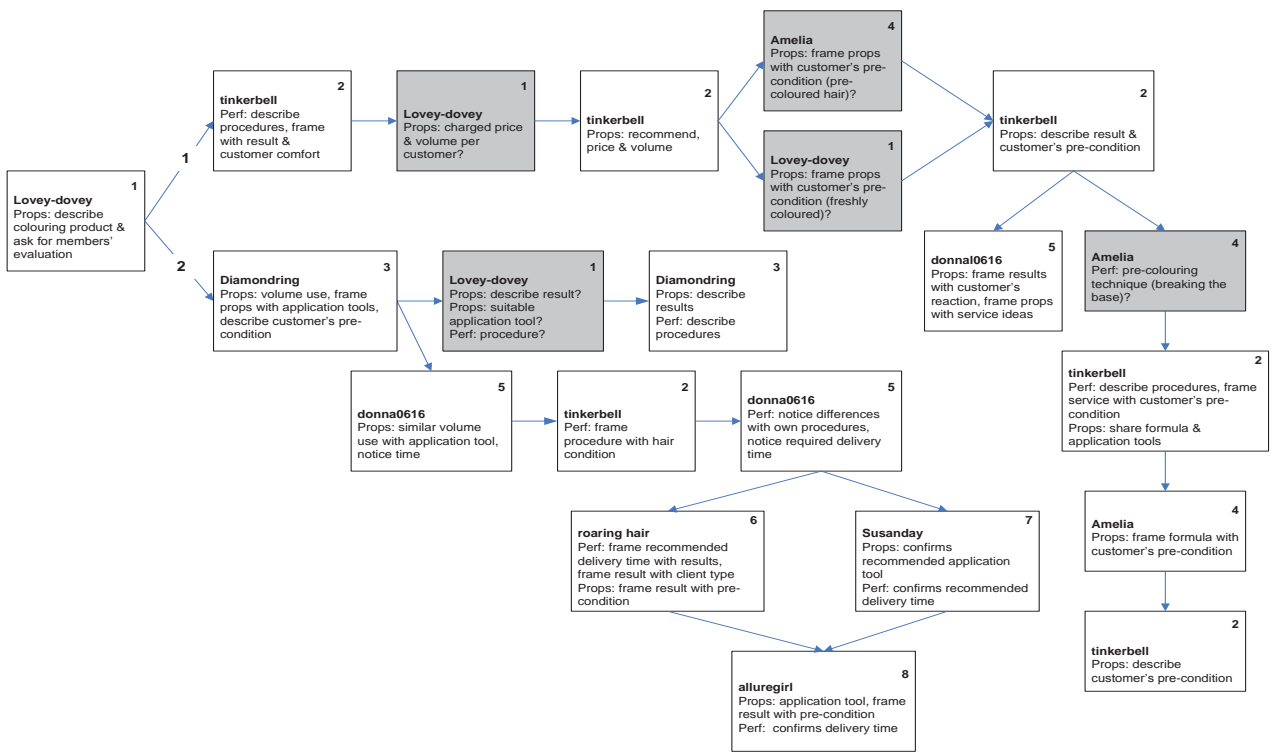


Figure 6.6 Discussion pattern example 2: New coloring product

a question about a new colouring product, an essential physical element of service. Forum members discuss the prop in the context of its use in service delivery; thus the thread covers both props (new colouring product) and performance (delivering service with the new product). Tinkerbelle frames the new product within a procedure to describe a technique. She describes the sequence of actions she goes through when using the product, and its results:

1 *“i used it tonight and i like it. i usually do a base break with Bright Red Color*
2 *gels 10n x 10 volume for 10 minutes at the bowl, this is basically the same type of*
3 *base break that takes 5 minutes. you have to work fast, it has a nice consistency*
4 *and smell, the client had no discomfort. it didn't pop the color as bright as what i*
5 *usually use, but it did deliver the 1 1/2 levels of lift with cool control that it*
6 *promised, without over casting the highlights i had just put in. there is one tube,*
7 *no tonal options, it is a cool tone, and you need to use the dedicated developer.*
8 *i'm guessing it's around 7 volume. give it a try!”(tinkerbelle, 02-03-2011)*

She offers additional information about the client's comfort, which can be affected if there is a reaction to the chemical (line 4). Diamondring (string no. 2) shares her experience with the product in the context of volume used per customer and the application tools she uses, and she describes her customer's hair prior to treatment. These descriptions reveal various aspects of the new product used by stylists in encounters with their own customers. Readers can see which clients are suitable for the service, the expected results and the importance of the stylist's application speed to achieve the desired result.

Two reviews, from tinkerbelle and Diamondring, became discussion strings with their own topics. Members posted various questions, as shown in the dark-grey boxes. The first string started with a conversation between tinkerbelle and lovey-dovey, about the product's result and volume use. Amelia joined the conversation, framing her inquiry around a customer's pre-condition; this was followed by an indepth discussion of the pre-colouring technique (breaking the base). Diamondring's review starts the second

string, framing her discussion with the chemical's volume use, application tools and the customer's pre-condition. She wondered why she had to use a large volume of the product:

- 1 *"I had to use almost a whole tube on her ... don't know why I had to use so much.*
- 2 *I applied with a sprush, so I might try it in a bottle next time to see if it uses less."*
(Diamondring, 02-11-2011)

This message prompted members to discuss how to efficiently use the product. Members framed their analyses with the process (tinkerbell) and its application tool (donna0616). Susanday suggested that volume use was related to both application tools and working speed:

- 1 *"I recently attended a Golden Color class, and the instructor covered this*
- 2 *product. He said they recommend using a wide brush and take large partings,*
- 3 *working quickly."* (Susanday, 02-18-2011)

Discussion ended with alluregirl's post describing her experience of trying the product on herself.

6.2.2 Social Dimension of Service Encounters

Community members share knowledge about the social interaction aspect of service encounters in the Salon Life sub forum, which is dedicated to non-technical topics. The social aspects of service are generally discussed as part of giving social support to members with difficulties handling problematic encounters. These threads typically start with a post about an unpleasant event, followed by replies detailing other members' similar experiences. Members tell stories about their own experiences mainly, sharing events as they happened chronologically.

Different communication patterns were found in sharing knowledge about social dimension. Unlike when sharing knowledge about technical dimension, members do not post questions about the shared experiences or approaches. Instead they respond by sharing similar situations, leading to suggestions of various approaches for particular social interactions with customers. This section discusses findings on sharing social dimensions of service encounters in three topics: consultation stage, service delivery stage and firing problematic clients.

Table 6.3 (see next page) presents an example of a consultation stage in hair styling encounters, involving community members swapping stories about negotiation in the consultation stage. The following example illustrates a member's problem in communicating her differing opinion during consultation. The example demonstrates a negotiation of power between a hair stylist and her client. The client demanded a style that was coherent with her perception of self-identity as a very stylish person ("*pretty hip*" in line 1; "*oober(über) hipster*" in line 4). Samantha X., as the hair expert, attempts to persuade her client not to choose an unsuitable style. This put the hair stylist in an ambiguous situation as her income is dependent on her ability to satisfy the client's demand. Her message shows her perception as an expert in hair style: she thinks the style is unattractive (lines 2–3) and inappropriate for her client's age (line 7). The following replies show community members' perspectives on customers as the representation of the professional work of stylists. Erica draws attention to the ambiguous role of hair stylists, which is to please customers by giving in to their demands (line 23) while worrying over what others will say about their work (lines 23–24). Bananas offers a detailed script where showing oneself as a professional ("*even if it goes perfectly the way you wanted, you won't be happy with it, and I don't want that. It*

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	Samantha X. (03-27-2011)	
1	HELP! I have an older client.. (pretty hip I must add) that wants a	Audience: Expressing different opinion to customer
2	SUPER DUPER EXAGGERATED A-Line.... I'm worried it will look like two	
3	cocker spaniel ears with a sheared out back! I've tried to tell her, but	Lines 2-3: Metaphor("two cocker spaniel ears")
4	(she) doesn't care. She thinks she's being oober hipster! What should I	
5	say without being abrasive. After all, I have tangerine colored hair and	
6	have my fun with make up, she will remind me of that too! But I'm 20	Lines 8-12: Offers possible script.
7	years younger! What to say?	Lines 8-9: Stylist as hair expert Lines 9-12: Offers guide to customer's possible reaction
	tinkerbelle (03-27-2011)	
8	tell her that cut is out, and offer some ideas for an even more up to	
9	date trendy cut. if she insists, show her from the side what it would	
10	look like, and explain that it will close in on her face, instead of open	Lines 16-20: Offers possible script based on personal experience.
11	and uplift. just use encouraging words to move her away from the a	
12	line and towards your newest creation. i'm thinkin croppy pixie.	
	Samantha X. (03-27-2011)	
13	OOOOH! I didn't think to show her the side view! Good one! Thanx.	Lines 22-25: Offers different point of view. Customers as representation of hair stylist.
14	that will show her exactly what I was trying to convey..floppy dog-ear	
15	look! Thanx again	Lines 26-32: Offers possible script with dialogue.
	lil'muffin18(03-30-2011)	
16	I once told a client it would give her "dog ears" she didn't like the way	
17	it sounded and that was the point. I was trying to get her not to do it	
18	but funny enough I caved, gave her the hair cut and started calling it	
19	the "Dog EARS" SO she started telling people thats what the cut was	
20	called!!"	
	Erica (03-31-2011)	
21	...	
22	thing is, if you have tried to explain that is will look bad and she wants	
23	it still, about all you can do is say, "OK you got it!" I don't know though,	
24	you probably would not want people asking, "Who did that to your	
25	hair?!"	
	bananas (03-31-2011)	
26	I just try to explain "You're sure this is what you want? I'm just worried	
27	I'll give you the cut, and even if it goes perfectly the way you wanted,	
28	you won't be happy with it, and I don't want that. It reflects badly on	
29	me as a professional, and more importantly I don't want you to leave	
30	here unhappy. But if you're SURE that's what you want, I will rock the	
31	hell out of that fugly cut." (I might not use the word "fugly" in real life	
32	by the way...)	

Table 6. 3 Sharing social aspects of a service encounter: Consultation stage

reflects badly on me as a professional" , lines 27–29) is part of persuading a client. His script makes it clear that the customer is the representation of the stylist's work and at the same time, reminds the customer that the stylist is a professional, implicitly showing who is in charge.

Another example illustrates a stylist who eventually gave in to a customer's demand which led to an unpleasant experience:

1 *“The other was a girl going to college for the first time and has really blonde*
2 *hair... she said she wants to go dark with a few highlites. So after a 20 minute*
3 *talk about how she will look really different and making her understand she will*
4 *not look like a blonde she said yes I am ready but of course nervous so I did it. ...*
5 *I thought it looked great. Well I get a call from her at home that night (she left a*
6 *message) that she wants more blonde in her hair, UGH!!!! I wanted to kill her at*
7 *that point. So I avoided her and she kept calling me and I didn't have time to fix it*
8 *and really didn't want to then her mom calls me and she is crying but I really*
9 *didn't have time to fix it due to booked appts(appointment). So she had to go to*
10 *college with darker hair, poor little spoiled brat...”* (HarrietX, 08-26-2005)

The example is an encounter between a stylist and her customer who previously dyed her hair blond. The customer wanted to dye most of her hair dark with some parts lighter (“*a few highlites*”, line 2). HarrietX tried to communicate how different her appearance would be after the service, and the customer indicated she understood the stylist's explanation (lines 2–4). The customer left but later persistently contacted the stylist to make another appointment and have her hair changed to a lighter colour (lines 5–6), even asking her mother to call the stylist (line 8). The example shows that even after careful consultation, the customer still did not expect the drastic change in her appearance. The encounter was unpleasant for the stylist because her customer, as a hair novice, did not follow her advice as a hair expert. These examples show consultation as negotiation of identity between hair stylists as hair experts and customers as hair novices. Customers' disregard of stylists' advice demonstrates their attempt to control their appearance. This is not pleasant for the hair stylist as it breaches the customer's role as the service recipient, who is supposed to trust the stylist as the service provider.

A hair stylist's social skill is important as hair styling involves working in close proximity to customers and invading their personal space. Findings show that the Hair

Pro Forum guides members to make a customer comfortable during service delivery. One of the recurring topics is how to engage in a conversation while performing the hair styling process. The following example shows a member seeking others' experience on engaging in a conversation during a hair styling service.

Table 6.4 presents an example demonstrating a hair stylist's knowledge on how to personalise social interaction during the service process. Community members offer suggestions on conversational approaches to make the client comfortable with the stylist's close proximity during service delivery. These examples show how the discussion forum provides a space for swapping ideas about actor–audience interactions during a service encounter. The Forum enables readers to see various performance possibilities.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	Serenade (06-24-2009)	Audience: Conversation during service delivery
1	i know all stylists are different.... but i was just thinking about this	
2	earlier today when i had a client, and we werent talking much, i had	
3	done her hair one other time, but we just didnt have anything to talk	
4	about. i dont mind it sometimes...but other times i feel uncomfortable	Lines 21-22: Draw attention to the client's preferences
5	like i should be talking...or she wont like getting her hair done by me if	
6	i dont keep her entertained by talking to her the whole time. Has	
7	anyone else felt this way...or put as much thought into it as i do??	Lines 22-24: Adjusting interaction approach to client's preferences
8	haha. do you think you got more comfortable with lame convo	
9	(conversation) as you were in the business longer??	
	gennaro(06-24-2009)	Lines 27-30: Offers possible conversation topic
10	...	
11	I sometimes just don't have anything to talk about to a client. We just	
12	don't click. Some I just can't shut up.	Lines 34-35: Draw attention to client's behaviour and mannerism
13	I do try and sometimes you just can't hit common ground, or maybe	
14	they just aren't interested in conversation. I have one client who will	
15	talk the whole time I am applying her colour then that's it! She sits	
16	back and relaxes the rest of the time I learnt after a few times there	Lines 39-44: Offers possible conversation topic
17	was no point trying to continue the converstation, she saw it as her	
18	time to relax	
19	...	Lines 49-50: Draw attention to the client's behaviour and mannerism
20	You won't hit it off with every client. I have one who after 3 years now	
21	has about a 2 minute chat when I start her hair. We don't have	
22	anything to talk about. What we have in common is I love to cut her	
23	hair and she loves what I do. So sometimes it isn't always important to	Lines 58-68: Offers possible conversation topic with
24	talk to people everyone is different.	

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
		examples
	stylecontent (06-26-2009)	
25	I will say though that years ago, I took the Dale Carnegie Course on	
26	"How to win friends and influence people". The best thing I walked	
27	away with after taking that seminar, was to get people to talk about	
28	themselves. Ask questions and be interested (even though you may	
29	not be). It's just part of what we do as hairdressers. With some clients	
30	they can drown in their talk because they don't come up for air.	
31	Others.....well let's just say it's not you:) But if you try....you will find	
32	some common ground.	
	Catherine (06-26-2009)	
33	Over the years I have learned to talk a bit, but I have also learned how	
34	to "mirror" the client and their mood. Meaning, you change your	
35	mood to match the client. Some are upbeat, excited, they want you to	
36	be that. Some are quiet, want a little convo but nothing too personal. I	
37	have many clients who stay with me because they don't like to talk	
38	much and were uncomfortable with chatting the whole time.	
39	I always do an in depth consultation asking about their hair, what is	
40	working etc, and during the visit I talk about hair, products, ask them	
41	about kids/family, trips taken or planned, weather, things like that. I	
42	may ask their opinion on something, etc. Trying to keep the focus on	
43	them. I usually compliment them on something, shoes, clothes, purse,	
44	whatever. You do get used to talking about nothing, remember most	
45	people want to talk about themselves.	
	lil'muffin18 (06-30-2009)	
46	I have one client, a color retouch, who I feel I don't talk to enough. But	
47	she is a wonderful customer, so I don't think she minds. I feel bad	
48	because I don't think she gets out much so when I ask about her week	
49	its always the same answer. When her color is processing I always feel	
50	like there is nothing to talk about. She just seems happy being quiet.	
51	But I agree with the others and usually try to go by their mood on how	
52	to act. The good clients are the ones who make the day go by	
53	smoothly and keep me entertained as much as I do them. I know with	
54	some I talk too much! Where I work, I sometimes have the language	
55	barrier too and with those clients I just smile and talk slow.	
	The Master (07-22-2009)	
56	Just like a comedian or an actor has a script. You should have a script	
57	as well.	
58	Have a list of stories that you can tell, something that is just a funny	
59	little thing that has happened to you so someone you know.	
60	Something that you can tell anyone. Keep that in your 'back pocket'	
61	and when you feel that you need to talk or say something you can pull	
61	out one of your stories. That way you are engaging with your client	
63	without the emphasis being on them to carry the conversation.	
64	Examples would be:	
65	1. my recent trip to vegas and explaining why I don't gamble.	
66	2. recent disaster dates that I've gone on thanks to musicalstyle !	
67	3. I'm looking to trade in my car and get something different and what	
68	I'm looking at and why I am over the Infiniti.	

Table 6. 4 Sharing social aspects of a service encounter: Service delivery

The example demonstrates that hair stylists try to make customers comfortable to create a pleasant encounter. Serenade makes it clear that stylists should keep the client

entertained by engaging in a conversation (lines 4–5). Her message illustrates the ambiguous role of stylists, who have not only to deliver a service but also create a pleasing encounter to build a following (lines 4–6). On the other hand, stylists should be aware of the client’s needs, which might involve *not* talking, as shown in gennaro’s example (lines 12–15). The Master’s message offers advice on what kind of engaging stories may make clients comfortable.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	jenniferB (07-27-2010)	
1	I did a perm on a client I have had for a few years about 2 months ago.	Audience: Dealing with problematic customer
2	I recommended against it but she demanded. As soon as I had her hair	
3	styled and showed her the back in a mirror she grabbed a BRUSH and	Lines 1-10: Relationship background
4	began vigorously brushing her hair out and straight down. I was	
5	mortified. She paid and left.	
6	A few weeks ago she shows up at my front door unannounced and	Lines 17-26: Offers three possible script to handle the client with dialogue (lines 18-
7	begins berating me on how I wreck her hair. ... She ended up stomping	21)
8	off mad at me. I offered her a free treatment, but explained to her that	
9	because her hair had been cut off over the winter we had to go	
10	through the outgrow again.	
11	This morning ...I have a message from perm client that she needs a	Lines 27-30: Offers possible script with dialogue
12	color and please call me to book an appointment. What should I do? In	
13	my gut I cannot go through this again. My counselor that I am seeing	
14	for my breakdown told me to skid these clients, and I know I should,	Lines 31-37: Offers possible script with dialogue
15	but how? I begin to cry just trying to think about this. HELP. TIA. (I	
16	don't see my counselor again until tomorrow.)	
	tinkerbelle (07-27-2010)	
17	well, one way is to not call her back, and hope she goes away.	
18	the other way which is more difficult, is to call her and tell her you will	
19	no longer be servicing her, as she is no longer welcome as a client in	
20	your salon. This is due to her abusive behavior, and showing up off	
21	times, overstepping your boundaries. The second way will give you a	
22	really good feeling about standing up for yourself when it's over and	
23	you hang up the phone.	
24	but if you are not sure you'll be able to fire her, just keep dodging her	
25	til you see your therapist and find a way to do it that is good for you	
26	and your emotional state of mind.	
	style4u (07-27-2010)	
27	I'd not call her back, or if you're not comfortable with that..call her	
28	back and suggest she see another hairdresser because she wasn't	
29	happy with the last service and her abusive outburst was	
30	unacceptable.	
	The Master (07-27-2010)	
31	DO NOT call her back. You are not her servant girl who is there to eat	
32	her \$hatty decisions.	
33	When you finally do talk to her, tell her that you don't feel comfortable	
34	doing her hair and think that she needs someone who understands	
35	what she wants better than you. Or you could always just yell at her	
36	back and tell her that you don't want to do her flipping hair after she	
37	had someone else ruin in !!	

Table 6. 5 Sharing social aspects of a service encounter: Problematic clients

Table 6.5 represents a common problem in the social aspects of a service encounter. Customer misbehaviour is a recurring theme and Forum members share tips on how to handle them. Problems with a regular client might lead to firing the client. Stylists use the term “firing the client” or “fire the client ” to refer to a decision to stop providing services to particularly problematic regular clients. The firing-the-client theme is found in both lists of popular threads and lists generated from threads posted during the last year (August 2010–August 2011). This is an indication of the theme’s popularity, and how common the problems are. In the example shown, community members provide possible scripts to follow when firing a problematic client. These scripts contain dialogues (lines 18–21, 28–30, 33–37).

6.3 KNOWLEDGE IN THE SERVICE CONTEXT

Section 6.2 presented the knowledge that frontline personnel used in hair styling encounters. The following sections discuss knowledge about service encounters as the results of information processing, and organised into knowledge content, structure and type. The first section (Section 6.3.1) will discuss knowledge content, which examines knowledge in the context of a customer’s perception of service quality, involving technical and social dimensions of service encounters. The next section, Section 6.3.2, discusses knowledge structure, and represents knowledge as the result of a categorisation process of knowing about procedures (procedural knowledge) and categories (declarative knowledge). Knowledge type will be discussed in the next section (Section 6.3.3), examining knowledge as the result of information processing, which involves the ability of individual to articulate the knowledge creation process.

6.3.1 Knowledge Content

The threads' analyses revealed two recurrent themes in the online discussion forum—namely the technical and social dimensions of a service encounter. Discussions on the Hair Pro bulletin board are mainly focused on either the technical dimension or social aspects of the encounter. These findings are aligned with previous studies of frontline service personnel's knowledge (e.g., Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003). The examples demonstrate that hair styling techniques dominate the discussion in the sub forums, Hair Cutting and Styling and Hair Colour General. The social aspects of a service encounter are also covered in the Salon Life sub forum. Although the examples show that discussions often deviate from their original topic in the thread starters, the main theme is mostly focused on either the technical or social dimensions. Discussions about core service delivery generally stay in the technical dimension theme although topics might branch into many aspects of delivering core service. Figure 6.5 and Figure 6.6 present examples of complex discussions about technical dimensions that grow to include many topics. Discussions with social dimension themes show similar patterns, as members focus on exchanging knowledge about social interaction with customers. These suggest hair stylists focus largely on a specific service dimension when classifying an encounter.

The online forum provides space to exchange technical knowledge, from basic skills to more advanced techniques and information on new methods and tools. New techniques and tools are shared through the descriptions of members' experience with these innovations. These findings support previous studies that show professional communities provide space to exchange knowledge about standard practices and their applications (Hara, 2007; Orr, 1990).

This study demonstrates that community members post strategies on how to deliver core services that allow members to gain technical hair styling knowledge. They exchange stories and tips on how to handle social interaction with customers, enabling members to see various approaches on how to handle social interactions with customers. Therefore, this study confirms that knowledge content includes the technical and social dimensions of a hair styling encounter.

6.3.2 Knowledge Structure

Findings from the Hair Pro Forum confirm that frontline service personnel's knowledge about a service encounter is structured into knowledge about procedure (procedural) and categories of facts (declarative). Declarative knowledge is shared as members describe facts about customers' hair condition, hair styling tools and hair colouring formulas. Detailed descriptions of customers' behaviour are also given, particularly as part of stories about unpleasant encounters. These findings fit with previous studies about frontline personnel's knowledge structure (e.g., Bettencourt et al., 2001; Gwinner et al., 2005; Sharma, Levy, & Kumar, 2000; Sujana et al., 1988).

Previous studies suggest frontline service personnel classify customers to simplify complex encounters (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Gwinner et al., 2005). Frontline personnel start the categorisation process with the customer's initial request and continue to refine the classification based on the customer's cues. Findings from the Hair Pro Forum demonstrate that hair stylists go through similar processes to classify customers. Examples show that hair stylists first describe customers based on their initial requests; cut or colour. Further descriptions generally include the condition of the

customer's hair, such as its length or current colour. Social dimension topics show that hair stylists use a scripted approach to determine how they should engage in a conversation with customers during service delivery. They monitor the customer's reaction to determine whether they should change their approach.

Hair stylists discuss service encounters as one event, rather than breaking it down into its different elements. Members typically share social interaction experiences chronologically, with detailed descriptions of the actions performed by both customer and stylist. Previous examples were told from beginning to end, with the service personnel's actions at the centre of attention. Customers are discussed as part of the frontline personnel's description of their chosen technique or social interaction approach. Discussion examples demonstrate that customers are categorised in terms of the condition of their hair, with detailed description of colour and previous treatments given by the stylist. These facts are discussed in relation to potential approaches to getting the agreed result. In other words, service encounters are discussed as one event made up of a sequence of actions performed to deliver the desired result.

This study shows that a hair stylist generally focuses on a service encounter as a singular event: a service encounter is described as a sequence of actions involving props and actors. This finding is not consistent with previous studies, which place customers at the centre of attention (e.g., Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Gwinner et al., 2005; Sujan et al., 1988). Bettencourt et al. (2001), for example, define service personnel's knowledge as knowledge about customer characteristics and knowledge about customer interaction strategies, which is based on a personal selling approach; the focus is on the ability of frontline personnel to categorise customers and match the category to a

suitable service. Customers are classified according to their background, which is focused on market segmentation such as demography and social status (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). In contrast, the present study shows that hair stylists use visual cues to determine customer type, as shown in descriptions of the condition of customers' hair. They use these cues to classify customers' hair types in relation to the requested service or as part of sharing a social interaction experience. Their attention is focused on deciding on a suitable sequence of actions and approach. In other words, shared knowledge is focused on dealing with the current hair styling encounter.

The focus by hair stylists on the current encounter may be explained more easily in the context of hair styling service typology and characteristics. Service encounters are complex situations involving interaction between customers and frontline personnel, therefore the outcomes depend largely on the interactive processes (Solomon et al., 1985). Thread examples show that even regular customers can be in different moods during different encounters, which can require hair stylists to adapt their social approach. Hair styling encounters can be classified as task interactive encounters, in which the hair stylist's duty to provide a service essentially ends at the end of the current encounter. This experience determines the customer's evaluation and decision to comeback. Consequently, continuously creating a pleasant encounter is essential to maintaining regular customers.

Service characteristics might also contribute to a hair stylist's knowledge, as shown in discussions in the Forum. Findings demonstrate that customers generally have clear ideas about what they want (for example, consultation stage in Table 6.3), with some showing pictures of their desired haircut or colour. This explains why hair stylists are

focused on the technical aspects of service, as opposed to matching the customer's background with something suitable. For example, one member described a customer's hair type in relation to how she adapts layering techniques to create a "graduated bob". This study shows that a hair stylist's knowledge must be applied in the context of the requested service and the current condition of the customer's hair.

There is limited literature about frontline personnel's knowledge on how to handle a service encounter. Previous studies defined this type of knowledge as knowing facts about customer typology and matching these with an available service offering (Bettencourt et al., 2001; Gwinner et al., 2005). Frontline personnel's knowledge is vaguely represented as knowing about a number of characteristics and traits of different customer types, without a clear description of the content. These studies suggest a customer's background is at the core of the categorisation process; for example, a customer's socio-economic status or age.

Findings from this research show that hair stylists' knowledge is quite complex, as they have both a deep understanding of their customer's characteristics and suitable service offerings, as well as an understanding of the available tools or props. This is crucial, as these tools are the means by which they can transform a customer's appearance. This study also demonstrates that hair stylists use visual cues to determine the current condition of the customer's hair. These cues are the basis of further analysis to find a match with available technique and props.

6.3.3 Knowledge Type

Findings show that those sharing knowledge typically describe a specific encounter and a sequence of actions, along with any relevant props and information on the customer's hair and behaviour. In other words, an encounter consists of the strategies used to deliver the core service in a specific situation, and this involves matching categories of customers (e.g., hair type and present condition, mood) with suitable tools and an appropriate level of interaction. These findings suggest that hair stylists look at an encounter as a unique interaction among various service elements in each encounter; therefore categories of facts should not be separated from the context of their use in one particular situation. In other words, knowledge of procedures and categories must be accompanied by an understanding of the specific situation.

The threads analyses demonstrate that hair stylists share encounters as individual events, as opposed to separating each aspect of the encounter from the context. This finding is aligned with the complex and situation-specific characteristics of this type of service. Hair stylists generally have a moderate degree of discretion, which allows them to customise service offerings to suit their customers' preferences. Each encounter is slightly different, as each customer has different needs and preferences, is in a different emotional state and has hair in a specific condition. Hair styling encounters are made up of many elements that interact to create a pleasant encounter. It is difficult to identify which of these contribute most to a customer's satisfaction. Consequently, causal relationships between the service elements are fairly uncertain, as each encounter is slightly different.

The above example shows that hair stylists need a lot of information to be able to explain the interactions between service encounter elements and to understand the causal relationships at play. This characteristic demonstrates that knowledge in the service context is complex knowledge (Bhagat et al., 2002; Garud & Nayyar, 1994). According to Bhagat et al.(2002), simple knowledge can be explained using less information because the causal relationships between elements are clear. They suggest that complex knowledge evokes more causal uncertainties because the interactions between the elements involved are more complex, and thus more information is needed to be able to understand these relationships. The service encounter in any one hair styling context involves the interaction of many elements, including the customer, the hair stylist, the tools and the salon environment. Hair stylists have to understand the interactions between these elements to be able to explain the causal relationships involved in a service encounter. In conclusion, knowledge about a service encounter in hair styling is complex knowledge.

The inherent difficulty involved in understanding the service elements' causal relationships might be due to the nature of hair styling service. Hair stylists largely depend on visual cues—from what they are exposed to when studying at cosmetology school through to their on-the-job-training during their apprenticeship to become professional hair stylists. They use visual cues in service delivery to determine hair type, to deliver various cutting techniques and to monitor reactions to their social interaction approach. The importance of visual cues is illustrated in one member's elaborate description of a customer's hair in the following example:

- 1 *“Natural level 3, 20% resistant gray on top, no gray in the back, 5% on the sides.*
- 2 *Very dense but fine hair type with very coarse textured gray. The kind of gray that*
- 3 *usually remains a little wirey after color even if the coverage is excellent.”*
- 4 (theitstyle, 02-24-2008)

The member used visual cues to determine the condition of the customer's hair, as illustrated in the message excerpt. She described the customer's hair type ("*Very dense but fine hair type with very coarse textured gray*") and natural hair colour ("*natural level 3*" represents a dark-brown hair), as well detailing the grey on some parts of the head. She concluded her analysis with "*The kind of gray that usually remains a little wirey after color even if the coverage is excellent*". Based on the hair type, she knew that the colouring result would not be perfect ("*remains a little wirey*"). Her knowledge was based on her experience dealing with this type of hair. However, she did not articulate a detailed appearance of the type, nor did she explain how it would affect the colouring process. This example demonstrates that hair stylists observe many aspects of a customer's hair appearance to determine its type; however they are unable to explain which elements they use to get to their conclusion. Difficulty articulating visual cues is also apparent in descriptions of non-verbal communication in a social encounter. The thread analysis shows descriptions of customer behaviour that do not fully capture facial expressions or tone of voice.

Hair stylists' knowledge is based on observations of visual and auditory cues that lead to various results. Based on their experience, hair stylists know which elements to notice and how to deliver service. However, it is difficult to explain how they know. One member's difficulty explaining his knowledge about hair colouring is clear in the below example:

- 1 *"I have, as I guess most of us do after a period of time gotten past the step by step*
- 2 *processing of what we do. It comes from the gut, or our brain processes it faster*
- 3 *than we think.*
- 4 *How many times do you sit with a client and say, well they have course hair, they*
- 5 *have about 40% grey hair, they are a level 5 they want to be a level 7, so I have*
- 6 *mix this to cover the grey, use this peroxide, add that pigment to counteract the*
- 7 *warmth..... Most of us grab 2 - 3 tubes and a bottle of peroxide and mix it up*
- 8 *before we even consciously know why. Although when training people, you stop*
- 9 *and take the time to go through those questions, compared to something that*

10 *almost happens instantly in your head in daily salon life.*” (gennaro, 07-23-2010)

The message excerpt represents typical processes used in delivering a hair colouring service. Gennaro, an expert hair colourist, proposes that he subconsciously knows what to do: “*Most of us grab 2 - 3 tubes and a bottle of peroxide and mix it up before we even consciously know why*” (lines 7–8). This suggests that knowledge about a hair styling encounter is gained through experiencing different situations and observing others’ enactments of service encounter elements. Hair stylists gain knowledge by practising their skill in various situations, therefore knowledge about a service encounter is situation-specific and subconsciously understood and applied. These characteristics are aligned with tacit knowledge definitions (Berman et al., 2002; McAdam et al., 2007). Therefore, knowledge about service in hair styling is mainly tacit knowledge.

6.4 SHARING KNOWLEDGE IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF HAIR STYLISTS

Discussions in the previous sections have shown that knowledge about a hair styling encounter is complex, which affects how individuals share that knowledge. This section introduces the way in which individuals share knowledge in an online community of hair stylists. Shared knowledge is presented at a group level, with a focus on the content of the Hair Pro Forum. The first section examines the online community in terms of how it acts as a back region, providing space to rehearse the service performance. The next section discusses how community members adapt to limited media to share complex knowledge.

6.4.1 An Online Community as a Back Region: Rehearsing Service Performance

The Hair Pro discussion forum provides space to see various interpretations of service performance as a form of rehearsal that enables hair stylists to learn about service encounters. Forum members share problems and stories about hair styling encounter experiences. In drama production terms, the shared experience is similar to that of a playtext or script. It informs hair stylists about the sequence of actions two actors take in enacting their roles as customer and service personnel, with a salon as the setting. The series of replies show the various interpretations of the playtext and reveal the implicit elements of the performance. As with drama production concepts, the Hair Pro Forum provides a place to discuss the playtext and transform it into the subtext.

The interactions presented in Figure 6.5 and Figure 6.6 show how this sharing of knowledge can be compared to a rehearsal in a drama production. Rehearsal is a process wherein actors explore playtext to uncover various elements of a performance, revealing its subtext. In other words, the subtext is an actor's interpretation of a script or playtext. In the online forum context, the video in Figure 6.5 and the reviews (tinkerbell's and Diamondring's) in Figure 6.6 are similar to playtexts. These messages guide hair stylists as actors through the sequence of actions necessary to perform a service delivery. The questions posed in the grey-coloured boxes can be aligned with an actor's interpretation of a playtext. Members' interpretations of the performance reveal various aspects of the shared experience. Figure 6.5 shows this pattern, revealing the effect of the hair dryer and the end results, as well as offering detailed steps on how to carry out the technique, and a variation (razoring), for the cut. Figure 6.6 presents a detailed examination of a new colouring product, including how to use the product, suitable application tools, the result and the most suitable pre-condition. The subtext is more complex than the initial

description, as the example shows. In drama terms, the subtext is gradually revealed as members discuss their interpretations of the playtext—represented here by the messages. These messages eventually reveal a possible performance that could be enacted in front of customers.

Hair stylists share playtext, describing encounters as sequences of actions, spoken words and settings. Shared playtext enables hair stylists to observe others' performances, which encourages discussion. Community members contribute different "knowledge bases" (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998), allowing them to offer different interpretation of the shared experience. This is similar to the rehearsal process in theatre. During rehearsals the actors discuss their roles so as to be able to transform written elements into a complete performance—encompassing both the explicit and implicit. Actors discuss the explicit elements of the script and explore the many possibilities within these. In a service encounter context, discussion in an online community enables members to explore possible variations of technique and social interaction. Sharing service encounter experiences enables members to investigate the behaviour of customers, possible ways to handle situations and the possible reactions of customers to the actions of personnel. Exchanging knowledge about the technical dimension of service reveals possible variations of technique and alternative uses of tools and chemicals. In short, the Forum allows hair stylists to gain an understanding of the reasons behind the actors' actions and use of props, and eventually prepares them for future encounters. Transforming the service script into its subtext has been explored in a previous study (Harris et al., 2003), which was conducted in a workshop where frontline personnel of a retail store discussed the service script to reveal its subtext. As in the previous study, the findings in this study confirm that frontline service personnel

transform playtext into subtext in the hair styling context. The results show that service script transformation occurs naturally in informal settings provided by the professional online community.

6.4.2 Adapting to Limited Media

Findings show that community members adapt to online technology's limited capacity to transfer complex knowledge. Metaphors and references frequently appear in messages to describe service hair styling and colouring results. These tools enable discussion participants to have "common" references, allowing them to "see" the results. For example, one member referred to "a bowling ball" to describe a shape caused by a certain hair type. Another member referred to an actress who is famous for her hair colour to give an idea of the results of a hair colouring technique. These examples demonstrate how community members use commonly known references to avoid using lengthy text to describe visual cues.

Technological advances provided by the Forum also help in sharing complex knowledge. Two technological tools are particularly important: the ability to post pictures in a message and the ability to get an immediate response to a reply. Internet communication technology allows individuals to post pictures and videos with messages. Hair stylists take advantage of these tools to present rich visual cues, enabling them to see the results of a technique through pictures or observe service delivery through videos. For example, The Master uses two different pictures of Jennifer Aniston (Table 6.1) to compare the results of two layering techniques. He adds arrows to point out the different results so that they are clearly visible. Another example

(Figure 6.5) shows that a member's video stimulates a rich discussion, where the technology enables members to ask the poster about the video. This example demonstrates how the technology allows immediate interaction by permitting participants to post questions on the shared visual cues. This leads to immediate feedback, which facilitates the clarification of ambiguous issues (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

6.5 DEVELOPING PRACTICE AND IDENTITY IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

The previous sections have discussed frontline personnel's knowledge about hair styling encounters. As a knowledge repository, the Forum enables hair stylists to observe hair styling practices. The Forum allows readers to follow the stylist's steps to deliver a technique, as if they are present in the encounter. Participation allows individuals to observe the community's repertoire, enabling them to learn, and thus facilitates development of practice (Handley et al., 2007). Findings from this study confirm this, as participation in the Forum enables members to observe the community's standard practices, adapt it to suit their needs and thus transform the individual's practice. Community members share knowledge about the technical and social dimensions of a hair styling encounter, allowing access to the community's repertoire. From the perspective of frontline personnel, a service encounter is an event that involves a sequence of actions and the interrelated elements. Therefore, procedural and declarative knowledge were discussed within the context of the specific situations. Service encounter elements were discussed in relation to how these elements help achieve a desirable result, enabling members to see the connection between these aspects. The Forum allows members to share their experiences and their various backgrounds to enable readers to see the multiple performance options.

Findings from this study confirm that hair styling encounters are complex, as a hair stylist deals with a customer's identity. Customers feel they have to have control of hair styling interactions because appearance is part of their (the customer's) identity. Hair stylists are expected to help customers achieve their goals of expressing their identity through appearance. On the other hand, customers feel they are quite informed about hair styling from the regular media. Customers claim hair expertise about their appearance, undermine stylists' capabilities and participate actively in the delivery process. In addition, the hair styling occupation has low status. These reasons often place stylists in ambiguous situations where they have to please customers without losing control of the service delivery.

The Hair Pro Forum offers identity regulation to reframe low prestige aspects of hair styling as an occupation. These aspects involve income, the relative importance of the job and educational preparation. Findings in the present study demonstrate that Forum topic discussions allow stylists to reshape the interpretation of income, the relative importance of hair styling and being knowledgeable as part of identity construction.

The Forum guides construction of identity by offering a source of identity regulation. The Forum's bulletin board offers discourse, which allows individuals to transform the meaning of the stigmatised element of the occupation. This is aligned with the occupational community's role to socialise an occupational ideology. Occupational ideology guides members to create meaning for their work and provides a framework to interpret what the occupation does.

Messages in the Forum have shown that the community helps hair stylists deal with the above problems. Hair stylists exchange tips on how to handle social interactions, mainly involving communication strategies. Enacting a professional identity allows hair stylists to claim their status as hair experts and maintain control of hair styling encounters. Hair stylists are emotional labour because they have to manage emotional display while monitoring and managing the clients' emotional state and appearance.

Hair stylists depend on customers as sources of income. This point of view often puts hair stylists in unpleasant situations as they endure rudeness from their regular clients. The Forum offers a different perspective by supporting stylists to “fire” these clients. Forum members point out that rude behaviour shows a lack of respect for the stylist, and thus the income is not worth the emotional consequence.

Hair styling's low occupational prestige is related to the relative importance of the work to customers. Hair styling work deals with the transformation of external appearance. Although appearance is associated with an individual identity, it is relatively lower in importance than, for example, education or health. Consequently, the work of hair stylists is considered not as important as that of doctors or teachers. As a source of identity regulation, the Forum offers to transform the meaning of the hair styling encounter. A salon experience provides a relaxing environment as hair stylists pamper their clients. These examples illustrate that the community offers an occupational ideology by reframing the service as transforming the customer's inner feeling. The Forum defines hair styling work as deeper than mere appearance transformation.

6.6 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

The main research question addressed in this chapter is what workplace knowledge is shared in an online community of frontline service personnel. This chapter has provided answers to the question by presenting knowledge in the service context as mainly comprised of knowing technical and social aspects of service encounters.

Knowledge in hair styling encounters was examined further by focusing on its structure and type. This examination directed a discussion on how knowledge is shared in an online CoP. This case study showed that sharing knowledge is similar to rehearsals in a drama production; where hair stylists as actors explore possible enactments of service scripts to be performed in front of customers as audience. This study also demonstrated how community members adapt to readily available internet communication technology to present rich information by embedding pictures and videos in shared messages. These findings provided answers to two research questions addressed in this chapter: (1) how individuals share knowledge in an online CoP, and (2) how individuals overcome limitations of lean media to share implicit elements of service encounters.

This chapter also discussed the Hair Pro Forum as a resource to develop practice and identity in hair styling. The Forum is a knowledge repository, allowing members to observe the community's standard practices. Discussions in the Forum facilitate identity development as members share tips on how to present the self as a professional in a relatively unequal, social-status relationship with customers.

This chapter showed that an online community of hair stylists facilitates the development of practice and identity in the group level. The following chapter examines

this topic further by presenting the dynamic processes between the community and individuals that facilitate learning in the service context.

**LEARNING IN THE SERVICE CONTEXT:
SENSEMAKING IN AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF HAIR
STYLISTS**

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter six demonstrated that the Hair Pro Forum provides a virtual space for members to share experiences about hair styling encounters through stories. These stories tell how hair stylists deal with customers. Stories also present a detailed explanation of hair styling techniques. These findings show that stories enable community members to exchange social interaction tips and learn about hair styling techniques and tools. These activities also show the Hair Pro Forum as a knowledge repository. As a repository, the Forum enables members to observe practices that represent the community as a group of professional hair stylists. In other words, the Forum provides a space to learn about how to be a professional hair stylist. The following sections will explore the topic further by examining learning at the individual level. This chapter aims to answer the last research question: How do individuals develop practice and identity in an online community of frontline service personnel? The answers to the question will focus on learning at the individual level by exploring how the community guides individual learning.

Sensemaking was used as an interpretive lens to examine learning in an online CoP. Learning is described as making sense of how to best act in a complex hair styling encounter. This chapter uses Enactment theory (Weick et al., 2005) as an interpretive lens to describe in detail how the community guides individuals to create meaning from

a shared event. Findings from this study generally show that hair stylists enact events by posting their problems or interaction stories on the bulletin board. The stylist makes the event exist and selects cues that she or he considers important in the situation. The enactment process entails transferring the event into textual form. This process allows the community to have a similar point of reference, enabling them to give a collective interpretation of the event. Feedback is given to guide individuals on a suitable framework within which to interpret the event. Community feedback enables individuals to make sense of the event, allowing them to retain the framework for future encounters.

Findings and discussion will be presented in the following sections, focusing on two main aspects of service encounters: technical and social. These aspects will be brought together to explain sensemaking in an online community as it contributes to learning to become a professional hair stylist. Stories will be discussed as sensemaking tools in construction of identity.

7.2 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS: LEARNING ABOUT TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

The discussion forum in an online community of hair stylists provides space to interact with professionals with various technical backgrounds and capabilities. The Hair Pro Forum's technological choices, as discussed in chapter five, encourage participation and knowledge exchange. The use of the question-and-answer technique is found as a common pattern to exchange procedural and declarative knowledge.

Learning about the technical aspects of a hair styling encounter can be described as making sense of procedural and declarative information. In a hair styling context, learning is gaining ability to create meaning from a sequence of actions (procedural information) or a category of cues (declarative information) in order to deliver the most suitable service for a customer. The ability to process procedural and declarative information is particularly important, as each encounter is slightly different because each customer is unique. Hair styling skills are generally learned on the job as stylists apply basic techniques to various customers. Hair stylists need to be exposed to a wide repertoire of technical knowledge that allows them to fulfil a customer's demands. On the other hand, they have to learn about the context in which the technique is applied.

This section shows that an online community of hair stylists provides space to learn technical aspects, be it obtaining clarification of basic styling skills or gaining skills for executing new styles. Individual–group learning dynamics will be demonstrated through sensemaking processes where individual learning is taken to a group level by submitting a message to the discussion forum. The message allows community members to give a collective interpretation of the individual's experience, and guides the individual towards best action in a particular situation. Three examples will be discussed to illustrate learning about the technical aspect of service as a sensemaking process.

Thread analyses show declarative knowledge exchange typically involves making sense of interactions between categories of facts. Discussions about hair colouring provide representative examples of the sensemaking processes. These discussions present processes in which hair stylists associate hair characteristics with chemical processes in hair colouring, leading to an understanding of how these characteristics influence the

colouring results. The colouring service requires a deep understanding of chemical reactions to different hair types, involving chemical processes which are not easily visible. Hair stylists cannot depend on visual cues to monitor the chemical processes, and consequently it is relatively difficult to control the entire colouring process. The following example demonstrates how an online community provides space to make sense of chemical processes involved in hair colouring. In this case the member gains a deeper understanding of how a colouring formula works in the context of a customer's hair characteristics.

A member starts a discussion thread by venting his frustration at not finding the right "highlift" formula to transform darker hair into blonde. A highlift formula contains a low level of bleach and a colouring agent, which enables it to simultaneously remove existing hair pigment (natural and previous colouring) and retain the new colouring pigment:

1 *"Okay, this might be lengthy because I'm really annoyed AND I'm a bit long winded*
2 *anyway. The gist of this is going to be "Does ANYONE do a truly ATTRACTIVE highlift*
3 *for levels FIVE OR SIX?" ...I get so frustrated because firstly, a huge majority of my*
4 *clients are blonde, or are working towards blonde... they could care less what their*
5 *natural level is. ... It would be ideal if I could use a highlift for the ENTIRE background*
6 *colour and then just do a highlight between, but in my experience the highlift will go so*
7 *warm ... As far as what I've used, Wright Colour, with and without the blonding*
8 *creams...So, is there actually a miracle highlift or is double-process blonding truly the*
9 *only way to get clean, beige-y blondes? I've almost given up on the highlift concept*
10 *altogether :("* (captain james, 07-16-2010)

He describes the hair condition of the clients prior to service (line 3: "levels FIVE OR SIX", a dark blonde) and the brand he uses (line 7). Most of his customers prefer the highlift process although their hair condition prior to service is not always suitable (lines 4-5), creating an unwanted, unnatural colour as a side effect (line 7: "will go so warm", an unnatural orange-y colour). The poster asks Forum members to help him find the right formula, compares the colouring process to another technique (line 8: "double-

process blonding”, hair is bleached first using high level bleach/ammonia before colouring pigments are applied), and indicates his desired result (line 9: “*clean, beige-y blonde*”).

The above message illustrates the sensemaking process at an individual level, resulting in an offer of a possible “story” about a highlift formula. An event is enacted by drawing attention to the formula, and a problem is created with captain james’ sentence: “*Does ANYONE do a truly ATTRACTIVE highlift for levels FIVE OR SIX?*” (lines 2–3). The message shows the results of captain james’ story-work as he attributes interpretive devices to parts of the event. Story-work enables captain james to communicate possible meanings in parts of his story: a customer’s hair condition prior to service is associated with a desired result. He uses attribution of unity (“*my clients are blonde, or are working towards blonde*”, lines 3–4) and fixed quality (“*they could[n’t] care less what their natural level is*”, lines 4–5) to describe a category of his clients. These interpretive devices enable captain james to create a category of customer with a specific characteristic (clients who want to have blonde hair, regardless of their hair’s natural trait). The natural hair condition of these clients is suggested to be the cause of unwanted side colour (lines 5–7); in other words, captain james creates a causal connection between the hair category of the particular customer type with the unwanted colour emerging from the highlift process. The connection is a result of a selection process in sensemaking, in which other possible factors that caused the unwanted colour are eliminated when captain james selects the clients’ unsuitable natural level as the cause of the event. The process allows community members to be more focused on solving the problem, as shown in the following replies.

Posting the highlift formula problem on the bulletin board, which involves making the event explicit in textual form, takes a member's individual sensemaking process to a group level. The form allows community members to focus on aspects of the story, enabling a feedback process that involves collective interpretation of the event. The first reply demonstrates a positive feedback:

- 1 *"I can't agree more. My clients are also levels 5-6 or more grey and want to be Jessica*
- 2 *simpson/Heidi Montag blondes. I have never had good results ... always WAY too*
- 3 *orange, needing to toned, ..."* (hameed, 07-16-2010)

The reply shows hameed's experience with a similar problem, confirming that the problem does exist (*"I can't agree more. My clients are also..."*, line 1). Visual cue is described with more specific words (*"WAY too orange"*, line 2–3), as opposed to a relatively vague cue in captain james' post (*"the highlift will go so warm"*, line 7). Hameed refers to well-known blonde celebrities (lines 1–2), providing the readers with a reference point that facilitates discussion of the desired results. This message is followed with positive feedback from gennaro, one of the experienced hair colourists in the Forum:

- 1 *"In short just like you said unless they are pale eyes/skin level 7*
- 2 *(more like 8) fine hair, you don't have a chance with a highlift.*
- 3 *And even then you don't get great colour.*
- 4 *The range I use has a XX.117 tint This gives us a level 8*
- 5 *blonde that makes a nice background colour, then depending*
- 6 *on the person we go from there, ... I guess the results are more*
- 7 *Gisele than Jessica but none the less more pretty on that dark*
- 8 *colouring."* (gennaro, 07-16-2010)



As with hameed, gennaro uses celebrities as a reference point to discuss the desired result. A picture is attached in the message to visually represent the result. An interpretation of the problem is offered, with gennaro's attribution of a causal connection between a customer's physical characteristics and the desired result (*"unless they are ..., you don't have a chance with ... And even then you don't get great colour.*

....”, lines 1–3). He gives positive feedback to the problem and provides a more simple statement of captain james’ long message (lines 1–3). More data is incorporated with an example (a famous model), illustrated with a picture showing the colour referred to. The message demonstrates that gennaro uses captain james’ cue with regard to using a highlift formula to create background colour (*“It would be ideal if I could use a highlift for the ENTIRE background colour”*, captain james, lines 5–6).

A reply to gennaro’s message shows captain james’ understanding of the highlift concept. He draws attention to a prop, blonding cream, which contains a low-level bleach as a tool to get the desired result:

1 *“Don't get me wrong, I most certainly can mix blonding cream into a highlift formula*
2 *and lift a 5 to an 8, but it is in no way going to be neutral/beige. When I attempt this on*
3 *a 5 or a 6 without bleach it seems like no matter how cool of a formula that I use, I*
4 *ALWAYS get brass....*
5 *I feel like I end up getting all lift and no tone whatsoever, which completely negates the*
6 *use for a highlift to me because a) it isn't ENOUGH lift and b) it doesn't seem to tone*
7 *either!*
8 *Nice single-process blondes just seem like a secret hair myth to me lol... something too*
9 *elusive to occur often! I'm going to keep searching for the secret formula/line/etc... but I*
10 *don't guess I will be holding my breath lol.”* (captain james, 07-16-2010)

The story is made more comprehensive as captain james adds a new element: blonding cream or bleach (lines 1–3). Highlift formula contains a low bleach level, just enough to remove previous colouring pigment (natural and/or previous colouring) to allow hair to retain a new colouring agent. A story redraft starts to emerge as captain james attributes causal connection to blonding cream as a chemical additive in a highlift formula. However, the process does not make any sense for captain james as it basically turns highlift formula into a formula with a higher ammonia level, similar to a double process formula (lines 5–7). At the same time, it does not create good colour either (*“but it is in no way going to be neutral/beige.”*, line 2).

Captain James' second message is similar to "story gloss" (Boje, 1991). As a storyteller, he simplifies his argument about highlift formula into two reasons (lines 6–7). Blonding cream, briefly mentioned in the first message ("*As far as what I've used, Wright Colour, with and without the blonding creams*", line 7–8), is attributed with agency in the second message as its inability to produce a desired result ("*I most certainly can mix blonding cream into a highlift formula ..., but it is in no way going to be neutral/beige*", lines 1–2). The thread as story becomes more comprehensive: a certain type of customer is unsuitable for a highlift process because highlift formula contains low bleach level, leading to the emergence of an undesirable, brassy colour. Captain James concludes the story with his scepticism of the highlift process.

The collective interpretation of Captain James' problem led to a new way of looking at the highlift concept. Gennaro proposed an idea to mix the highlift formula with a darker colouring agent to cover the unwanted colour:

- 1 *"I am just thinking here you could also try mixing a natural tone highlift with measure ...*
- 2 *the extra pigment in the 6 level would tone and be a little forgiving than concentrates*
- 3 *are ... I haven't had the chance to try it out yet ..."* (gennaro, 07-16-2010)

The message offers a new way of looking at bleaching and colouring agents in a highlift formula: a darker colouring agent is used instead of adding more bleach. Gennaro offers a new meaning to colouring agent as a tool to cover the unwanted colour as opposed to using more bleach to counter it. The story is redrafted again with a new focus on colouring pigment, and thus it retains the idea of low-level bleach in a highlift formula. Positive feedback on two occasions encourages Captain James to seek more information. Alluregirl attached a link to a famous colourist who works for a colouring brand (line 1), and uses a metaphor to describe the result (line 3):

- 1 *"... if you go to Joshua D. Taylor.com he has some great formulas with Great Color, he*
- 2 *is an educator for them. He mentions a formula that is a highlift with lower level color*

3 *and says it will reach the color of a paper bag.” (alluregirl, 07-17-2010)*

The famous colourist (line 1) has a similar concept to that of gennaro, thus giving credibility to the untested formula. Skatewise’s response to gennaro’s idea supports the idea of overcoming unwanted colour with colour:

1 *“I find it better to work “with” rather than “against” the natural tendenciesYou have*
2 *control, rather than fighting the “brass” which can lead to very odd, “off”-colours.”*
3 *(skatewise, 07-17-2010)*

These replies repeat gennaro’s idea, and thus gloss the story of fighting unwanted colour with colour. The above replies encourage captain james to seek yet more information that leads to a new understanding of the highlift process:

1 *“These are all great ideas! Thanks so much!*
2 *I went and had a look at Joshua D. Taylor formulations and, gennaro, you and he are*
3 *on the same page. To get extra lift WITH great control, he mixes his formulas with ...I*
4 *presume that the extra pigment found with say, a level 7 (his example for “khaki”), is*
5 *enough to still give great control even with much higher levels of lift/ammonia.*
6 *This actually makes tons of sense to me and I am reckoning that it could be formulated*
7 *with tons of colors and levels.... you're essentially thinking of the actual SHADE as an*
8 *additive or corrector, while perceiving the highlift as a pure lightener....*
9 *The IDEA of that is essentially being carried over into this theory, which is tone (in this*
10 *case your permanent color) mixed into lightener (in this case highlift blondes) to*
11 *achieve lift and ACTUAL deposit of tone in one step!*
12 *I am actually feeling SO excited about this at the moment because it honestly is*
13 *something I would never have thought of alone, yet it is completely logical!” (captain*
james, 07-17-2010)

Captain james evaluates formulas from alluregirl’s suggested link and gennaro’s hypothetical formula (lines 2–5). The message demonstrates that captain james retains the “fighting unwanted colour with colour” concept (“*I presume that the extra pigment ... enough to still give great control*”, lines 4–5), enabling him to internalise the new idea. In summary, the example illustrates how the Hair Pro Forum helps a member to create a new meaning. The Forum guides captain james to find a new meaning of the colouring pigment as a corrector to unwanted hair colour, and thus able to keep the low level of ammonia in his formula.

This post represents a cycle in Weick et al.'s (2005) Enactment theory as captain james enacts the new concept, making it exist by writing his thought processes in his messages. Captain james made a new event by reporting the result of his experiment with the new concept:

- 1 *“So I am clearly a slacker & didn't report back on this in even a remotely timely way lol.*
- 2 *I've used this formula ... and its working perfectly. I even used it on an ethnic level 2 and*
- 3 *got very very neutral level 5 results... of course having said that, you still have to stick*
- 4 *with your regular color theory rules.”* (captain james, 08-23-2010)

This message is the last post in the thread, ending the story with positive feedback. Captain james' account confirms that the formula works (lines 2–3), and consequently gives the story more credit and resilience towards criticism. Aligned with Weick et al. (2005), the message shows a circular sensemaking process where retention is demonstrated through an individual's application of a new meaning created through the community's collective interpretation.

The above example illustrates learning in an online community as a sensemaking process. In this example, collective sensemaking guides a member to give new meaning to a colouring pigment in the highlift formula, and so they learn a new way of looking at a type of colouring chemical. Messages in the thread demonstrate members' story-work, as shown in the use of interpretive devices to explore new possibilities in declarative knowledge about colouring formula. Story-work helps participants reduce possible causes of the problem (unwanted colour is the result of the customer's physical characteristics), retain an existing concept (highlift is a low-level bleach formula) and create new meaning to hair colouring tools (applying darker colour to counter unwanted colour). Learning as a sensemaking process comes to a full cycle, as shown in captain james' report of his application of the new concept. His report makes the new experience available for the next collective interpretation.

Learning procedural knowledge generally involves making sense of a sequence of actions to deliver a service. Thread analysis shows hair cutting and styling is a dominant theme as members discuss a wide range of skills and different skill levels: from clarification of basic cutting and shaping techniques to adopting methods to execute new styles. Two excerpts are presented as illustrative examples of learning in an online community. The first example demonstrates a common pattern found in learning procedural knowledge. Making sense of procedural knowledge is observed as straightforward question–answer messages which enable participants to learn the community’s standard procedures. The second is an example of a rich thread in which community members use various approaches to guide discussion participants to make sense of a variation of basic techniques.

In the first example, Hair Pro’s discussion forum demonstrates the use of points of reference to discuss hair styling techniques. Excerpts were taken from a thread involving participants sharing texturising tips to make hair look less thick. Amelia, the thread instigator, enacts a problem using metaphors to convey visual cues:

1 *“I’m wondering what thinning techniques you all suggest for thinning/“texturizing” these*
2 *clients with massive heads of hair. ... Like how do you get rid of that bowling ball head*
3 *look that they tend to get if you don't flat iron every strand? What I've been doing-and I*
4 *don't know if this is right-is ...-is this the best and right way to handle this? If it is*
5 *correct, what's the best length-in inches-from the head to start the razoring*
6 *at?”(Amelia, 03-06-2011)*

A problem is brought into existence and a causal connection attributed to a customer’s physical characteristics: the “*bowling ball*” hair shape was caused by the client’s thick hair (lines 1–2). The member reduces other possibilities as the cause of the particular look and selects a texturising procedure with a razor to solve the problem. She describes her own technique but is not sure whether she did it according to the community’s standard (lines 3–4). More cues are provided by drawing attention to a specific length to

carry out the procedure (lines 5–6). The message demonstrates Amelia’s attempt to connect with the community’s shared repertoire, as she demonstrates that she has knowledge of the technique but wants to know how community members do it (lines 3–4).

The Forum’s following replies show mixed feedback. A member gives negative feedback by sharing his preference for using a particular type of scissor over razor:

- 1 “*But more often than not what I end up doing is using thinning shears ... I always make*
- 2 *sure of course not to texturize much (or at all, if it doesn't need it) on the topmost visible*
- 3 *layer of hair.*”(bananas, 03-06-2011)

Bananas, an apprentice, implicitly suggests that using a specific scissor (“*thinning shears*”, line 1) is a better technique than Amelia’s preference. Positive feedback to Amelia’s preference is given by The Master with a detailed reply, consisting of texturising procedures with a razor and a reference to his educational DVD:

- 1 “*razor channeling is a good way to remove a lot of hair if you take very thin strokes. I*
- 2 *would not go deeper than half of the hair length (So if the hair is 6 inches long, you start*
- 3 *your razoring at the 2.5/3 inch mark). If the hair is curly, fuzzy and cannot take the*
- 4 *razor I point cut internally (you see this alot in my Modern haircut DVD and on the*
- 5 *Modern Shag on the Video Magazine)*” (The Master, 03-06-2011)

The Master follows Amelia’s cues by suggesting the appropriate hair length to start the technique, illustrated with an example (“*if the hair is 6 inches long...*”, line 2) and a tip for the technique (“*if you take very thin strokes*”, line 1). The Master’s message confirms Amelia’s preference, as shown in the latter’s subsequent message:

- 1 “*I absolutely do remember from your DVD and did wonder if you thought the vertical*
- 2 *channeling was a really good technique, but I didn't know the ratio of where to start*
- 3 *razoring vrs. the overall hair length-that's really good to know-thanks!☺*” (Amelia, 03-
- 4 07-2011)

The Master’s reference to his DVD allows participants (The Master and Amelia) to have the same point of reference. Amelia explicitly states that she remembers the DVD

(line 1), draws attention to specific points where she needs a clarification (“*did wonder if you thought...*”, line 1) and why she could not make sense of the technique (“*I didn’t know the ratio of where to start razoring...*”, line 2–3). The Master’s detailed message puts the missing piece in the DVD and enables Amelia to understand the technique.

The above excerpts demonstrate learning as making sense of existing procedural knowledge. Amelia enacts her problem and selects razor channelling to frame her story, rejecting other techniques as possible solutions to the “*bowling ball head*” problem. She needs the community’s confirmation of her technique, which she receives from The Master’s positive feedback. His reply justifies her preference for the technique, provides a more comprehensive story with detailed information, and thus enables her to internalise razor channelling into her hair cutting procedures’ repertoire. Amelia learns about razor channelling by enacting her problem, selecting razor channelling as a possible solution and finally retaining the concept after the community’s feedback. The Master’s message allows Amelia to relate information (razor channelling) into her knowledge system. This example clearly demonstrates learning as creating new meaning for existing procedural knowledge.

Online forum technology enables members to use multimedia as points of reference in the sensemaking process. The following example starts with stylinmama’s reference to The Master’s DVD, drawing attention to a layering technique:

- 1 *“I just don't get the difference in the square layering- I mean I see the outcome is*
- 2 *different I am just not sure how the process is different. I know I need to watch the DVD*
- 3 *again and figure it out, but I was hoping some one could explain it to me a tad better.*
- 4 *The sectioning is the same on the V and the square correct? What is the differences.*
- 5 *Thannks :?”* (stylinmama, 04-05-2007)

Stylinmama enacts her experience by distinguishing between two layering techniques (V layering and square layering). The selection process is demonstrated with her attributing causal connection to a part of a cutting technique, namely sectioning. She reduces possible causes for different results as shown with her conclusion that sectioning (parting hair into several parts before cutting and shaping them) does not contribute to different results in these two layering techniques (lines 1–2). Story-work in the selection process allows stylinmama to offer a rough draft of a story and encourages readers to focus on other possible causes by eliminating sectioning.

The community’s collective interpretations allow stylinmama to make sense of the V layering technique, as shown in the following messages. NERDYSTYLIST offers an interpretation of the technique, using the The Master’s DVD as a point of reference:

- 1 *“... maine difference between the two is were those sections directed to. When you watch*
- 2 *the DVD, pay attention to the direction of each section- is it straight out from were it*
- 3 *grows or is it over directed & if it's over directed-how far...*
- 4 *Also, at what angle is the section that is being cut.*
- 5 *Just those things alone will make a difference in the over all shape you will get at the*
- 6 *end.:)” (NERDYSTYLIST, 04-05-2007)*

The message redrafts the story by extracting and selecting cues that needed to be observed in the DVD (line 1). NERDYSTYLIST gives positive feedback, confirming stylinmama’s framework, and thus creates a more sensible story by focusing on steps after sectioning. Attribution of causal connection is used as an interpretive device, as shown in NERDYSTYLIST’s reference to directions (line 2), angles (line 4), and length (line 3) as the causes of different shapes resulting from the two layering techniques (“*just those things alone will make a difference*”, lines 5–6). The redrafted story contains more information and provides a more comprehensive interpretation of the DVD referred to in the messages. A message from The Master, the DVD creator, gives positive feedback for the redrafted story. The Master uses a different approach to

compare the two layerings, using capitals to draw attention to the different steps that must be taken to create a different shape:

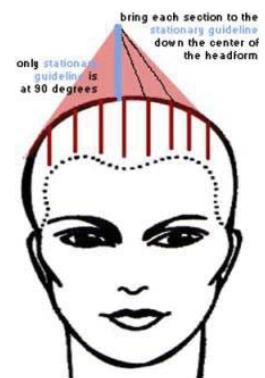
- 1 “V layering= everything is pulled to the center of the head above the nose and cut.
- 2 Square Layering= everything is pulled **DIRECTLY** about the section and your sections
- 3 travel to the sides of the head.
- 4 V layering will give you less layering towards the sides of the head and square layering
- 5 will evenly distribute the layering across the entire top of the head.” (The Master, 04-05-2007)

Attribution of causal connection is used as an interpretive device to show the link between the direction in which the hair is pulled and the end result. This feedback allows stylinmama to focus on discrepancies between her knowledge and the new information as shown in her reply:

- 1 “... OKay with the V layering after you pulled the layers up didn't you pull them out to a
- 2 90? I could be getting them confused so bear with me” (stylinmama, 04-06-2007)

She cannot fit the new information into her repertoire of techniques. She retains the new concept (the angle of the hair being pulled in relation to the head, line 1); however, she cannot place the next step into her knowledge (pulling hair layers out “to a 90?”, line 2). In other words, previous messages enable her to make sense of V layering procedures up to a certain step. An illustrated message finally allows stylinmama to learn about the layering procedure:

- 1 “(after it's cut) when you comb the hair straight up, the
- 2 center will be shorter, and the two sides will be longer
- 3 forming a "V" shape (hence the name).” (Hair Fierce, 04-06-2007)



Hair Fierce’s illustration enables stylinmama to use visual cues and allows her to make sense of the sequence of actions needed to create V layering:

- 1 *“Great! That REALLY helped me a lot. I ws getting stuck on the 90 for some reason.....*
- 2 *thanks for helping me.....”* (stylinmama, 04-06-2007)

The V layering topic ends here as discussion in the thread shifts into other types of layering.

The above example illustrates the online community as a space to learn about new procedures. A member enacts her hair layering problem and uses a DVD as a point of reference. She selects sectioning to frame her problem and thus allows community members to focus on following steps to create the desired layering technique. Community members provide collective interpretations, following NERDYSTYLIST’s cues to focus on steps after sectioning. This feedback is similar to story gloss, which embellishes a part of the V layering technique (pulling hair to a certain angle). Story gloss allows stylinmama to comprehensively construct the V layering steps, eventually enabling her to internalise the new technique into her repertoire.

7.2.1 Making Sense of Technical Aspects of Service Encounters

Three examples were presented in the previous section to illustrate learning as making sense of technical aspects in a service encounter. These examples show learning as a process to create meaning from the sequence of events in delivering hair styling skills. Sensemaking starts when hair stylists notice a problem or are unable to internalise new information into their knowledge system. Events are created as technical problems that need to be solved (e.g., captain james’ highlift formula); as ways to reduce possible techniques to deliver service (e.g., Amelia’s thinning techniques), or as steps to gain new skills (e.g., stylinmama’s layering problem). The discussion forum enables members to guide others to make sense of these events by giving more detailed steps in a technique,

providing context or experimenting with new ideas. This feedback allows individuals to internalise new information into their knowledge system, and thus enable it to be used as a source of guidance for future service delivery.

Sensemaking activities at an individual level are clearly visible by following messages sent by an individual, particularly when she or he is the thread instigator. The thread instigator brings into existence a technical problem by posting it in the Hair Pro Forum, selects elements to frame the problem and poses questions that draw attention to these elements. The individual extracts cues from the flow of technical processes and creates a sequence of actions that allows her or him to make sense of the connections between these actions. The examples in the previous section showed that attribution of causal connection guides hair stylists to assign a causal chain between technical elements of a service encounter. Selecting a frame enables hair stylists to reduce other alternatives as the cause of a problem or a result, and at the same time draws attention to their selected interpretation of an event. For example, captain james assigns clients' physical characteristics to the cause of unwanted colour in the highlift process. At the same time, he drew attention to his framework and reduced other factors as the cause of the unwanted side results. In the second example, Amelia makes a connection between the client's hair type and the result (the "*bowling ball head*"). The third example presents NERDYSTYLIST's interpretation of the cause of different results in two layering techniques. She frames the differing results as being caused by how stylists pull hair sections into a certain angle, which eliminates other actions as the cause of the result.

The Hair Pro Forum allows interaction which leads to collective sensemaking. Individual sensemaking is taken to a group level when a Forum member posts a

message on the Forum's bulletin board. A message's textual form in the Forum is similar to reification (Wenger, 1998b), enabling the community's members to have a "physical" form of the problem, and thus provides a point of reference for discussion. The discussion forum demonstrates collective sensemaking, as community members provide collective interpretation of the thread instigator's cues. The discussion participants use cues provided in the previous messages to generate comprehensive information about the problem. Findings from the present study shows participants' various backgrounds to be beneficial as members use different approaches to submit their opinions, offering many alternatives to choose from (Desanctis et al., 2003).

A question–answer pattern is apparent in making sense of technical aspects of hair styling encounters. Threads with technical aspects of hair styling show discussion participants generally follow the thread instigator's cues, as shown with subsequent messages revealing more detail of the framework to interpret the cue. The Forum gives positive feedback, shown when the community confirms the selected framework or perspective. An alternative framework or technique usually follows negative feedback, allowing readers to learn the community's ways of delivering technical aspects of hair styling. Examples have shown that collective sensemaking guides discussion participants to internalise new information as each feedback helps them to connect elements of a technique with what they have already learned from experience.

7.2.2 Learning as Development of Technical Practice

The previous section has shown the bulletin board as a knowledge repository, which includes shared histories of learning and shared repertoire. These artefacts show that the

community facilitates development of practice because it enables observation, experimentation and feedback, and adaptation and transformation (Handley et al., 2007).

Chapter six presented the Hair Pro Forum as a knowledge repository where community members share not only textual instructions but also videos and pictures. These tools provide evidence that the Forum facilitates observation of community standards. This chapter examines the development of practice further by showing that sharing technical knowledge leads to feedback from the community. Experimentation and feedback activities are clearly shown in a thread about highlift formula as captain james tested gennaro's hypothetical formula after comparing it with community members' feedback. In other words, gennaro got feedback for his experimental formula. These discussions enabled captain james to adapt the formula and transform his practice.

The community's feedback allows members to make sense of technical knowledge shared in the Hair Pro Forum. It guides members to give context to the new experience and thus enables them to internalise the new information in their knowledge system. This case study has shown that collective sensemaking guides members' observations towards adaptation and thus transformation of their practice. The community's feedback draws attention to an element of the observed experience, allowing readers to internalise the observed experience.

7.3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS: LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

Data analysis shows a distinctive pattern is present in threads where hair stylists discuss social interaction with customers. Unlike messages involving technical aspects of hair styling encounters, hair stylists share social encounters in the form of stories, with actors (hair stylists and clients) involved in a sequence of actions, often with a plot that ties the sequence together. Stories either consist of several encounters or they focus on the last memorable encounter with the client. Detailed stories are common: emotions and actions are described in detail, using emoticons, symbols and uppercase letters to emphasise points. Stories about unpleasant encounters with customers tend to be popular with a high number of views. These stories often encourage other members to share similar experiences in the discussion forum.

The following section demonstrates learning about social encounters as making sense of roles in hair styling encounters. It will be followed by a section that shows a detailed analysis of the community's collective interpretation of a member's attempt at service recovery. Learning as a sensemaking process will be presented and discussed using thread excerpts to illustrate the process.

7.3.1 Learning about Customers: Making Sense of Social Interactions in Hair Styling Encounters

Thread analysis employed in this study shows two story types are apparent in sharing stories about social interactions in hair styling encounters. Drawing on Gabriel's (1995) classification of stories found in organisations, social interactions with customers are generally told as either comic or humorous stories, or as gripe stories. These types are

differentiated by the emotional tones expressed in the stories. Comic or humorous stories generally present amusement, mirth and also disparagement. Compared to the previous type, gripe stories are more emotional as they generally present self-pity, sadness and resentment.

In the present study, humorous stories in hair styling encounters involve a community member's perspective of an unpleasant encounter, typically conveyed in a light-hearted way. Hair stylists perceive customers' behaviour in these described encounters as rude and annoying. However, the emotional tones in these stories are generally amusement, displayed with the stylists' reaction of humour and wit. Some stories show hair stylists' scorn towards the rude behaviour; however, the main mood is annoyance.

Gripe stories in hair styling encounters reveal more of an emotional tone, especially when sympathy is being sought. Customers in gripe stories are usually regular clients who constantly make a service encounter difficult and emotionally draining for the stylist. The stylist as storyteller is portrayed as a victim, having been wronged or exploited by the customer. Some customers are described as particularly unpleasant, leading to the stylists' decision to stop providing a service for them.

Sharing social interaction stories in the Hair Pro Forum enables members to make sense of roles in a hair styling encounter. The following sections will discuss learning as making sense of social aspects of a service encounter. Examples will be presented to illustrate learning and sensemaking in the Hair Pro community.

Customers, or clients as Hair Pro Forum members prefer to call them, are part of a hair stylist's daily activities. The following examples demonstrate how individuals learn about social aspects of hair styling through sharing stories in the online community. Excerpts from two of the most popular threads are shown to illustrate learning as a sensemaking process. Examples are presented in tables consisting of excerpts of messages from the selected thread. Each row contains messages with the same topic or a discussion on a topic. Messages in a row are organised chronologically according to their arrival time in the Forum; therefore, the top message represents the first message on the topic.

Humorous stories are presented in Table 7.1, which contains excerpts of notable stories in a thread about annoying clients. The first message was posted in July 2010 and the thread quickly gained popularity as shown in the number of times it was viewed at the time of data collection (841 views within a year). The thread brings together 22 replies which includes 12 stories. The thread can be viewed as one story which consists of many short stories in its messages. Thread analysis shows that encounters with certain types of clients are generally annoying: ignorant customers (lines 1–36); children and their parents (lines 37–71), and clients who actively participate in service delivery (lines 72–94). *Stefani*, a cosmetology student, starts the thread by asking members to post stories about customers, and sets the light emotional tone (Table 7.1., lines 1–2). The tone is set with the use of “*fun*”, “*crazy*” and “*drive us completely NUTS*”. *Stefani*'s words set the tone of the thread as members describe encounters with these types of customers as annoying but bearable. The light emotional tone is accentuated with the use of “*lol*”, or “*hahaha*” to show laughter. Some messages convey venting and frustration; however the major emotional tone is still light.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	stefani (07-06-2010)	Lines 4-8: Attribution of unity.
1	I think it would be really fun if we all posted our crazy	Customers as ignorant people who
2	stories & the things that drive us completely NUTS	do not realise the dangerous
3	about clients! I'll start:	situation they are in during service
4	I HATE it when my clients fall asleep in the chair while	encounter.
5	I'm working on them. Especially when I'm flat-ironing	
6	or cutting their hair. Don't they realize that if their	Lines 4, 11: Attribution of emotion.
7	head bobs while I have sharp shears or a 400 degree	These encounters cause frustration.
8	iron in my hand, they can get hurt? I mean, really....it's	
9	like....an hour of your life. Drink a cup of coffee and get	Lines 11-12: Attribution of unity.
10	with it! haha	Inconsiderate customers.
11	And it also drives me completely insane that people	
12	are so cheap! I do hair in my cosmetology school, so	Implicit cues: Customers who do not
13	the clients know that I'm not getting paid to do their	appreciate the hair stylist's work.
14	hair and it's just so inconsiderate of them to sit in my	
15	chair for hours & hours while I colour, foil, cut & style	Lines 18-36: Positive feedback.
16	their hair, then either not tip me at all or give me	Gennaro picks up *stefani*'s cues.
17	like...\$2. That's almost insulting! haha	Offers a story about hair stylists as
	<hr/>	trickster, customers as deserving
	gennaro (07-06-2010)	victim (Lines 29-36). These
18	Anyway pet peeves..... When someone sits in my chair	customers deserve to be tricked
19	and asks if I know how to cut hair..... Responses vary	because they doubt the stylist's
20	depending on my mood from, I am just starting out	capability.
21	your my 3rd client.... to once where I just unclipped	
22	the cape and told her to go I wasn't going to cut her	Lines 25-28: Attribution of
23	hair, in all fairness she did ask me 3 times if I was sure I	responsibility. Customers as ignorant
24	knew how to cut hair and all I was doing was putting	individuals who are not aware of
25	on the cape..... Oh this happened last year, so she	signs that show a stylist as expert.
26	should have bought a clue with my name on the door	
27	and a the larger than life poster on the wall	
28	proclaiming me as a hair god.....	
29	I remember about 10 years ago I walked into a friends	
30	salon and she was busy, and I did a haircut for her, the	
31	guy asked me what I do, obviously he was waiting and	
32	saw me come in, I told him I was a doctor normally and	
33	just called in for a visit..... This knowing look crossed	
34	his face and he said in a low voice, you're like one of	
35	those "Pretender (link to tv show)" guys on TV aren't	
36	you????	
	<hr/>	
	sophiepriscilla (07-07-2010)	Lines 37-48: Storytellers as victims of
37	My biggest pet peeve is when I get the worst kid in the	customers (children) but
38	world and the parent just sits there expecting a fab	sophiepriscilla manages to overcome
39	haircut on their kid. I just had this kid the other day	the situation by asking the parent to
40	who ran around the salon grabbing stuff I had to pry	control her kids (lines 44-48).
41	out of his fingers and then kept shaking while I did the	
42	haircut the mother had two smaller kids running	Lines 37-39: Attribution of unity.
43	around also. At the end the mother was like can you	Parents who ignore their children's
44	clean up his side burn more? I told her then you better	behaviour during service delivery.
45	hold his head! I'm sorry but if there was anyone that	Children as a category.
46	needed a spanking it was the Mom for allowing her	
47	kids to act like animals! I hate working at family chain	Lines 40-41: Attribution of fixed
48	salons lol!	quality. Children's movements are
	<hr/>	unpredictable.
	stefani (07-07-2010)	
49	hahahahaha! I've only had a few kids cuts so far. The	Lines 40-42: Attribution of

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60	<p>first one wasn't too bad, but the second one, the little girl would not hold still! She was quiet, so it's not like she was chattering on or anything. For some reason her head just kept dipping. So I went to cut a straight line in her perimeter just as her head dipped down & I ended up making a decent sized hole. Fun times....haha I was just reading a magazine the other day that had an article called "the 8 things you should know, but your hairdresser will never tell you" and one of them was that they hate when you bring your kids along haha!</p>	<p>responsibility. Parents should control their kids in the salon.</p> <p>Lines 49-60: *stefani* gives positive feedback on children as a category of customer (line 49: Attribution of unity) and they are unpredictable (lines 51-56: Attribution of fixed quality). Agrees with sophiepriscilla that customers should not bring their kids to salons (lines 57-60).</p>
	<p>harmony (07-13-2010)</p>	
61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71	<p>lmao!! i know exactly what you mean!!! one time this little girl was making the meanest face at me cause her mom was making her get her hair cut, she was about four or five..well when i went to trim her bangs she tried to bite me!!! she was screeching at the top of her lungs and her mom was texting on her phone and just smiled and said, oh she never acts like this i dont know why she doesnt like you. :eek: all the while her brother was running aruond the shop opening and slamming drawers and picking up hand mirrors. i couldnt get them out fast enough!!!!</p>	<p>Lines 61-71: harmony gives positive feedback on children as a category of customer (line 61: Attribution of unity) and parents should control them (lines 65-68: Attribution of responsibility, the mother does not control her child).</p> <p>Implicit cues: Parents should not bring their children to salons because they can disturb the service environment. Parents should control their children's behaviour.</p>
	<p>sandybeach (07-18-2010)</p>	
72 73 74 75	<p>client has hair past shoulder's and wants to keep it long but want's a swing bob- "just not as short, and be sure to not cut much off of the length". LOL " but I like the shape of the swing bob." LOL</p>	<p>Hair stylists describe customer's participation as giving instructions to stylists during service delivery. These messages use attribution of emotion, shown in stylists derive specific emotions from these events such as amused (lines 72-75) and frustrated (lines 87, 94).</p>
	<p>DamonD (07-18-2010)</p>	
76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87	<p>Hi all....I haven't posted in ages! I just had a client last week who was a royal pain in the..... She had a traditional straight bob and wanted it "angled toward the front" with the sides kept the length they were. FINE.....that in it's self, not a problem.....She says "now don't take much, but take enough so you can tell its longer in the front than the back". OK.....so I took about one inch from the back, and angled it. She pitches a fit and said "it's soooo short"! OMG.....ONE FREAKIN INCH and she is having a cow! It was all I could do to continue being nice to her! She said "it will grow". GRRRRRRR!!!!</p>	
	<p>Serenade (07-25-2010)</p>	
88 89 90 91 92 93 94	<p>i hate when someone brings a picture in and says... I WANT IT LIKE THIS! but a little longer in the back and a little shorter in the front and red instead of brown and add bangs but idont want the layers..well maybe a little, but not as much as this. Just make sure its not this short but the front is shorter.... WHA?</p>	

Table 7. 1 Humorous stories: Annoying clients

The example starts with *stefani*'s invitation to share stories about annoying customers. *Stefani*'s message shows sensemaking at an individual level where the poster takes the experience with a type of customer “out-of-the-flow” of the encounter and gives the event a meaning. *Stefani* enacts the event by drawing attention to a type of customer (clients who sleep during an encounter), making these individuals exist in the realm of customer types. *Stefani* creates the type by taking out a specific character, treats individuals with the character as belonging in a category and thus gives them an attribution of unity. The poster attributes to these individuals the implicit special quality of ignorance and associates the encounter with them with a specific emotion (“*HATE*” in line 4; “*drives me completely insane*” in line 11). The sensemaking process at the individual level is apparent in the poster’s message: *Stefani* enacts the encounter with a type of customer and selects a frame to interpret the event, and this enables her to connect the customer type with emotions she derives from these encounters. As a part of the story in the thread, the message offers a rough draft of a story about annoying clients. The analysis shows that these sensemaking activities were a common pattern in the thread.

Sensemaking activities are found in subsequent messages where members share their experiences with annoying customers. These activities are displayed as the enacted encounter is given a frame to interpret the event, enabling the hair stylist as the storyteller to associate a type of customer with emotions derived from the event. Analysis of the thread as one story demonstrates that members take out elements from previous messages to create their own stories. This is aligned with Sims et al.’s (2009) study that shows the audience takes parts of stories they can relate to and uses them to create another story they can tell to others. The thread analysed demonstrates a similar

result as members shared stories about customers who were ignorant about aspects of hair styling delivery. For example, stories about children as clients start after jenniferB mentions them in reply to *stefani*'s thread starter:

- 1 *"I am sorry, but I don't find it a bother when people nod off to sleep while I am doing*
- 2 *their hair. Kids are worse to do than someone nodding off. You learn to work with*
- 3 *things like that."* (jenniferB, 07-06-2010)

The member does not elaborate on children's characteristics, but sophiepriscilla (lines 37–39), *stefani* (lines 49–60) and harmony (lines 61–71) pick up the cue and share stories about their experiences with children, and subsequently parents who bring them to hair salons. In other words, sophiepriscilla relates to jenniferB's post about children, which leads to the former writing and posting her personal experiences. Sophiepriscilla's post, in turn, encourages *stefani* and harmony to use children and parents to tell their own stories.

The example thread under discussion exchanges mainly "terse-stories" (Boje, 1991) or "proto-stories" (Gabriel, 2000) about clients. Stories are told as a series of customers' actions during the encounter, without any clear plot that connects these actions. Collective sensemaking is shown as the stylists interpret these behaviours by using interpretive devices. Two interpretive devices are apparent: attribution of unity and attribution of fixed quality. For example, children (attribution of unity) are attributed with the quality of being difficult to control. Each message enacts the poster's experience and brings into existence the customer type. One recurring implicit theme emerges, as a client's behaviour (e.g., giving direction to a hair stylist during a service delivery, a mother who does not control her children in a salon) is given meaning by challenging the stylist's authority as the person in charge of hair styling encounters. Aligned with Weick (1995), the example thread shows that sensemaking started with

individual stylists feeling an incoherent sense of self because they were not supposed to feel negatively about clients. Sharing similar experiences provides feedback that allows thread participants to make sense of their feelings towards their clients and gives them a positive perspective as it justifies their annoyance at their clients' behaviour.

The sample thread shows stories containing various customer types (children, parents and customers in general), with a recurring characteristic implicitly described: these customers do not perform the roles hair stylists expect them to. One such expectation is that children should be well mannered and their parents' role is to tell them to behave. Another is that clients should know that the stylist is the expert, and therefore they should not question the expert's capability (see gennaro's message in the sample thread in Table 7.1, lines 21–28). These customers are breaching the role of customers as hair novices who submit to hair stylists as hair experts (Jacobs-Huey, 2007). Collective sensemaking in the above example (Table 7.1) implicitly presents Hair Pro Forum's perspective towards customers who do not perform their roles as service recipients. These stories allow community members to make sense of their negative feelings; as the feelings are justified when customers breach their roles.

The following examples illustrate gripe stories in social interaction themes. Two popular threads were collected, both containing stories about processes that stylists had gone through in deciding to fire particularly problematic, regular clients. Unlike the humorous stories, gripe stories are more complex, with detailed descriptions of a specific encounter which led to the decision to fire. Excerpts from two notable threads illustrate learning as making sense of unpleasant clients. The first example was taken from a recent post which quickly gained popularity (posted in 2010 and gained 596

views within a year). Transcript excerpts from an old but popular thread (first posted in 2005, culminating in 2007) are used as a second example as they provide rich stories about problematic clients.

Firing a client is a rare but significant event in a hair stylist's career. Thread analysis suggests that this is not a common decision, and not every stylist had experienced such a situation. However, this is an interesting topic for the community as evidenced by its popularity. The first example was taken from a recent thread (posted in 2010), which in the title clearly asks Forum members for help in firing a client (detailed excerpts were presented in chapter six, Table 6.5). The thread is relatively short, with 28 replies, and is relatively faithful to the topic. A member enacts the event and frames it into two encounters. The first is described as a service delivery in which the client went against the stylist's recommendation to get a perm (lines 1–4). The second encounter did not constitute service as the encounter was unscheduled; the client's behaviour is described as rude (lines 5–6). JenniferB turned to the Hair Pro Forum to get help in avoiding the problematic client:

1 *“I did a perm on a client I have had for a few years about 2 months ago. I recommended*
2 *against it but she demanded. As soon as I had her hair styled and showed her the back*
3 *in a mirror she grabbed a BRUSH and began vigorously brushing her hair out and*
4 *straight down. I was mortified. She paid and left.*
5 *A few weeks ago she shows up at my front door unannounced and begins berating me on*
6 *how I wreck her hair. (She went to the states over the winter and a hairstylist had cut*
7 *her hair really short....) The perm was to try and help her through the awkward layers*
8 *stage after the short cut. ... This morning I checked my cell phone for messages ... I have*
9 *a message from perm client that she needs a color and please call me to book an*
10 *appointment... My counselor that I am seeing for my breakdown told me to skid these*
11 *clients, and I know I should, but how?” (jenniferB, 07-27-2010)*

JenniferB enacts the experience, creates a particularly difficult client and draws attention to a decision not to serve this type. The poster brackets the time frame of the story into the last two encounters, enabling readers to focus on significant events that

have led to her decision. Attribution of responsibility is implicated to the client (lines 1–2). JenniferB attributes emotional tone to both her action (“*I was mortified*”, line 4) and her client’s action—the latter through the use of capital letters for emphasis (lines 3–4). Attribution of responsibility allows jenniferB to make sense of the decision to fire the client. It enables jenniferB to make a comprehensive story justifying this decision, and creating a story that can resist criticism from fellow hair stylists. The problem experienced by jenniferB creates an awareness that such clients exist, and the poster’s plea for help encourages others to submit their advice. Positive feedback is given by the community as shown in their support for jenniferB’s decision. The Forum provides help by submitting various scripts to end the client–stylist relationship. This feedback embellishes behaviours deemed as unacceptable, thus making these behaviours explicit:

“*abusive behaviour, and showing off times, overstepping your boundaries*” (tinkerbell, 07-27-2010).

“*abusive outburst*” (style4u, 07-27-2010)

Notable feedback was given by The Master, retelling his father’s story:

1 “*I saw my father fire a client and told her that she needs to find some place else to do*
2 *her hair because he doesn't feel comfortable doing it for her anymore because he*
3 *doesn't feel that she is ever happy with his work. She said "Don't I always tip you?", he*
4 *replied "I don't work for tips".*
5
6 *It is totally acceptable and ok for you to refuse to work on a pain in the *** client. It*
7 *does not make you a bad person or a bad hairstylist or unprofessional. It makes you*
8 *EQUAL to the client to be able to refuse them and that is the way life should be. Equal.”*
(The Master, 07-27-2010)

Feedback from tinkerbell, style4u and The Master show collective interpretations of the client’s behaviour. JenniferB’s client is considered as rude as she violated the rules of conduct between stylist and client: an appointment should be made prior to meeting, and rudeness is not acceptable. The Master’s story explicated values that become the foundation of the stylist–client relationship, which is based on a socially equal position (lines 7–8). In other words, the community created meaning for clients’ behaviour, in this case overstepping roles in an interaction between socially equal individuals. This

feedback justified jenniferB’s actions and assured her she made the right decision without losing credibility as a professional hair stylist:

- 1 *“Thanks so much everyone for your replies. I think I just needed to hear from you all*
- 2 *that I need to step away from this one. ... Thanks for making me feel better about not*
- 3 *calling her back.”* (jenniferB, 07-27-2010)

The feedback JenniferB receives enables her to feel positive about her decision because it is in accord with the community’s values, as shown explicitly in The Master’s message.

The second example is one of the most popular threads ever on the Forum, evident by the number of views (1,829 views since it was first posted in 2005, with the last post in 2007). There are 78 replies, which include 14 stories collected for data analysis. Table 7.2 shows three general types of customers found in the thread: problematic regular clients (lines 1–88), older clients from nursing homes (lines 89–111), and a one-off customer who tried to get free service from the salon (line 112–156). Humorous stories are found in stories about clients from nursing homes, describing stylists’ experiences in handling special behaviours from older people. These stories have relatively light emotional tones and exhibit a tendency towards sympathy with respect to specific behaviour from these clients. Two messages contain detailed stories about customers who try to obtain free service. These stories describe hair stylists as heroic survivors of customers’ attempts to deceive them. DamonD’s story (lines 123–156), the first message to appear on this topic, was taken as an example due to its complexity. Gripe stories formed the majority of the theme in the thread and will be discussed below.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	HarrietX (12-17-2005)	Line 1: Attribution of emotion.
1	This is another vent topic about those clients you hate to	HarrietX derives frustration from the event.
2	deal with... I have this women I did a few years back.. This	

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
3	is her life, ... Anyway she only gets her hair done once	
4	every year or so and only if her mother pays for it..Yea she	Lines 4-6: Attribution of fixed
5	can't pay for it because she is to busy spending it on drugs	quality. Client as a negative
6	or whatever.. Anyway she called on Thursday to get her	character (battling addiction).
7	hair done because it was the only day her mom was able	
8	to come with her to pay for her hair, lol.. ...I started to	Lines 12-13: Attribution of causal
9	think about it and knowing how she was I really didn't	connection. Client was rude
10	want to do it I explained I had something to do and	because she had a hangover.
11	could not take her and was very sorry and just made up	
12	excuses... Well she must have been hung over and said I	Line 15: Attribution of emotion.
13	was so unprofessional and got really rude and said a few	HarrietX was mad.
14	choice words to me and just went off on me then hung	
15	up.. I was so mad that I exploded in my car while my	Lines 18-23: Attribution of
16	daughter was sitting there with her mouth hanging open	responsibility. HarrietX blames
17	from shock, lol..I said some really bad things because she	the client's characteristics as the
18	is such a peice of trash to put in mildly, lol.. I know it was	reason for getting mad.
19	no reason to get made but if you knew her she is the type	
20	of person that wants everything cheap and can't make a	Lines 24-33: Negative feedback.
21	living because of her messed up lifestyle and goes on and	Mallory offers cues to interpret
22	tells me I don't know how to run a business and am a bad	the client's behaviour (Lines 26-
23	stylists and so on...	28). Mallory frames these cues as
	Mallory (12-18-2005)	clients who deserve to be
24	Now i understand sometimes we divorce clients, and if	'divorced' but also contests
25	you had a client that came regularly, once every six weeks	HarrietX's decision to cancel the
26	for example and she always complained about her hair,	appointment (Line 30-31).
27	and cancelled appointments, and then expected you to	
28	take her in at the last minute then i would fire that client,	Lines 34-41: HarrietX provides
29	but this lady i would have grinned and bared it, and then	more information and reflects
30	enjoyed my eighty dollars. Also it is kind of not nice to	upon the unpleasant event.
31	cancel her after she did make an appointment with you, if	
32	she bugs you that much i would have at least passed her	Lines 34-35: Attribution of fixed
33	off to a junior stylists. ...	quality. Reiterates the client's
	HarrietX (12-18-2005)	negative characteristics.
34	I guess I don't have sympathy for her because she is the	Lines 36-38: Attribution of causal
35	kind that just takes from people and won't help herself....	connection. The stylist links her
36	So she is just a big problem and I guess I thought it would	busy schedule on the day with
37	have been the end of the day and I would have been tired	her decision to cancel
38	and just didn't feel like dealing with her. I still shouldn't	appointment.
39	have booked her without telling her it was after I am	
40	closed and it could change but I just booked her without	Lines 38-41: Attribution of
41	thinking of what a pain she was..	responsibility. The stylist blames
	X3 (12-18-2005)	herself for booking the
42	i give myself an attitude check as much as i can when i get	problematic client in the first
43	a VERY difficult personality to deal with. ... they are very	place.
44	troubled people and if i can encourage or lift them up in	
45	some way i'll give it my best shot.	Lines 42-45: Negative feedback
	moonlight style (12-18-2005)	on HarrietX's decision to cancel
46	i have a lady who is about to get the boot from my salon. i	the appointment. Explicates hair
47	have only had to "divorce" 2 clients in about 16 years. This	stylist's role to encourage client.
48	lady is never pleased. i take extra time and care to baby	
49	her and make sure everything is just right. she always	Lines 46-58: Positive feedback on
		decision to divorce client. Picks
		up Mallory's cues on clients who
		deserve to be divorced (Lines 47-

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58	<p>agrees that it is perfect when she leaves. she is so miserable with herself and i am sure she acts like she does in my chair everywhere she goes. ... so i have decided that i am going to call her on it next time. when she starts complaining i am going to suggest that she finds someone who can please her ... because i cant. i dont want the bad advertising of someone saying they hate my work. i cant afford to turn people away at all ... but she is not the kind of person i want to represent my work</p>	<p>48). Explicates client's behaviour as part of her characteristics (Lines 51-52: Attribution of fixed quality). Offers new framework to client-stylist relationship (Lines 57-58). This framework is not pursued further in the thread.</p>
	<p>HarrietX (12-18-2005)</p>	<p>Lines 60-62: Retains X3's framework on stylist's role in the client's personal life.</p>
59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66	<p>you all are right about those kind of clients.. After my anger subsided I started to feel bad because one of our jobs as hairdressers are listening to people and I am a firm believer of encouraging people who are down and out ... I really appreciate you all because it is so nice to come here and unwind and read your posts and talk to you all like I know you all personally..You are all so helpful and encouraging.Group hug, lol....:D</p>	<p>Line 59: Attribution of unity. Creating a category of problematic clients.</p>
	<p>gennaro (12-19-2005)</p>	<p>Lines 62-66: Attribution of emotion. Sharing stories in Hair Pro Forum allows the stylist to feel better about herself.</p>
67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82	<p>I have only ever sacked one client but she was habitually late, complained at the price, complained about my blowdrys. Well I didn't care about the blowdrys, ...As for being late, I hate to keep people waiting, so I don't like fitting people in when they are late, but often do. This particular client was late and my next appointment was just about to be started. I told her she would have to rebook this time as I couldn't just fit her in. She was rather indignant. So I just said I would be able to do her hair any more as we are just not suited to each other. She left in a huff. Best part is she doesn't come in anymore and I am not in a bad frame of mind when doing other clients wondering what is going to be her problem today. Yes the money is important, but if one person makes the time bad for other clients, then her money doesn't add up to what I lose on others.</p>	<p>Lines 67-69: Positive feedback on Mallory's cues on clients who deserve to be divorced. Offers new framework on a client's behaviour during service delivery (Line 77-82)</p>
	<p>X3 (12-19-2005)</p>	<p>Lines 83-88: Explicates hair stylist's professional values.</p>
83 84 85 86 87 88	<p>i certainly agree with the "inviting a client to go elsewhere" and have done it as well. it is SO not worth the lack of respect from them to keep them, no matter what the monetary pay off may be. i have had to do that too. only we can allow ourselves to be treated poorly and we can fix it too!:cool:</p>	
	<p>betweenjobs (04-25-2006)</p>	<p>Nursing home clients as a category.</p>
89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97	<p>Just wanted to post a funny story, I was working in a nursing home salon, and filling in for a stylist who was on vacation, well I think the ladies were upset because they knew the stylist wants to retire soon, and they Love her...(loyal clients to the very end..kinda sweet really..) So here I am with not much experience dealing with clients who are so frail, and this client who was under the dryer with (you guessed it) her roller set, is sitting slumped over VERY still eyes glazed, and pale looking (well most of</p>	<p>Lines 95-99: Attribution of fixed quality. Nursing home clients have specific behaviours.</p>
		<p>Lines 108-111: Attribution of emotion: Stylists generally derive amusement from their</p>

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
98	these ladies are pretty pale) and I thought, OMG!!! She's	experiences.
99	died!!!	
100	I am freaking OUT...I gently touch her sholder and	Lines 112-113: Attribution of fixed quality. Nursing home clients as a category.
101	nothing....OMG....I try again, firmer this time, calling her	
102	name...FINALLY she comes to...okay my heart is now	
103	backing down my throat..thank the good Lord...	
104	I get her rollers out, style her and give her the hand mirror	
105	for the once around, I said, "How do you like it?" Knowing	
106	she would, it looked great...and she said, "You've made	
107	me look older..."	
108	When I told this story to my friend, she asked, "Isn't this	
109	the lady who you thought was dead just minutes	
110	before???" I busted a gut laughing, now my friend insists I	
111	can really do wonders lol	
	<hr/>	
	Mallory (04-26-2006)	
112	I help volunteer at a nursing home salon. And they are a	
113	special group of people, but some of them are just really	
114	interesting. It takes a special person to do this full time,	
115	really. I was there one day, and this lady was doing	
116	something with her cape. We looked at her, and the lady I	
117	volunteer for said "Oh my god she's eating the cape." So	
118	we gently took it out of her mouth, and sure enough there	
119	was a big hole in it, like a goat of something got it. This	
120	lady was not upset or distressed (we have had those) she	
121	was just as calm as anything eating the plastic cape, I	
122	mean what else would you do with a cape. lol.	
	<hr/>	
	DamonD (05-13-2005)	
123	...	Survivor stories: surviving client's attempt to get free service.
124	I'll be da~~ed if she doesn't complain that the hair isn't on	DamonD enacts the experience.
125	the wrong side again! I tell her the Jr Stylist had just	Client insisted on be given
126	changed it....anyway, I change it for her again...I fix, and	service, constantly complained
127	fix and refix....she continues to mess it up, nearly having a	(lines 124-127) and then
128	seizure. SHE THEN COMMENTS...."I've NEVER had to pay	suggested that she should not be
129	for a haircut that looks like this. If I'm not happy they don't	asked to pay for poor service
130	make me pay for it. At this point, we've spent an extra	(lines 128-130). Same cues
131	hour or more on her and I'm not about to let her leave	(constant complaints) are given a
132	without paying for this. If she had been polite &	different interpretation when
133	simply said she wasn't happy, I would have not charged	combined with other behaviours.
134	her. As it was, she was rude and mean and trying to get	
135	something for nothing.	
136	I am usually not one to say something to a customer that's	
137	rude, but I was at my breaking point. In an ugly tone of	
138	voice, I told her "Well I'll tell you one thing, it looks a hell	
139	of a lot better than it did when you walked in that door!".	
140	She was shocked. I told her she would pay or I would call	
141	the police & have her arrested. I picked up the	
142	phone, she screams at me & asks how much. I give	
143	her the amount....and get this. She doesn't have enough	
144	money. She litterally had to scrape thru her purse to come	
145	up with the \$40. I told her I'd take Visa or MCCC and she	
146	screams that she wouldn't pay interest on such an awful	
147	haircut. She paid me about \$20 in cash, she had a couple	
148	rolls of nickles, a roll or two of pennies and the remainder	
149	came from an overturned purse to gather up change.	

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
150	I collected her money and told her she was not welcome	
151	at our salon again. Of course my hubby said I should have	
152	physically tossed her azzout!	
153	She had walked into the salon expecting to pull a fast one	
154	& get a freebie. It didn't work for her that day.	
155	I do top quality work. I have stylists from other salons that	
156	come to me. I know my work and this lady got a good cut.	

Table 7. 2 Gripe stories: Unpleasant clients

HarrietX's story starts the thread with an emotional tone as a vent topic. HarrietX describes the customer in detail, framing her in a negative light with a suggestion that she was a drug addict (line 5). The client pushed HarrietX to schedule an appointment at the end of a busy day, HarrietX had second thoughts on the day and cancelled the appointment in the morning (lines 8–12), which led to the customer being rude to HarrietX and accusing her of acting unprofessionally (lines 13–14). The stylist was very angry and vented anger in front of her daughter (lines 15–16). HarrietX enacts the experience by creating a story consisting of events that culminated in the venting of anger over the client's rude behaviour. HarrietX associates this anger with the client's accusation that cancelling the appointment showed a lack of professionalism on the part of the stylist. HarrietX's story implies that the client's appointment deserved to be cancelled due to the emotionally draining quality she brought to the previous encounter with HarrietX. The poster offers a possible story where events are put into sensible order (taking appointment–cancellation and getting rude remarks–venting) along with categorisation of elements (problematic client). The story allows HarrietX to make sense of the action of “exploding” (line 15), implying it was out of character as shown in the daughter's reaction (lines 16–17).

HarrietX's message starts a discussion where online community members give collective interpretations of her experience. Mallory gives negative feedback by not

agreeing with HarrietX's decision to cancel the appointment (lines 30–31). This feedback adds new data to the story in the form of characteristics for clients who deserve to be “divorced” (lines 26–28). The feedback encourages HarrietX to give more detail of the client's characteristics, enabling further reflection on the decision to take the appointment with the client in the first place (lines 36–39). X3 (lines 42–45) provides a new framework in explicating the hair stylist's role to encourage problematic clients (line 44). However, this role is contested in the following reply from Moonlight Style, where it is suggested that some clients are characteristically problematic (lines 50–52), and the only way to handle them is to stop providing service for them. The reply to this discussion shows that HarrietX has retained X3's suggestion that one of the hair stylist's jobs is to encourage people (lines 60–61). She makes sense of her role in the service encounter and blames herself for her decision to cancel the appointment. HarrietX's action to publish the experience with this client to the Forum allows Hair Pro members to give their feedback. Collective interpretation of the story enables HarrietX to make sense of her uncharacteristic behaviour and establishes the meaning of a hair stylist's role in relation to encouraging clients with difficult personal lives. In other words, HarrietX learns about the hair stylist's role by giving new meaning to the experience with the difficult client.

HarrietX's story encourages Forum members to share similar experiences with problematic clients. These stories become a major theme of the thread where members describe client behaviour that leads to a decision to stop providing service to a particular client. Sensemaking activities are found in stories in the thread: the hair stylist enacts an encounter that leads to a decision to fire a client and selects a frame to interpret the

client's behaviour which allows them to make sense of the decision. These stories have one element that appears repeatedly:

“and if you had a client that came regularly ... she always complained about her hair”
(Mallory, lines 24-25)

“This lady is never pleased. i take extra time and care to baby her and make sure everything is just right ...” (Moonlight style, lines 47-49)

“when she starts complaining I am going to.”(Moonlight style, lines 53-54)

“I have only ever sacked one client but ..., complained at the price, complained about my blowdrys” (gennaro, lines 67-68)

Analysis of stories in the thread shows that hair stylists associate constant complaining with problematic clients. This feedback probably follows Mallory's message (lines 25–27), which draws the community's attention to specific behaviours shown with client type. The community gives meaning to constant complaints of the stylist's inability to please the client, leading to a conclusion that the hair stylist–client relationship is not working. The conclusion justifies the hair stylist's decision to stop providing a service for the problematic client, despite a loss of income. The thread clearly shows that sensemaking activities in the Hair Pro community guide individuals to make sense of possible future encounters with this client type.

The third customer type in the thread, customers who try to get free service, demonstrates different frames used to interpret a customer's complaint. DamonD's story (lines 123–156) describes a detailed encounter with a customer who complained through the entire service delivery. The story shows that DamonD takes the complaint as a cue to enact a different interpretation of a similar event. As with previous stories in the thread, a customer complaint is given meaning—showing dissatisfaction with the hair stylist's service. However, DamonD offers a different interpretation, as is shown in the way she puts the sequence of events together: the customer was not pleased—the

stylist attempted a service recovery (lines 124–126)—the customer suggested she would not pay for what she considered to be poor service (lines 128–130)—the stylist started to suspect her intention (lines 130–132)—the stylist was proven correct about the customer’s misbehaviour (lines 144–145). DamonD’s story creates a different meaning, by attributing causal connection to the customer’s complaint through the sequence of events which showed she did not have enough money for the service (lines 144–145). DamonD’s story shows a different context for complaining behaviour by adding detailed cues that should be noted in the context. It draws attention to accompanying cues for the event (i.e., the customer was not a regular, she explicitly suggested she should not be made to pay for poor service), makes a causal connection between events and thus demonstrates that a different meaning is created for a different context.

7.3.2 Learning about Impression Management: Making Sense of Unpleasant Encounters

Examples in the previous section show hair styling as emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Thread excerpts in Table 7.1 (see pp. 245–246) demonstrate that hair stylists often have to hide their annoyance at a customer’s behaviour. Hair stylists’ attempts to manage emotion appear implicitly in jenniferB’s reaction to her client’s behaviour (“*As soon as I had her hair styled... she grabbed a BRUSH and began vigorously brushing her hair... I was mortified.*”). In another example, HarrietX vents anger in front of a family member instead of confronting the difficult client (Table 7.2, p. 253, lines 15–16). These examples show hair stylists engaged in emotional labour, dealing with the management of emotion to appear in control of the situation.

Impression management is particularly important in dealing with service failure. The following example demonstrates how the discussion forum allows members to make sense of service failure and learn to display a correct emotion. Table 7.3 presents the discussion on the topic. The example is part of a long thread in which members vent their feelings over various topics about their working life. Five consecutive messages were extracted, consisting of a string of conversations about Lady Lacey’s service failure experience. These messages were treated as one text or major story, involving one initial story and four interpretations from members. Two of the interpretations contain similar stories which were drawn from the posters’ personal experiences.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
	Lady Lacey (08-06-2005)	
1	Ok I need to vent.	Line 1: Attribution of emotion. Lady Lacey derives frustration from the event.
2	Yesterday I had a mother (60 ish) come in	
3	because her daughter loved the color work I did	Lines 2-8: Customer’s background.
4	on her a few weeks ago. They drove her up	
5	from sterling VA. about an hour away. (cost of a	Lines 2-4: Attribution of causal
6	salon is 3x higher there) any way she had 2	connection. Creates a link between a
7	inches solid grey regrowth, with box color 5 n/g	previous satisfactory colouring service
8	Cherry Color she and hubby had been doing ... I	with the daughter and the present
9	expalinedeverything I needed to do ... The color	encounter with her mother.
10	came out great. ... then she gave me a picture	
11	for the cut. ... 1/2 way throughthe cut I have	Lines 13, 16-17: Attribution of emotion.
12	50% of her hair combed up to do the layering,	Customer’s verbal and non-verbal
13	and she totally panics that I've cut it to short. I	behaviours are interpreted as panic.
14	stop in the middle of the cut, and comb all her	
15	hair down and start checking my cut from left to	Lines 13-14: Attribution of responsibility.
16	right, she keeps saying OH my I'm having an	Customer blames Lady Lacey for cutting
17	axiotyattacke....:shock:(meenwhile I'm	her hair too short.
18	counting to ten and trying to stay cool. I give	
19	her the picture and show her the lady in the	Lines 18-19: Attribution of emotion. Lady
20	picture hair is just on her sholders. She keeps	Lacey manages emotion by attempting to
21	pulling on her hair and saying it is going to	appear calm in order to be able to stay in
22	shrink when you dry it, and now one side is	control of the encounter.
23	longer than the other. I tell her hair has no curl,	
24	so it should not shrink when it is dry. then I	Lines 19-27: Lady Lacey’s attempt to
25	remind her I has in the middle of her cut, and	reason with the customer.
26	when I am finished it won't be uneven.	
27	She says she loves the color, But I can tell at this	Lines 28-33: Attribution of responsibility.
28	point there is no changing her mind that the cut	Lady Lacey admits her mistake; however,
29	is not to short, I offer not the charge her for the	her attempt at recovery was rejected.
30	cut, but she refuses the offer. When completed	
31	it looked dam close to the picture, but I was	Lines 34-35: Attribution of emotion.
32	read for a shot or two. It has been a long time	Describes the stylist’s own feelings

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
33	since I have had that happen. I forgot what a	throughout the event. Shows the capability to manage emotions, and eventually the encounter.
34	freak out that can be for use, while smiling	
35	through our teeth about keeping them clam.....	
36	thanks I needed to get that out... My boy friend	
37	just did not understand... he was like, well did	Lines 42-57: Positive feedback. Linda confirms Lady Lacey's story by accepting Lady Lacey's cues of hair length as the cause of service failure. Draws on personal experience, Linda retold the story to highlight how to manage the problem: 'trick' customers by cutting their hair longer than what they asked for (Lines 48-50).
38	you cut her to short, I said I might have by a 1/4	
39	inch, and I offered a free cut what more could I	
40	do?	
41	<hr/>	
	Linda (08-06-2005)	
42	UGH! PEOPLE! I have men that do this to me all	Line 42: Attribution of unity. "PEOPLE" and "men" as an entire class.
43	of the time. They'll say, I want a 2 on the sides	
44	and longer on the top! I'm like, they have no	
45	idea what a two looks like so I always start them	
46	with a 4 or 5 without telling them. Then I say,	Lines 43-47: Attribution of fixed quality. Customers try to be co-participants in service delivery and try to control it.
47	"how's that?" - "perfect" they say.	
48	People have no idea about length so even with	
49	a picture I always cut it 1/2" or 1" longer then I	
50	need to. I can always take more off in the end.	Line 52: Attribution of unity. Blonde customers who ask to go dark again are treated as an entire class.
51	The other thing I need to be careful about are	
52	bleached blondes who want to go dark again. I	
53	never do it all in one pop because they are so	
54	used to being blonde that they will almost	Lines 52-53: Attribution of fixed quality. Bleached blonde customers do not expect their appearance to be significantly different.
55	always HATE that sudden change.	
56	On the other hand maybe she was trying to get	
57	something free outta ya?!!	
	<hr/>	
	s-weave(08-06-2005, 08:33 AM)	
58	Yeah, even though they come in for a change in	Lines 56-57: Negative feedback. Offers another possible story. This plot was not pursued further.
59	style, it seems that some people really don't	
60	want to change.	
	<hr/>	
	Missy(08-06-2005, 05:37 PM)	
61	Beware of people bringing their mothers!	Lines 58-60: Positive feedback on a story redraft (Linda's). Picks up Linda's cues on change and starts to redraft Lady Lacey's story into customers who do not like to change.
62	Usually the daughter wants the change and not	
63	the Mom. Especially when they have been	
64	doing their hair at home.	
65	At least she liked the color!!! ☺	
	<hr/>	
	X3 (08-06-2005, 06:22 PM)	
66	Good grief Lady Lacey - sorry no freebies. You	Lines 61-65: Positive feedback on the story redraft.
67	did well calming the situation down, referring	
68	back to the picture she brought in and	Line 61: Attribution of unity. Daughters who bring their mothers. Mothers who go to the salon because of their daughters.
69	explaining again to her. I hope you didn't	
70	discount your work!!!	Lines 61-64: Attribution of fixed quality. Mothers who are brought to the salon by their daughters do not like change. Picks up Lady Lacey's cues on the customer's background. Combines Lady Lacey's and Linda's story to make a comprehensive one, uncovering deeper meaning of the customer's actions (the mother was not
71	I have a woman like this as well ... she's been	
72	hacking her own hair for years. Every single	
73	time she comes in for her appointment she tells	
74	me the same story of where she cut what. I tell	
75	her the same story-"would you like to prebook	
76	your next appt. so you won't have to do that?"	
77	Well of course she never does. In the beginning	
78	she'd always be late and then run over her	
79	appt. time telling me exactly where to put the	
80	curling iron curl etc. it was like she didn't want	

Line	Transcript excerpt	Notes
81	to leave my chair. (my fault for allowing it) We	happy about the length because she initially did not want to change her appearance).
82	no longer do this routine. TAKE CHARGE!	
83	& So true about changes:dude:! I (have	Lines 66-70: Positive feedback on Lady Lacey's actions. Lines 71-88: Picks up Linda's cues on controlling the customer, X3 draws on a personal experience and retells the story to highlight how to manage this customer type.
85	learned to) ask them exactly what they like	
86	about the picture they bring in. Is it the length,	
87	the bangs, the highlight, the colour, the model's	
88	lipstick.....ya never know.	

Table 7. 3 Making sense of an unpleasant encounter

Lady Lacey starts the string with her service failure story, setting an emotional tone right at the beginning: “*Ok I need to vent*”. The customer’s background is briefly described (lines 2–8), followed by a chronological sequence describing her interpretation of the customer’s behaviour (line 13, lines 16–17), the stylist’s efforts to control the situation (line 18–27) and the customer’s rejection of the service recovery (lines 30–31). The story shows Lady Lacey’s attempt to make sense of the event. Lady Lacey makes the event exist by taking it out of the stream of encounters with other customers, noticing the significant differences between this event and other regular encounters. The poster creates some order by bracketing the event into one encounter involving the particular customer. Although the focus remains on the present, the poster attributes causal connection by revealing the reason why the customer chose her service (lines 2–4). In other words, the existing event is caused by a previous encounter where Lady Lacey performed a satisfying colouring service for the customer’s daughter. Lady Lacey attaches an emotional tone to the story, interpreting the customer’s action as an expression of dissatisfaction (lines 13, 17) and describing the emotional effects of these actions (lines 17–18, 34–36). Lady Lacey takes responsibility for the event, by assuming blame for the mistake made (lines 28–30, 39); at the same time showing

competence by staying in control, attempting to calm the customer and offering not to charge for the cut. These processes enable Lady Lacey to make sense of the situation by creating order in the flow of events.

The replies to Lady Lacey show collective interpretation of the poster's experience. Linda confirms Lady Lacey's cues (hair length) and uses it to create a similar story (lines 43–47). Linda's message demonstrates positive feedback to Lady Lacey's initial story about the cause of the customer's displeasure. However, Linda's offer of an alternative interpretation (lines 56–57) also suggests doubt. Two following messages (from s-weave and Missy) offer a different framework: the event is framed in terms of a customer who does not like to change, and the meaning of the her displeasure is shifted to her unwillingness to change. Linda mentions change in relation to blonde customers, however s-weave shifts the meaning and frames it into Lady Lacey's customer (lines 58–60). Missy's (lines 61–65) positive feedback to s-weave points to Lady Lacey's extracted cues. Missy's statement (*“Especially when they have been doing their hair at home”*) refers to Lady Lacey's description (*“with box color Cherry color she and hubby had been doing”*), to emphasise that the mother does not really want to change. Lady Lacey offers a plausible story which frames the cause of the customer's dissatisfaction as the length of her hair. Members' feedback, however, shifts the meaning of this story. The story becomes a customer who does not like change as the mother is specific about the hair style. These activities show how members collectively interpret Lady Lacey's experience. The customer's dissatisfaction with the stylist's service is given interpretations, and these interpretations are framed with the discussion participants' own experience. These activities redraft Lady Lacey's story so it is more

comprehensive; now the reason for the customer's dissatisfaction is not only the hair cut length but also the customer's reluctance to change.

7.3.3 Making Sense of Social Aspects of Service Encounters: Stories as Sensemaking Tools

This chapter presented four examples to illustrate story types shared in the Hair Pro discussion forum. Table 7.1, Humorous stories: Annoying clients, shows the community sharing terse stories to describe customers' irritating behaviour. Messages in the thread show a common theme: hair stylists' implicit reference to behaviours that show a customer's ignorance of the hair stylist's efforts to deliver service. Gripe stories are illustrated with two threads, both in relation to a decision to discontinue providing service to problematic regular clients. These threads show divorcing or firing clients to be a recurring and popular topic. The first example of the gripe story type (jenniferB's decision to fire a problematic client) shows collective sensemaking, where rude behaviour is given meaning as the client's lack of respect for the stylist. The second example, shown in Table 7.2, demonstrates the community's collective sensemaking to give meaning to customer complaints. The last example, shown in Table 7.3, presents the topic of impression management: a member's attempt to display the right emotion during an unpleasant encounter, which leads to a service failure. The thread illustrates the community's collective interpretation of the unpleasant encounter.

Story examples presented in the previous sections demonstrate learning as an ability to create meaning from social interaction with customers. Based on the examples analysed in this study and presented in this chapter, sensemaking mostly starts when a hair stylist has a negative experience with a customer, as shown with the stylist's enactment of the

encounter. An event is created comprising interaction with a customer category or with a specific unpleasant encounter. The community's interpretation of the event enables members to make sense of their decisions to fire problematic clients or of their feelings towards certain customer categories. Collective sensemaking activities are shown as feedback in the form of sharing stories about similar experiences. These stories provide readers with a source of guidance for future social encounters. In other words, making sense of the social aspect of a service encounter is typically about learning how to best act in a particular situation.

It is clearly visible in the examples discussed in this chapter that the community uses storytelling as a tool to make sense of social aspects of a service encounter. An apparent pattern is found in making sense of social interaction, different from that of technical aspects in hair styling. Collective sensemaking of the technical aspect demonstrates that the community's feedback generally follows the thread instigator's explicit cues, manifested in questions posted in the thread messages. These questions guide participants to focus on a specific part of a technical problem. (A detailed discussion of this topic was presented in Section 7.2). Unlike technical aspects of hair styling, social interaction is an ambiguous situation where each encounter is different. There is no explicit point of reference to focus on other than the sequence of actions in the story, and thus cues are implicit. Despite this, thread examples show that each thread has recurring themes, which appear in most stories. As the excerpts in Table 7.1 (Humorous stories: Annoying clients) demonstrate, the recurring theme is the hair stylists' interpretation of behaviours that represent customers' ignorance. In Table 7.2, the customer's complaint emerges as a recurring theme. It can be assumed that participants relate to these themes as representing notable cues in the shared stories. They retain

these elements as cues and incorporate them in stories they post as feedback in the thread. These stories are the result of participants' interpretation of the noted elements in which they use their own framework to retell their personal experiences. These activities are indicative of collective sensemaking; the community's feedback to a member's enactment of events.

Collective sensemaking in the Hair Pro discussion forum is similar to Boje's (1991) story performance, whereby storytellers and audiences engage in a dynamic process in interpreting stories. In an online context, the community members offer their interpretation of the initial story in the form of reply messages, which may contain suggestions on how to handle the situation or a personal story about a similar experience. Collective sensemaking is shown as the community discusses elements of the event. Sharing similar stories in one thread guides the collective sensemaking process as the thread guides readers to interpret cues presented in the story with the community's preferred frameworks (Tracy et al., 2006). For example, a thread about annoying clients (presented in Table 7.1) puts together anecdotal stories that involve customers' irritating behaviour. The cue is the irritating behaviour, which is interpreted as customers' ignorance (the framework). Thus, interaction in the bulletin board enables them to shift the meaning of the initial story by taking elements and cues from the initial story and either simplifying or exaggerating them (Boje, 1991).

Findings from this study support Weick's (1995) ideas that popular stories are the ones that are noteworthy, that depart from regular experiences. Findings show stories about customers are generally about their misbehaviour during hair styling encounters. Stories about service failure and the hair stylist's attempt at recovery are also popular. These

events are interesting because they are unexpected. Hair stylists must take actions that are difficult and cannot be handled through routine conduct. The stories' popularity shows that such stories are the source of fear and curiosity (Weick, 1995). Reading these stories allows hair stylists to be aware of the unusual occasions (Thier & Erlach, 2005), enables them to update their framework for interpreting similar cues (Weick, 1995), and thus prepares them for similar encounters and situations in the future.

Based on the examples analysed, four interpretive devices are commonly found in stories about customers: attribution of unity, attribution of fixed quality, attribution of causal connection and attribution of emotion. Findings from this study are similar to Gabriel's (1995) findings in organisational stories; attribution of unity is generally paired with attribution of fixed quality. For example, children (attribution of unity) are generally attributed with an unpredictable behaviour (attribution of fixed quality).

Previous studies in a hair styling context (e.g., Cohen, 2010; Gimlin, 1996) indicate that hair stylists form friendships with their clients to gain a following (Cohen, 2010), or to feel they have an equal social status with the clients (Gimlin, 1996). Stories found in the Hair Pro Forum often cast clients as "others". This finding supports the community's perspective of the hair stylist–client relationship as more of a professional relationship than a friendship. Being friendly is limited to making a customer comfortable during an encounter. Clients are not the stylist's friends; therefore sharing personal information is discouraged.

In the examples most stories are told in chronological sequence. Stories mostly start at the beginning of the encounter, followed by descriptions of notable events during

service delivery, and end with the customer leaving the salon. Telling the story in a sequence implies previous events are the cause of subsequent ones, therefore creating causal connection within the chain of events. Attribution of causal connection is the product of selection, where the storyteller filters the events with the help of her or his existing framework. This activity reduces the number and nature of possible causes that might influence the event.

Attribution of emotion is apparent in the threads about social interaction with customers. Hair stylists use the device to interpret a customer's actions and express emotion they derive from an encounter. Thread analysis in the present study shows that sensemaking activities guide individuals to make sense of and deal with emotional events (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Driver, 2009). An interesting point emerges as dealing with an emotional experience often leads to a discussion about the hair stylist's occupational identity.

In summary so far, story-work enables individuals to organise facts as experience. Telling a story enables the storyteller to create a sequence of the facts and use interpretive devices to attribute meaning to the story. The storyteller offers a plausible story to the community by submitting it to the Forum's bulletin board. The community's interpretation of events guides retention; which cues and frameworks in the story should be remembered for future events. In the group context this is a form of occupational value socialisation. In this case, participation in the online community enables individuals to make sense of workplace experiences in hair styling settings. Constructing a professional identity is apparent in discussions, particularly in managing social interactions with customers. The topic indicates that learning is more than

knowing technical and social aspects of an encounter. Learning is constructing an identity as a professional hair stylist. In other words, learning is becoming a professional hair stylist, which entails understanding of practice and identities. The following section will discuss learning as development of professional identity.

7.3.4 Learning as Development of Professional Identity

Service encounters often put hair stylists in ambiguous situations because stylists may not have the exact knowledge of cause–effect relationships in relation to customer behaviour. A service encounter can be interpreted in multiple ways; for example, complaints can be interpreted as showing customers’ various motivations. The present study shows that the online community provides frameworks to interpret a situation, in terms of both technical and social aspects of an encounter. These frameworks allow stylists to give meaning to those events while simultaneously limiting other factors as responsible for the occurrence of the event. Community members’ feedback on a story allows readers to be exposed to and learn about the community’s values (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark, 2006). Therefore, readers can learn about how to best act according to valued enterprises in a community (Wenger, 1998b).

Hair stylists are generally considered as having lower social status than their clients. As part of society, hair stylists are aware of their occupational image. The sensemaking process in relation to professional identity often begins as a member tries to construct a coherent sense of self after an unpleasant encounter. These encounters are emotional as members try to feel positive about their chosen profession. Participation in the Hair Pro Forum allows members to create a boundary between themselves as the role occupants

and others. For example, community members treat customers as indistinguishable from each other, as expressed in words used to refer to customers: “people”, “kids” and “parents”. In contrast, the words “us” and “we” are used to describe themselves. Stories about customers generally characterise them as villains. These stories demonstrate members’ articulation of attributes that make hair stylists different from the others (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The textual form makes the boundary explicit, and thus the occupational identity is more salient.

An identity regulation can be observed as collective sensemaking, which guides participants to define being hair stylists by reference to the “Other”; that is, the client (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Stories about unpleasant hair styling encounters cast customers as villains or fools, or as cunning. These stories implicitly communicate a sense that stylists are the ones who hold moral values. This is similar to social weighting, where the community tries to sustain positive social identity by “condemning the condemners” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The process enables participants to dismiss the negative event and feel positive about their identity as hair stylists. Thus this case study supports Weick’s (1995) idea that sensemaking process is grounded in identity construction.

This chapter has presented an online community as a source of identity regulation that enables members to make sense of their identity as professional hair stylists. Learning as participation in a CoP facilitates development of identity through these activities: observing role models to identify potential identity, experimenting with the provisional identity and evaluating the experiment against internal standards and external feedback (Ibarra, 1999). As a knowledge repository, the Hair Pro Forum offers plenty of stories

about social interactions in hair styling encounters. These stories enable members to observe how more experienced hair stylists deal with different customer types.

Experimentation and evaluation activities are evident in the Hair Pro Forum, as it offers a safe place to test an individual's experimentation of professional identity and obtain feedback—such as HarrietX's story about her unpleasant encounters with a rude client (Table 7.2). HarrietX develops her identity by offering her provisional self as a professional hair stylist who is also a caretaker of the client's wellbeing. Although supporting her decision to stop providing service to the rude client, the community challenges her choice to suddenly cancel the client's appointment. Community feedback allows HarrietX to evaluate her interpretation of being a professional hair stylist and learn that she can handle appointment issues with problematic clients differently.

7.4 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

This chapter has demonstrated the professional community's role in guiding individual learning. Collective sensemaking facilitates individual learning as community members give their interpretation of the shared event. Participation in an occupational community enables individuals to learn as they develop awareness of the community's practice, leading to understanding and engagement with its repertoire and values. Learning is achieved through participation in the professional community, which involves development of practice and identity.

Storytelling as sensemaking tools are also presented and discussed. Stories have been shown as sensemaking tools as they facilitate individuals to organise facts as experience

by creating a sequence of actions out of the flow of events. This chapter has also demonstrated how individuals use interpretive devices to offer a plausible story, leading to a collective sensemaking process in the community. Collective sensemaking guides individuals to make sense of workplace experiences by noticing cues in the shared stories and providing frameworks to interpret these cues.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to gain deeper understanding of knowledge and learning in the service context by investigating how frontline personnel make sense of their workplace experiences in an online CoP, namely the Hair Pro Forum. This final chapter presents a summary of the study, research contributions, research considerations and suggestions for further research. A summary of chapters one to seven is presented below.

Chapter one provided an overview of the research by presenting the background of the study. This chapter also introduced concepts and research methodologies used in the study. Chapter two presented a literature review, covering the main ideas, concepts and theories guiding the study. Learning as a participation in an online community, proposed at the end of chapter two, guided the development of the research methodology presented in chapter three. A qualitative case study design was described in chapter three, along with discussions on qualitative research standards of quality and ethical issues for research in online community settings.

Chapter four provided the context of this study by presenting a description of the hair styling service and industry. This chapter presented hair styling encounters as complex social interactions between social actors with unequal social status. Research findings were presented and discussed in chapters five to seven.

Chapter five provided answers to two research questions: (1) Why do individuals participate in an online community of frontline personnel? and (2) What are the online community's characteristics that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning? The chapter argued that the Forum is a space to exchange knowledge, obtain social support and be with people in a similar situation. Seeking social support and friendship themes are important in creating an environment that facilitates knowledge exchange and learning.

Answers to three research questions can be found in chapter six. This chapter presented knowledge in the service context as the result of information processing. Knowledge was discussed as having elements that influence how individuals share it; therefore answering these research questions: (1) What workplace knowledge do individuals share in an online community of frontline service personnel? and (2) How do individuals share knowledge about service encounters in an online community of frontline service personnel? Findings presented here demonstrated that along with textual media, Forum members communicate hair styling techniques using visual cues. The visual cues allow members to have a common reference point. Discussion on this topic answered this research question: How do online community members overcome limitations of online media to share and learn implicit elements of service encounters?

The last research question was addressed in chapter seven: How do individuals develop practice and identity in an online community of frontline service personnel? The chapter presented learning in an online CoP as a dynamic process between collective sensemaking and individual sensemaking that leads to the individual's understanding of practice and construction of professional identity.

The following sections present research contributions, discuss research considerations and offer suggestions for future studies.

8.2 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Research about knowledge and learning in the service context is fragmented into two main strands. Service management literatures discuss knowledge in the service context as the results of information processing. Literatures in service management and identity indicate that understanding of identity enables frontline service personnel to manage service encounters. Along with these two strands, Community of Practice literatures suggest that informal workplace communities provide space to learn about practice and occupational identity. These research strands present theoretical foundations to explain learning in the group level (See Figure 1.1, Conceptual framework, page 9). However, the micro-processes within a community of practice that enables learning have not been elaborated in detail. There is a limited description on how individuals learn in a CoP.

This study uses sensemaking concepts to investigate how interactions in an online community of frontline service personnel guide individuals to learn about practice and identity. Two main theoretical contributions in service management area were made. First, this study presents evidence that an online community provide space to learn about practice and occupational identity. Second, using sensemaking concepts, this study also explains how interactions in the community enable individuals to learn: collective sensemaking guides individuals to make sense of service encounters experiences shared in the community. This section presents key findings and research contributions of the study in three sections: Hair Pro Forum as a CoP and a Back

Region (Section 8.2.1); Knowledge in the Service Context (Section 8.2.2); and Learning in the Service Context as a Sensemaking Process (Section 8.2.3).

A methodological contribution was also made in regard to studying online communities. Chapter 3, Research Methodology, has presented an elaborate process of data collection and analysis which included thread selection and mapping. This study also adapted Gabriel's (2004) stories as sensemaking tool in the context of online communities. The methodological contribution is presented at the end of this section (Section 8.2.4).

8.2.1 Hair Pro Forum: Online Community of Practice as a Back Region

This research makes a contribution in service management and marketing research by demonstrating an online CoP similar to Goffman's (1959) back region concept, where frontline personnel collectively interpret playtext to reveal the subtext. This study shows the Hair Pro Forum as similar to a back region where individuals rehearse performing the ideal standard of themselves as professional hair stylists. The Forum's bulletin board provides space to share service encounter experiences and get community members' interpretations of these encounters. These shared experiences resemble a playtext in a drama production concept. As with rehearsals in a drama production, the Forum allows hair stylists to interpret and discuss playtexts to reveal various aspects of the shared experiences. The community's interpretations are similar to subtexts which enable frontline personnel to see various possibilities to perform a technique or various reactions to a social interaction approach.

Although knowledge exchange is the main motivation for participating in an online community of hair stylists, this study shows that community members also seek emotional support and friendship. This study supports an online community as a back region by providing space to seek emotional support and find friendship from people in a similar situation (Ross, 2007). This study also confirms the community's role in supporting frontline personnel to cope with unpleasant service encounters (Korczyński, 2003), and confirms that the community's coping strategies may not be aligned with the service organisation's goals (Raz, 2007). This research makes a contribution to this existing literature by showing that seeking emotional support and sharing similar experiences enable individuals to develop professional identities. Findings from this study also show that friendship in the community is built on sharing life as hair stylists, involving sharing professional histories and dealing with the general public's perception of hair stylists. These themes have important roles in creating a sense of community, developing trust and encouraging knowledge sharing and learning. This study also shows that although some coping strategies may be incompatible with the organisation's goals, this issue can be balanced by the community's leadership to give excellent service.

8.2.2 Knowledge in the Service Context

This study supports the cognitive selling paradigm (e.g., Sujan et al., 1988; Weitz et al., 1986), which discusses knowledge as the result of information processing. Previous studies have vaguely described knowledge in the service context as knowledge about customers (e.g., Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Gwinner et al., 2005). This study makes a contribution by demonstrating that knowledge in the service context involves frontline

personnel's understanding of technical aspects and complex social interaction approaches. Findings from the study have presented an elaborate description of knowledge in the service context and shown the Forum as a knowledge repository for technical and social interaction repertoires in hair styling.

This research confirms that frontline service personnel share workplace experiences in online communities (Gray, 2004; Henri & Pudelko, 2003). This study also supports previous research, which shows that frontline personnel share and learn about workplace experiences in face-to-face CoPs (Geiger & Turley, 2005; Meyer et al., 2005; Wägar, 2008). This study contributes to this previous research by explaining the role of an online CoP in helping individuals learn about service encounters. Frontline personnel learn through experience, and so knowledge in the service context is difficult to articulate in words. Conclusions from this study show that the Forum helps learning by sharing service encounter experiences and guiding community members to interpret cues in the shared encounters.

This research confirms that online community members adapt to the limitations of computer-mediated communication (Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Swan, 2002). Community members share hair styling techniques through textual and illustrative media. Sharing videos and images improves the richness of this communication approach by presenting a frame of reference. In addition, the bulletin board allows immediate feedback, which enables members to clarify ambiguous issues presented in the videos and images. Storytelling enables hair stylists to observe roles they can perform when interacting with customers.

A key finding of this study is that customers become the centre of attention when their behaviour interrupts the stylists' activities of doing their job. These interruptions have negative consequences as they affect hair stylists' sense of self. Conclusions drawn from this study have shown that the understanding by frontline personnel of their service roles helps them to cope with these consequences. Service roles consists of roles within the organisation and roles that customers expected them to perform, which is related to society's definition of the role. This study has shown that hair stylists' understanding of their professional identity enables them to find balance between controlling the encounter and fulfilling customers' demands without losing their sense of self. In other words, knowledge in the service context entails knowing about practice and identities.

8.2.3 Learning in the Service Context: Narrative Sensemaking of Everyday Experiences

This study contributes to service management and marketing research in describing learning in the service context as participation in an online community of practice. Like previous research, learning in an online CoP enables frontline service personnel to make sense of their relationship with customers (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007) and learn about emotion rules (Seymour & Sandiford, 2005). Whereas previous research suggested that frontline service personnel learn in CoPs (e.g., Geiger & Turley, 2005; Meyer et al., 2005; Wägar, 2008), the present study explains learning as sensemaking activities involving development of practice and construction of professional identities. This study also makes a contribution, by presenting an insight into how professional identity is socially constructed through collective sensemaking activities.

This study shows learning as situated in a social setting of an online community, enabling frontline personnel to develop practice and identity. Using Weick's (1995) sensemaking concepts, this study demonstrates learning in the service context as a meaning-making process involving a dynamic process between groups and individuals. Findings from this study contribute by complementing Wenger's (1998b) idea of identity construction in a community of practice. Wenger (1998b) suggests participation in a CoP guides individuals' understanding of who they are. This study has explained how the community guides individuals to make sense of workplace experiences that lead to a better understanding of who they are as professionals.

The service setting in this study makes a contribution to sensemaking research by demonstrating sensemaking as occurring in everyday interactions in the workplace. Previous studies have focused on sensemaking as activities conducted by managers and leaders to make sense of changes in the organisational environment (e.g., Abolafia, 2010; Maclean et al., 2012; Rouleau, 2005). Setting sensemaking in the service context complements previous research in a manufacturing company (Patriotta, 2003) and a rugby team (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). This study presents sensemaking as an activity to make everyday events in the workplace sensible by capturing how hair stylists make sense of service encounters; for example, complex chemical processes of hair colouring or dealing with customers' behaviour, emotion and mood. The study has shown that making life sensible involves intuitive and often unconscious processes as hair stylists sense and respond to events in their environment.

This study shows the role of stories as sensemaking strategies, explaining sensemaking as micro processes of creating meaning through story-work (Gabriel, 1995, 2004). Thus,

the Forum shows the use of stories as a collective sensemaking tool to create shared meaning (Boyce, 1995). Shared stories represent individuals' sensemaking activities—specifically enactment and selection processes—through which they frame the complexity of hair styling encounters. Sensemaking enables individuals to filter out daily experiences and create order out of the flux of events in the workplace, leading to a deeper understanding of their actions. Stories are narrative performances which act as attention directors, allowing the community to respond and make collective sense of the event. This process guides individuals to assign meaning to cues derived from the event by placing them into a framework or existing knowledge structure. It enables individuals to make sense of these cues, and use them to guide their actions in future encounters.

This study shows that a coherent sense of self is an important aspect of learning, particularly in low status occupations. The study confirms occupational community as a source of discourse to develop identity (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), particularly in low prestige jobs (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) and it supports individual identity as being continuously shaped and redefined (Van Maanen, 2010; Watson, 2008). Findings from this research also make a contribution by demonstrating collective sensemaking in an online community, helping individuals' identity construction. Collective sensemaking in the Hair Pro Forum guides members to have esteem-enhancing interpretations of hair stylists as a low prestige occupation. The Forum provides identity regulation, which allows members to do identity work and make sense of a customer's expectation of a hair stylist's social roles. The Forum constructs hair styling as a professional identity, based on an ability to deliver technical competence in hair styling as equal to society's perception of a profession.

Results from the study demonstrate sensemaking as an emotional event associated with individuals' attempts to create a coherent self-identity. Social interaction stories are rich with the storyteller's emotional descriptions of generally unpleasant events. Developing identity is making sense of self-identity by aligning self-identity with the community's standards. Individuals represent themselves in the story, projecting the history of professional self to the community. These individuals evaluate their experiment of self against the online community's feedback, leading to identity work which reproduces and transforms self-identity. Thus, sensemaking in the Forum allows individuals to bring together internal self-reflection and external engagement with social-identities, enabling them to shape a relatively coherent sense of self.

This study demonstrates that an online community of practice provides space to collectively negotiate responses to an individual's interpretation of events happening in her or his workplace. The Hair Pro Forum is an example of how an online CoP guides individuals to make sense of both technical and social aspects of service encounters. Collective sensemaking enables hair stylists to define what it means to be a professional, which entails competence not only in the technical skills of hair styling but also in the ability to act according to hair stylists' social roles. At the same time, the Forum enables hair stylists to make sense of customers' behaviour in unpleasant encounters and to justify their actions in handling such situations. Thus sensemaking in an online community facilitates identity work in which individuals interpret an event to reproduce and transform their self-identities.

8.2.4 Methodological Contribution

This study makes a methodological contribution by presenting an elaborate process of data collection and analysis for qualitative research in online communities. A key contribution was made by treating a thread as one large text which often consists of more than one topic. Previous studies tend to present a simplified thread as a focused discussion between online community members (e.g. Desanctis et al., 2003; Hemetsberger & Reinhardt, 2006; Herrmann, 2007; Ross, 2007). In fact, discussion threads are often appearing incoherent as members raise new topics and simultaneously discuss them. This study examined all topics in a thread, classified messages according to their arrival time and topics, deconstructed the order of the messages and drew a thread map to present a more focused and coherent discussion. Thus, unlike previous research in online communities, a thread was analysed as in its complex entirety. Thread maps allowed the researcher to investigate how the community discuss an issue and how participants contribute to the discussion. Importantly, thread maps enabled the researcher to examine how a discussion of an issue was enriched by messages that seemed irrelevant if separated from the entire thread.

Another methodological contribution was made by using sensemaking concepts as a framework to examine discussions in online communities. My study makes a contribution by using Gabriel's (2004) stories as sensemaking tools in online community setting. Weick's (1995) sensemaking was used as a framework to analyse communication process in an online community of investors, focusing on how discussion participants make sense of fuzzy financial reports (Herrmann, 2007). The study was focused on the results of the sensemaking process online as it lacks an explanation of how groups and individuals interact in collective sensemaking.

One of the key findings of my study is a detailed description of interactions between group and individuals that guide frontline service personnel to learn about practice and identity. This finding was enabled by using Gabriel's (1995, 2004) poetic tropes as interpretation tools. Similar with Herrman's (2007) study, messages were compared sentence by sentence to see how discussion participants make sense of the topic. My study expands the methodology by using poetic tropes as a framework to examine how discussion participants interpret previous messages. Poetic tropes allowed the researcher to follow an individual's sensemaking process as presented in the messages: to identify frameworks used in the interpretation process, find which parts of the previous messages were retained and, eventually, be able to recognise how group influence individual sensemaking. These processes enabled the researcher to investigate how an online community guide individuals to give meaning to and make sense of messages shared in the community's discussion forum.

In conclusion, this study makes methodological contributions by deconstructing discussion threads to explore knowledge shared in an online CoP. The methodology allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of what frontline personnel know about hair styling encounters by examining knowledge as the result of information processing. Message maps allowed the researcher to track the flow of ideas and explain how knowledge is socially constructed through discussion. Stories were collected as data to investigate how frontline personnel learn from their everyday experiences. This method is a unique contribution to the study of online communities of service personnel.

8.3 RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

This study has certain considerations that need to be taken into account. Chapter three presented extensive discussion on strategies employed to ensure the research fulfilled the qualitative research's standard of quality. This section discusses two issues to be taken into consideration: first, the observational and textual form of data, and second, the single case study approach.

The first issue is the observational and textual form of data. Data was collected from the Forum's publicly available archives, and thus it was recorded without the intervention of the researcher. These messages were interpreted to examine knowledge content and learning processes in an online community of service personnel. A consideration to this type of data is that the researcher might misinterpret the cues and the communication activities in the Forum. This process might lead to presenting results that do not portray the participants' experiences in the Forum. The researcher handled this issue by learning about hair styling services through hair styling websites, videos, forums and personal experiences as a customer. Therefore, the researcher had a good knowledge about the research setting. The researcher also contacted the community's founder and leader during the writing of the research report to get feedback.

The single case study approach employed in this study presented the second issue. A single case study aims to gain an indepth understanding of the phenomenon, and not to present results that could be generalised. The single case study presented an opportunity for further investigation, to discover whether findings in this study could be generalised into different contexts. It would be fruitful to examine how these findings compare with

other service industries that involve similar personal relationships, such as personal training and nursing. Suggestions for future research are presented in the next section.

8.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study presented new questions worth pursuing for future research. As mentioned in the previous section, the single case study is an opportunity to investigate the topic in different service industries. The present study was in a hair styling setting, a low prestige occupation. Learning in a hair styling context is inseparable from the hair stylists' construction of professional identity, which is to present hair stylists as on an equal social status footing with their customers. It could be interesting to compare learning in a different service typology, that involves different power relationships between service providers and service recipients; for example, in teaching, consulting or the public service, such as fire departments and city councils.

The hair styling setting is often used to explain gender issues in service work (e.g., Gimlin, 1996; Lindsay, 2004). Hair styling is a feminised occupation, associated with nurturing clients and subservience (Lindsay, 2004). Hair stylists are predominantly female; however, most celebrity hair stylists are male. This fact is reflected in the Hair Pro Forum, where all moderators—who represent successful and experienced members—are male. It would be fruitful to explore how gender plays a role in the construction of professional identity in the service context, especially in a feminised occupation. It would also be useful to examine whether gender plays a role in the community's leadership, both in online and face-to-face community of feminised occupation.

This study explained learning processes by investigating the Forum members' active participation through communication activities in the bulletin board. Most members are passive participants who read threads without contributing messages to the Forum. This does not mean that passive members are not learning. It would be useful to investigate learning processes from the point of view of passive members. This perspective could provide insights into how passive members deal with the ambiguity of issues presented with limited textual media, without having to communicate these problems to the community. Another potential research topic is to explore whether similar mechanisms apply to a face-to-face community of frontline service personnel. This topic may involve how individuals learn from face-to-face storytelling events. It would also be useful to investigate individuals who participate in both face-to-face and online CoPs.

An understanding of power dynamics in communities of practice is essential to understand the social construction of knowledge. This issue will reveal how meaning is negotiated in the community, such as how power influences collective sensemaking processes in the community. A recent study (Humphreys et al., 2012) shows a leader using storytelling to silence a certain interpretation in the meaning-making process. Online communities retain all messages; consequently it would be interesting to explore how some interpretations are silenced and how members resist these actions.

8.5 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions drawn from this empirical study have provided us with a deeper understanding of knowledge and learning in the service context as socially constructed in the community. Learning in the service context is not simply gaining knowledge required to deliver service. Learning is a continuous process of shaping and redefining self as a professional.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

PILOT STUDY RESULTS

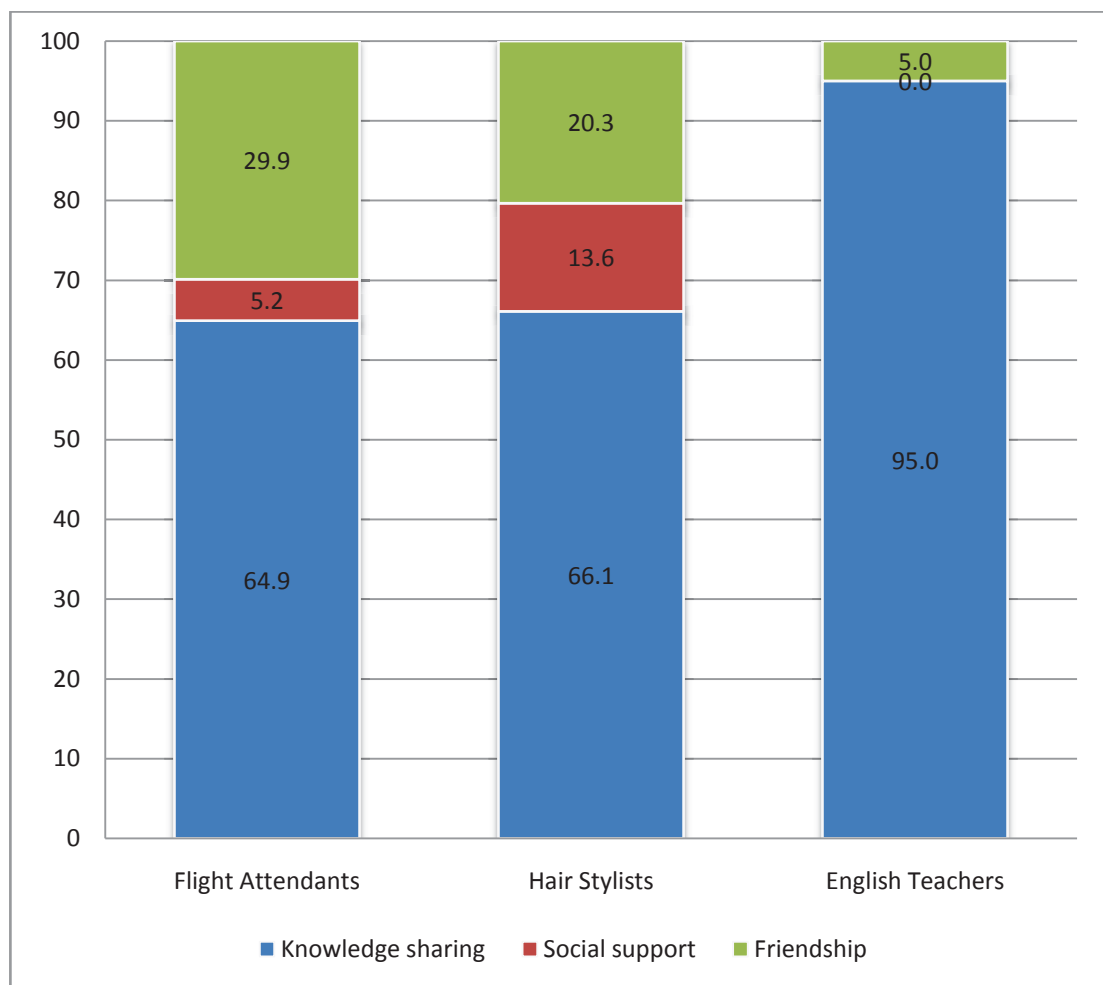


Figure A.1 Pilot study result: Motivation to participate in online communities of frontline service personnel

	Flight attendants	Hair stylists	ESL teachers
Statistics	Oldest post: August 2007 Active members: Not available	Oldest post: August 2005 Active Members: 174	Oldest post: August 2003 Active Members: 394 registered as teachers
Task description	Helping customers get ready for take-off, serving food and drinks during long flights, guiding customers during emergency (happens very rarely). All customers receive similar service. Contact time varies from 1 hour to 14 hours (long international flight), however direct one-on-one contact for each customer is generally short.	Transforming customer's appearance through cutting and colouring hair. Service is customised according to customer's demand and hair state. Contact time from 30 minutes to 3 hours where the hair stylist has close and personal contact with the customer.	Transforming customer's capability to communicate in English. Service is customised according to customer's demand and English Language capability. Contact time is relatively long as English course consists of several encounters, each encounter lasts minimal 1 hour. Most members teach a class (one teacher with more than 5 students), with some teaches private classes.
Professional experiences	Vary, from would-be flight attendants to more than 10 years of experience.	Vary, from beauty school students to more than 20 years of experience.	Vary, from inexperienced to more than 20 years.
Formal professional education	Company trainings.	Cosmetology or beauty school.	Non-native speakers learned English formally through English courses, some have degrees in English as Second Language education. Formal training to get teaching certification
Employment status	Work in organisation, part time or full-time.	Mostly self-employed or in a small salons.	Mostly work in regular schools or English as Second Language schools. Some are self-employed.
Recurring discussion topics	Tips on living between flights: where to go, how to survive living in a hotel.	Hair styling techniques, customer's misbehaviour, life as hair stylists.	Learning English for teachers who are non-native speakers, sentences examples, few threads on class management.

Table A. 1 Pilot study sites' summary

	Flight attendants	Hair stylists	English teachers
Declarative knowledge: Customer type	Customer behaviour: Aggressive customers, customer from rural areas.	Customer behaviour: Mothers, daughters, problematic clients. Precondition: Customer's hair type	Customer behaviour: noisy students, spoiled students, Precondition: customer's English level, customer's background (business, student, mature learner)
Declarative knowledge: Service offering	Not available.	Pre-condition& procedures: Match delivery method with customer's hair type Props & procedures: Match hair styling tools with procedure	Pre-condition& procedures: Match student's type with teaching approach Pre-condition& result: Match student's capability with lesson aims
Procedural knowledge: Technical	Not available.	Standard: Hair cutting and styling, Hair colouring Variations in hair colouring chemicals, customised style, tools	Standard: Grammar teaching, lesson planning, syllabus making Variations on the real use of English language, teaching tools
Procedural knowledge: Social	Dealing with aggressive customers Dealing with ignorant customers	Dealing with customer's misbehaviour Firing client Communication during consultation with client	Dealing with students' misbehaviour Motivating students Building suitable learning environment

Table A. 2 Pilot study results' summary

APPENDIX 2

PUBLICATION

Subtext and Play-text in a Hairdresser Online Discussion Forum

Contact author and presenter: Ira Fachira
School of Management (Albany Campus)
PB 102 904 NSMC
Massey University,
Auckland
New Zealand
Auckland, New Zealand
Email: i.fachira@massey.ac.nz

Janet Sayers
School of Management (Albany Campus)
PB 102 904 NSMC
Massey University,
Auckland
New Zealand
Auckland, New Zealand
Email: j.g.sayers@massey.ac.nz

Shu-Ching Chen
School of Marketing, Communication and Journalism
PB 102 904 NSMC
Massey University,
Auckland
New Zealand
Email: s.c.chen@massey.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

Little research is directly concerned with frontline service personnel's perspectives of the service encounter, especially with how they learn to deal with the technical and social aspects of service delivery. This paper presents work-in-progress examining the ways frontline personnel use online communities to deepen their understandings of service encounter. Situated learning theory is used as a scaffold to accompany a dramaturgical framing of the discussion process in an online discussion forum. We argue on-line discussion enables members to learn about and practice implicit elements of service encounter and prepare them for future encounters.

Keywords: service quality, knowledge management or transfer, case study, e-learning, learning and development, professional development

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present work-in-progress examining the ways that front-line service personnel use on-line communities to deepen their understandings of the service encounter. We conceptualise service delivery using a dramaturgical framework, and frame analysis of online communities with situated learning theory. We focus on two discussion threads as illustrative examples of one discussion forum (hairstylists) in a larger PhD project. The unit of analysis, a discussion thread, is analysed by reading each thread in the context of members' learning through discussions of their service scripts. The paper demonstrates how employees are using opportunities afforded by new technologies to create trans-organisational communities of learning practice and also how these communities enable service personnel to rehearse their performances on-line by discussing with text, images and video the subtexts of their play-texts.

BACKGROUND

Traditionally employees are introduced to the requirements of front-line service jobs through on-the-job and formal training through which they learn their 'roles' in the organisation. However, the service encounter is more complex and sophisticated than manuals or formal training is ever able to communicate, and so most learning happens through experience. This experience is gained through tacit and implicit learning processes; through what can be learnt from formally encoded instructions, and what can be learnt more informally by watching what others do and by practicing the skill repeatedly under different conditions.

Service is often understood as a process of intangible activities which are provided for customers by frontline personnel which deliver a valued experience. These processes include functional and technical dimensions (Grönroos 1984). The technical dimension deals with the core service: what customers intend to get from the encounter or what is being delivered to the customer; whereas the functional dimension deals with social aspects of the encounter, including psychological and behavioural aspects of delivery. For example, a hair stylist delivers technical value by offering a range of hair styles suited to his or her customer's needs and personality. The functional aspect of the service process is concerned with experience factors from first contact to the end of the service process.

To be able to create a service experience with value, frontline personnel have to personally manage an array of social and technical elements related to their performance of a service. The theatrical or dramaturgical metaphor is now commonly used to explain how the various aspects of these complex systems involving people and things inter-relate over a period of time in these

'performances'. Expressions like 'service staging' epitomise this standpoint towards understanding service delivery. This metaphor has use-value because it helps managers identify service encounter elements and analyse how elements inter-relate. So, the service encounter is often thought of as a 'drama' or narrative which consists of four key components: actors (service personnel), audiences (customer), settings (physical environment and props) and performances (service delivery) (Grove, Fisk, & Bitner 1992). These components are bound together by the service script: a sequence of behaviour or actions regarding the service process (Tansik & Smith 1991). From a management perspective, scripts are essential to service organisations. They are the primary method by which managers encode required behaviours and communication protocols that are needed for the successful performance of quality service experiences.

The service script generally covers the technical dimension of the service because it informs frontline personnel of the series of actions he or she needs to perform to deliver a particular service. Some organisations develop scripts with specific words and actions to guide their frontline employees in a social interaction with their customer encounter, for instance in the fast-food industry. Other scripts are more sophisticated. For instance, hairstylist work is not usually formally scripted in the sense of telling people what to say, but it is governed by techniques, rules, and norms of behaviours that are learnt, traditionally on-the-job over a number of years.

In research on service encounters, the term 'role' is often used. Role is also a concept that has its origins in theatre, and is sometimes confused with the idea of character. Role is about performance and shows ability and skills in the performance of a character, while character is proscribed 'type' with particular personality traits. In research a role is defined as 'a cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual's behaviour in a given setting' (Solomon, Suprenant, & Czepiel, 1985: 102). Roles relate to factors performed by individuals that guide the customer interaction. Research in this area is predominantly focused on how successful the encounter is, and usually based on how well the customer and the service personnel each perform their respective roles: that is, acting their respective roles in the encounter and reacting to each other's performance as service quality is facilitated if both the employee and the customer have appropriate expectations of their roles (Broderick 1998; Tansik & Smith 1991).

So, much research has focused on quality issues from consumers' perspectives, but there are a number of issues apparent from employee and organisational perspectives regarding role scripts. First, and as already mentioned, service roles can be very sophisticated, making learning complex and time-consuming. Second, scripts can be rigidly used in some industries so that employees may feel disempowered and unable to interpret the script and adapt it to the requirements of the customer (Harris, Harris & Baron 2003; Leidner 1993; Mudie & Pirrie 2006), although on the other hand rigid scripts can help reduce anxiousness (Yagil 2008). Third, sometimes frontline personnel develop their own scripts to handle encounters and this can become a problem for businesses when these script improvisations are not in line with company goals (Raz 2007). Fourthly, most research into customer service roles has been from a marketing perspective, with little focus being on the ways that employees learn about, interpret and use scripts, so understanding of roles is one-sided.

Service delivery is complex and social; and ideas about scripting, roles and character have been useful for researchers to understand service delivery issues like quality. But little research is directly concerned with customer service employee perspectives of the service encounter, especially with their learning about it. This paper is directly concerned with these issues. This paper focuses on how customer-facing staff learn how to perform their roles on the internet, and so we use situated learning theory as a scaffold to accompany a dramaturgical framing of the process itself.

Situated learning theory (SLT) has been discussed by Lave and Wenger (1991) who argue that 'newcomers' become members of a community of practice by performing authentic or legitimate activities, beginning with peripheral activities, and gradually are becoming entrusted with more significant ones. Three main processes need to occur: first, participation as it involves the way individuals understand, take part in and subscribe to the social norms, behaviours and values; second, identification occurs because participants identify with the community of practice – it means 'understanding who we are and what potential we have' (Lave (2004) in Handley, Clark, Fincham & Sturdy 2007: 8); and finally practice itself needs to occur - the rehearsal of skills (Brown & Duguid 1991). Although initially designed with communities of practice in workplaces in mind, the application of SLT to internet pedagogical research has now become relatively common-place (Beldarrain 2006; Herrington, Oliver, Herrington & Sparrow 2000).

For the purposes of this paper our research questions is "How do front-line service personnel use internet communities as situated learning platforms to learn about the service process?"

METHOD

In the larger PhD project upon which this paper is based, three internet communities are being examined. For the purposes of this paper we demonstrate analysis of two threads in one community of hairdressers in order to demonstrate the analysis method and some preliminary findings. The three cases were selected because they are used by customer-facing staff to discuss, share and learn about their jobs, and they are trans-organizational in scope. That is, front-line service personnel learn from a community that extends beyond the physical boundaries of their individual workplaces and the traditional on-the-job learning scenarios that have dominated paradigms of on-the-job learning in the past.

Our analysis is cognizant of the nine critical characteristics of situated learning environments identified by Herrington and Oliver (1995). These are: real-life; provide authentic activities; provide access to expert performances and the modeling of processes; provide multiple roles and perspectives; support collaborative construction of knowledge; provide coaching and scaffolding at critical times; promote reflection to enable abstractions to be formed; promote articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit; provide for integrated assessment of learning within the tasks.

The unit of analysis is a discussion thread. Threads were chosen because they generated the most discussion. In the first thread, participants discuss the experience of one hairdresser who misread a customer's expectations and cut her hair too short. The hairdresser's first posting explains the techniques she used, and four later postings provide reactions to the initial experience. The second thread begins with the posting of a video by one member and results in a lengthy discussion about a variety of technical matters, and the posting of further images and videos. These two threads were chosen for the purpose of this paper because they illustrate both main elements of service delivery identified by Grönroos (1984); functional and technical dimensions.

Our understanding of the service encounter is that it is guided by a script, which we call a play-text following Harris et al. (2003), and is the formal expectations, norms and behaviour in hairdressing. We are interested in discovering, through our analysis, how the script is being discussed and learning occurs about the play-text. Analysis involves a close reading of the discussion threads, and the identification of characteristics of situated learning and how the play-text is being discussed.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Our analysis aims to answer the research question, “How do front-line service personnel use internet communities as situated learning platforms to learn about the service interaction?” Two threads are analysed, and the results of this analysis are given below in *Table 1: Example of Analysis: Dealing with a Difficult Customer (Functional dimension)*, and *Table 2: Example of Analysis: Discussion using text, video and images (Technical dimension)*. Tables provide excerpts from the thread instigator in column one and related further discussion from other participants in column two. Column three comprises of reflections by the researchers on how the scripts are being discussed, and the learning that is therefore occurring.

PUT Table 1: Example of Analysis – Dealing with a Difficult Customer ABOUT HERE

PUT Table 2: Example of Analysis – Rehearsing ABOUT HERE

Dealing with a Difficult Customer (Functional dimension)

From the script notes in Table 1 column three, it is apparent that all of the critical components that Herrington and Oliver (1995) identify as characterizing situated learning environments are evident. The situation being discussed is an authentic real-life experience of one of the participants who has offered up his/her expert performance as an opportunity for comment. Multiple roles and perspectives are given and there is a collaborative approach to the construction of knowledge regarding how to deal with this type of customer. Participants coach each-other over a critical incident and this promotes reflection by the group of ways to deal with such a scenario thereby enabling abstractions to be formed in how to deal with other difficult situations, including how customers complain and how they should respond as professional hairdressers. Tacit knowledge which can only be learnt through experience is being made explicit and shared, and feedback is being given which enables the group to assess what can be learnt.

Regarding the play-text, the thread instigator provides the play-text by placing the scenario within the context of ‘dealing with a difficult customer’, a common service scenario. The member dramatizes the narrative by framing it as a ‘vent’, giving the post a function of emotional catharsis, but she also describes the character of the customer along with specific characteristics that made her actions understandable, and then describes the various technical and functional aspects of her role so that other members can relate to it as a group of professionals. Social and emotional support is provided by the community. The play-text is discussed by the participants through discussing their roles and the possible motivations of the other character (the customer). Discussants coach to reinforce appropriate behaviors and give feedback and advice regarding acting with confidence and affirming the value of the profession as a whole. By discussing this issue in this way, the discussants are reviewing in depth a real-life scenario and surfacing the sub-text of the script. By doing so they develop mastery and skill in this aspect of their work by reviewing the incident, developing their ability to ‘read’ the customer, carry out their roles, and develop their own social capital. They review and rehearse how the play-text can be applied in other scenarios.

Discussion using text, video and images (Technical dimension)

The video featured in this thread is a play-text about the application of a technique, enacted by a hairdresser to his customer in a salon. Videoing and uploading a video into the discussion allows members to see a sequence of actions, and this posting activity created a lot of interest in the community. There is considerable discussion around technical aspects of haircutting, colouring, blow-drying and the use of tools and products during the service process, including issues arising about technique and its implications for their health and safety. The hairdresser is recognised for his skill mastery, and the participants want to learn from his demonstration. Participants discuss their role, their tools and techniques, aspects of the service environment (the

stage), and what they want to achieve for the customer. In this thread it is clear that the nine critical characteristics of situated learning environments are being enacted by participants.

Similar to the rehearsal process in theatre production, online community members in this thread explore various aspects of the play-text to reveal possible ways to do this technique. They swap stories, and tips. The multiple perspectives given enable individuals to point out various aspects of the play-text, including surfacing implicit elements of the technical dimension. Thus, the subtext of the performance is revealed. This process is provided in Figure 1: Play-text and Subtext in online discussions.

DISCUSSION

Participants in this discussion group, in both threads analysed, discuss on-line their service provider experiences and provide multiple perspectives on complex scenarios, both functional and technical. Members develop implicit knowledge of their job by discussing the tacit role requirements in the context of the values of the community. By discussing the issues, individuals come to understand the reasons behind the sequence of actions that they undertake, thus helping them to make more appropriate decisions next time. In the service context, sharing encounter experiences enables other individuals to observe how a role is enacted in specific contexts or scenarios. Other members are able to retrace others' actions, which can be the closest thing to experiencing the encounter themselves (Klein 2008). Although the implicit elements are not explicitly stated, others are made aware of the events and phenomena that represent it. Consequently it can be clearly seen, that by belonging to this community members learn about both the explicit and implicit elements of their work.

There are two forms of script in theatre theory: play-text and subtext. Play-text is the script and gives performer's stage directions and the actors' their roles, as well as a sequence of actions, dialogue, costume and setting (Pickering 2005). Play-text then focuses on the explicit elements in the performance as it technically and functionally guides actors in what to do. Play-text is crucial for setting parameters of required action, but performers learn how to perform the play-text by rehearsing. Our analysis shows that by participating in their professional community online, play-texts are brought 'to life'. Participants discuss their roles in context, develop their understanding of characters' motivations, affirm their skill mastery, and swap ideas and tips about how to use props effectively. They appropriate the play-text and make it their own.

According to drama production theory, the play-text is never the final form of a performance. It is simply the formal stage direction, plot, character notes and words to be learnt to drive the narrative to its conclusion so that the audience's psychological states are altered according to the purpose of the play. For the playwright, the script is merely a guide that must be interpreted by the actors to reveal the subtext (Pickering 2005; Wallis & Shepherd 2002). When a show is to be conducted, prior to the show during rehearsals actors discuss their roles and their lines so they will be able to transform the script into a performance. The rehearsals result in a final performance or series of performances which includes the 'unspoken elements' that the actors have agreed upon, like appropriate facial expression, modulation of the voice, comic timing and body-language. The actors interpret and discuss these elements during rehearsals to enable them to create characters they will perform in front of the audience. The result of this process is defined as 'sub-text': 'a way of describing the discrepancy between the spoken text and those motivations that result in particular action and modes of behaviour on the part of a character' (Pickering 2005: 56). A subtext is the end 'product', the one that the audience experiences and reacts to. It contains both explicit and implicit communication performed by the actors: and in the case of the service encounter, between service personnel and the customer.

Our research so far confirms that employees share their workplace experiences in their internet communities (Hara 2007; Henri & Pudelko 2003; Koh & Kim 2004). Like previous research we have found that experiences are told in the form of stories which involve sequences of events or

actions (Hemetsberger & Reinhardt 2006; Orr 1990). This narrative form allows personnel to describe 'real-life' encounters in sharable ways, through metaphor and analogy (Harris, et al. 2003; Meyer, Connell & Klein 2005). Our research makes a contribution to this existing literature by showing how service employees rehearse play-text to create sub-text in internet communities of learning, and that they are doing this for a variety of purposes like social support and emotional catharsis, but also to rehearse their performances in a virtual backstage. The use of video and images increase the richness of this communication, and enables experiences to be replayed and reviewed as often as is necessary to master a skill. Reviewing experiences on-line allows employees to iteratively review and refine their roles and expectations, and gain understanding of the reasons behind other actors' actions. In the case given above hairstylists learn to understand the motivations behind their own and the customer's actions, and how to handle variations in roles, characters and to improvise when mistakes and misunderstandings occur.

Employees can improve their service performances through rehearsal, coming to a better understanding of play-text, including affirming the limits of the play-text (e.g., when discussing hand injuries, and the rightness or wrongness of offering refunds). Sharing metaphor and analogy allows members to agree on interpretation of events and phenomena.

CONCLUSION

Informal communities of practice on the internet may proliferate because the encounter experience can be shared and its complexity and richness acknowledged. The discussion given here (and others in this research) would not happen in organisations as they are too 'rich' to be shared in formal channels (Geiger & Turley 2005; Orr 1990). Previous studies have suggested that frontline personnel share their experience with customers and learn about interaction strategies from others' experience (Geiger & Turley 2005; Meyer, et al. 2005; Wägar 2008). Although our examples do not illustrate this, other threads we are looking at do include customers and they can be seen to be sharing interaction strategies.

Sharing experiences in this way through the internet offers several advantages. Online communities allow people from different organisations and locations to contribute many different perspectives on work-related problems (Cummings, Sproull, & Kiesler 2002). The lack of physical presence may encourage individuals to share their experiences without worrying about others' immediate response, including those of management (Wright 2002). Connections can be made with customers outside of the normal context, so that roles and role reactions can be assessed and modified.

We argue in this paper that two forms of service scripts are being used: play-text and subtext. Online communities of service personnel provide space where employees can share and discuss real encounters, and thus offer an opportunity for them to review and rehearse their performances. This paper argues situated learning theory is important for understanding this practice, and illustrates the application of a dramaturgical approach to describe the transformation of play-text into subtext in an online community. We argue on-line discussion enables members to draw attention to implicit elements of the encounters, so they can learn future scenarios. These practices will have specific implications for work and learning management into the future. We hope in this project to develop and discuss these implications at some length.

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Table 1: Example of Analysis – Dealing with a Difficult Customer (Functional dimension)

Original script excerpts - HSF1 Instigator of thread	Discussion – examples of responses	Script notes
Ok I need to vent. Yesterday I had a mother (60 ish) come in because her daughter loved the color work I did on her a few weeks ago....	HSF2,3,4, and 5 also vent about this type of customer e.g., HSF2 - UGH! PEOPLE! I have men that do this to me all of the HSF3 – Some are worse than cats! (in not liking change) time	Real-life script scenario is given. The experience is told using a dramatic narrative with customer character types (mother and daughter), age, roles, functions, techniques, props, narrative flow, dramatic climax(customer upset at length of cut). Own role is outlined. Drama is accentuated by venting intent. Narrative is about dealing with a difficult service encounter. Social support given – mirroring vent.
... she had 2 inches solid grey regrowth, with box color 5 n/g clarol she and hubby had been doing , with a level or two lighter in the bottom. I explained everything I needed to do, to get her where she wanted, The color came out great.	HSF5 - I have a woman like this as well. Her husband does her pull through a cap frost (eeeew hate that word) and she's been hacking her own hair for years.	Technical/functional aspects of tacit knowledge about the service are described.
I stop in the middle of the cut, and comb all her hair down and start checking my cut from left to right, she keeps saying OH my I'm having an anxiety attack.... :shock: (meen while I'm counting to ten and trying to stay cool. I give her the picture and show her the lady in the picture hair is just on her sholders. She keeps pulling on her hair and saying it is going to shrink when you dry it, and now one side is longer than the other. I tell her her hair has no curl, so it should not shrink when it is dry ...	HSF5 - TAKE CHARGE! ... I (have learned to) ask them exactly what they like about the picture they bring in. Is it the length, the bangs, the highlight, the colour, the model's lipstick..... ya never know.	Customer roles are being discussed. The customer does not understand her role. Exchange of techniques for clarifying role expectations
I forgot what a freak out that can be ... while smiling through our teeth about keeping them calm..... thanks I needed to get that out...	HSF5 - You did well calming the situation down, referring back to the picture she brought in and explaining again to her	HSF5 is coaching HSF1 in how to handle a difficult customer. Reinforcing appropriate behaviors.

I offer not the charge her for the cut, but she refuses the offer	HSF2 - On the other hand maybe she was trying to get something free outta ya?!! HSF5 - Good grief HSF1 - sorry no freebies	HSF1 is requesting both social support and feedback from community about how she can improve her performance or play her role better. HSF2 notes other customer character motivations. HSF5 gives detailed advise based on own experience.
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Table 2: Example of Analysis – Discussion using text, video and images (Technical dimension)

Original script excerpts - HSF6 Instigator of thread	Discussion – examples of responses	Script notes
HSF6 begins thread by posting a link to a video (18.13 mins) of him cutting and colouring a client's hair.	36 responses to this video including further video postings HSF7 - .. you remind me of some actor on tv...can't figure out who yet. nice blowdrying too-do you ever use a directional nozzle on your dryer? HSF8 - Love the video, was that a star section for the point cutting? I've never thought of that just to lighten it up without having to layer it all. After you had the blunt line, what guide were you following to lift up and graduate? Keep the video's coming, what a great opportunity for us...Thanks so much for sharing your time! Comments jokingly compare HSF6 to a well known actor and to a hairdresser celebrity.	Members are able to visually see a cut and review and discuss the performance of the actual cut on a real customer. Rich communication promotes more discussion. The instigator of the thread is recognized for his expertise and members try to learn from his performance so they can replicate it, adapt and appropriate to their own. They are mainly interested in his techniques. Members develop an understanding of HSF's hairdresser character type – e.g., expert, celebrity, technically competent
The concentrator thing-ee that you put on the end of your blow dryer to fan out (direct) the airflow. It fans out the air into a line, rather than a circle. It helps direct the air AWAY from the scalp so it's smoothing down the cuticle (making the hair more shiny and silky). When you blow air toward the scalp, the hair gets frizzy. (Think teasing)	Considerable technical discussion about haircutting techniques and blow-waving. HSF7 - sounds like you already use that technique with the razor- i learned it from Xenon in one of his last classes. it's good for many uses- lift...helping to cover 'bald' spots such as 'whorls' in the crown. you take a small section, and gentle shave the blade back towards the scalp taking off just a little of the	Techniques of delivery are discussed in detail. Relationship to consumer as another actor playing a role is discussed. Hairdresser's role is to make the client feel good and cover their faults.

	hair. it's actually quicker though bringing the blade towards you in a light scooping action.	
I have in the past but it causes me to have to arc my wrist a little bit too much and caused carpal tunnel. (along with hours of "mousing" each evening when I'm editing photography)	Discussion about carpal tunnel syndrome and other issues related to hairdressing – discuss repetitive cutting and how to minimize risk with tools and techniques.	Members discuss health and safety issue in the workplace and how they themselves can minimize risk. They are discussing the limits of the service script.
Oh and the product is Nolita Molding Clay (I have a stash of probably the last 7 jars left on earth. When P&G bought GW, their numbers people got in there and started discontinuing the lower sales performers. I don't think they took into consideration that it's the type of product that one jar would last a year, unlike a bottle of shampoo that might be replaced once a month.)	Discussion about hair products and their applications, including problems with supply and demand and issues like affordability.	Members discuss the cost of their tools and products and how to access them. They need these materials to carry out their role.
The handle of the Elchim ilFuturo folds back [away from the nozzle] When in this position your control buttons are on the top-side of the dryer. It's a little hard to tell from the photo but... the side handle, with the removable cushion that says elchim, is where you slide your hand in and your fingers then rest on the controls [like a video cam recorder. ... The concentrator nozzle, is removable and swivels very easily, so its easy to change the direction and not twist your wrist. the side handle ;that you slip your hand into also swivels.	Discussion about coloring and highlighting. Discussion about tools and applications to cuttings, including where they are purchased and sharing of hyper-text links to images of tools. HSF7 - love the elchim dryers! where did you find that one HSF6? i think my Galaxy is about to bite it...	Technical discussion where members learn about other aspects of the performance. Images are linked to so knowledge about tools can be shared. Use of tools and techniques are discussed, including detailed information about how to hold tools. Explanations supplement video and provide rich information for leaning.
Well I shot it yesterday morning. All afternoon I edited it. I needed to break it into four parts so that it would fit on YouTube. And then it took almost 4	Requests for more video contributions from HSF6 are requested. HSF8 - that was really fun to watch, i have a client that wears her hair a little like that but	Members specifically mention their learning about technical aspects of hair cutting and reinforce and affirm HSF6.

<p>hours to upload. Four Youtube links are given</p>	<p>the side fringe is a little longer,, but i learn a few new tricks now THANKS!!</p> <p>HSF11: Very nice. I learned something today. Your cutting of the nape where you pushed back with the razor was something that I've not seen before but really interesting and I think useful. Thanks.</p>	<p>Skill mastery of HSF6 is acknowledged. HSF6 is creating and loading up video in his own time, demonstrating high forum citizenship behaviors.</p>
<p>HSF16, you are absolutely correct. I must have seen that segment a dozen times as I was editing it and didn't even notice. I did the same, later in the video on the side, but I corrected myself. This one slipped right by me. Thanks for being so observant</p>	<p>One thing, HSF6, I always thought that horizontal sectioning went around the head, while vertical sections went UP and DOWN, like in this video? I noticed you called your initial guideline from the nape to the occipital a horizontal section, whereas I would call that a vertical section.</p>	<p>Critical feedback on performance acknowledged and learnt from by HSF6. The forum is highly supportive.</p>

Figure 1: Play-text and Subtext in online discussions



APPENDIX 3

CONSENT FROM HAIR PRO FOUNDER AND MODERATOR

From: Hair Pro Owner <TheMaster@mail.com>
To: "Ira Fachira @ Hair Pro Forum" <ira.fachira.1@uni.massey.ac.nz>
Sent: Saturday, 7 January 2012 9:55 AM
Subject: Re: Hair Pro Forum Contact Us Form - Greetings from a student

Hello

I'm perfectly fine with you viewing the forum and using it for your research. I look forward to seeing the results of your work.

The Master

On Wed, Jan 4, 2012 at 3:46 PM, Ira Fachira @ Hair Pro Forum
<ira.fachira.1@uni.massey.ac.nz> wrote:

The following message was sent to you via the Hair Pro Forum Contact Us form by Ira Fachira (<mailto:ira.fachira.1@uni.massey.ac.nz>).

Dear Mr. Master,

My name is Ira Fachira and I am a PhD candidate at the School of Management, Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand. My doctoral project looks at how online communities support service professionals.

My project focuses on forum discussions and how members learn by sharing their working experiences, and so how forums contribute to professional development.

My research is the first of its kind to examine how forums assist the development of service industry professionals.

In order to conduct my research, I am choosing three case forums from different service industries. Each forum needs to be actively used by members to learn about their jobs.

I found your forum through a Google search and have read many of your publicly available discussions. I believe your forum to be at the fore-front of modelling best practice. Consequently, your forum would provide an ideal case for my doctoral research.

I would now like to ask your permission to analyse messages in the forum. Although your discussions are publically available, I believe that your knowledge of my research and your agreement, as administrator, to the use of discussion threads is important to the integrity of my study.

I have lodged a low-risk ethics application at Massey University which means that my supervisors and myself are responsible for the ethical conduct of my study. As high ethical standards are required at all times in PhD research, I will not use any information that could cause harm to the forum or to its members. My aim is simply to understand how members use forums to develop themselves as service professionals.

If you agree then the full results of my study will be made freely available to you, and you may want to use the final research product to promote your site. The results may also help you in the development of your forum. I will also send a summary of the research results to you to pass on to your community.

I would be really grateful for your participation in my research. Please contact either myself or my supervisor if you require any further information. Our contact details are below.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ira Fachira

PhD candidate

School of Management (Albany)

Massey University, New Zealand

(http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/departments/school-of-management/school-of-management_home.cfm)

E-mail: ira.fachira.1@uni.massey.ac.nz, ira_madani@yahoo.com

Facebook : <http://www.facebook.com/ira.fachira>

Supervisor , Dr. Janet Sayers

Senior Lecturer

School of Management (Albany)

Email: j.g.sayers@massey.ac.nz

Staff profile: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/departments/school-of-management/staff/academic-staff.cfm?stref=115430>

APPENDIX 4

RESEARCH ETHICS: LOW RISK NOTIFICATION RECORD



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

7 March 2011

Ira Fachira
Apt 60, The Grange
92 Bush Road
Albany
AUCKLAND 0632

Dear Ira

Re: Sharing Knowledge about the Service Encounter: Internet Communities of Customer Contact Service Personnel

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 4 March 2011.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

John G O'Neill (Professor)
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)

cc Dr Janet Sayers
School of Management
Albany

Prof Claire Massey, HoS
School of Management
PN214

Dr Shu-Ching Chen
School of Communication, Journalism and
Marketing
Albany

Prof Malcolm Wright, HoS
School of Communication, Journalism and
Marketing
PN254

Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Tc Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

Research Ethics Office, Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand
T +64 6 350 5573 +64 6 350 5575 F +64 6 350 5622
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz animaethics@massey.ac.nz gtc@massey.ac.nz
www.massey.ac.nz