

# Reciprocity and Professionalism in Service Encounters

- Preconditions for Encounter-Based Service Innovation



By Donna Isabella Caroline Sundbo

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# Reciprocity and Professionalism in Service Encounters

- Preconditions for Encounter-Based Service Innovation

To my parents Jon and Birgitte Sundbo  
who have lovingly supported and hosted me during my struggles.  
I will forever be grateful.

A PhD thesis by Donna Isabella Caroline Sundbo

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## **Summary in English**

Service innovation is a relatively new field of research. Due to their processual and often intangible nature, services are notoriously difficult to innovate using industrial approaches. Furthermore, such innovation should ideally be based on the users and the ideas and needs they have since they are the ones actually using the service. A possible solution could be to ask the users for ideas during the service encounters between them and the frontline service employees. This gives the employees a crucial role as they are the ones who must identify ideas, motivate the users to state their needs, and transform the input from users into ideas which can be communicated to the rest of the service organisation. Some important elements of encounter-based service innovation are therefore which processes of interaction that take place during the service encounters, as well as what the employee roles and mindsets are like, and what effect these elements have on sourcing innovation ideas from the users during the encounters.

This thesis provides in depth analyses of some concrete interactions of the service encounters, and investigates the role and mindsets of some frontline service employees. It is based on two case studies, one at a café and another at a tour operator. It takes an anthropological approach by using ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews and by using anthropological theory in the analysis of the interactions, roles and mindsets studied.

The results are presented in three articles and a frame. It was found that the exchange processes of the service encounters are better conceptualised as reciprocity and three kinds of reciprocity were then identified in the service encounters studied, namely *formal*, *social* and *personal* reciprocity. These processes follow certain specific patterns and form greater networks of reciprocity. It was also found that the frontline employees could be performing what is termed a *hyperprofessional* role which relies strongly on display of professionalism in manner and appearance (but not necessarily in content), and that they had a concomitant mindset of *othering* or viewing the users as fundamentally different from themselves in important ways. These roles and mindsets are likely to hinder sourcing ideas from users during service encounters.



## Resumé på dansk

Service innovation er et relativt nyt forskningsfelt. Grundet deres processuelle og ofte u håndgribelige natur er services notorisk svære at innovere ved hjælp af industrielle metoder. Ydermere bør en sådan innovation ideelt set baseres på brugerne og de idéer og behov de har, da det er dem, der rent faktisk bruger servicen. En mulig løsning kunne være at spørge brugerne om idéer gennem servicemødet mellem dem og de servicemedarbejdere, der har direkte kundekontakt. Dette tildeler medarbejderne en meget væsentlig rolle da det er dem, der så skal identificere idéerne, motivere brugerne til at fremsætte dem, og transformere brugernes input til idéer, som så kan kommunikeres til resten af serviceorganisationen. Nogle vigtige elementer i møde-baseret service innovation er derfor hvilke interaktionsprocesser, som finder sted i løbet af servicemødet, samt hvordan medarbejdernes roller og tankemåder er, og hvordan disse elementer påvirker muligheden for at få idéer til innovation fra brugerne i løbet af servicemøderne.

Denne afhandling indeholder dybdegående analyser af konkrete interaktioner i servicemøder og undersøger de roller og tankemåder, som nogle servicemedarbejdere med direkte kundekontakt har. Den er baseret på to case studier, den ene lavet på en café og det andet lavet hos en turoperatør. Den har en antropologisk tilgang dels i form af brug af etnografiske metoder såsom deltagerobservation og interviews, og dels i form af brug af antropologisk teori i analysen af de undersøgte interaktioner, roller og tankemåder.

Resultaterne præsenteres i form af tre artikler og en ramme. Det blev fundet, at udvekslingsprocesserne i servicemødet bedre kan begrebsliggøres som reciprocitet, og tre slags reciprocitet blev identificeret, nemlig *formel*, *social* og *personlig* reciprocitet. Disse processer følger bestemte mønstre og danner større netværk af reciprocitet. Det blev også fundet, at medarbejderne med direkte kundekontakt kunne spille hvad der i afhandlingen er kaldt en *hyperprofessionel* rolle, som i høj grad bygger på at udvise professionalisme i adfærdsform og fremtoning (men ikke nødvendigvis i indhold), og at de havde en medfølgende tankemåde kaldet *othering* i afhandlingen, og denne tankemåde består i at brugerne ses som fundamentalt anderledes end medarbejderne på nogle vigtige områder. Disse roller og tankemåder kan hindre, at idéer til innovation kan fås fra brugerne i løbet af servicemøder.



# **INTRODUCTION**



# Introduction

## Research Topic

The following PhD thesis is made as part of the ICE project at Roskilde University ([www.ice-project.dk](http://www.ice-project.dk)). The ICE project investigates how service innovations can be based on the needs and wishes of the users and the understanding which employees have of these needs. The focus of the ICE project is on situations of interaction between users and employees known as service encounters. So during service encounters – which most service organisations have anyway – the attentive frontline employee can identify or co-create innovation ideas with the users. That was the frame for this PhD thesis. However, such a frame begs a series of questions which have been the inspiration and foundation of this PhD thesis. First of all, is such a thing even possible? And how might this happen? More fundamentally, these questions are based on the assumption that employees do have an understanding of user needs. But do they? And how do they obtain this understanding? It is also based on the assumption that users state their needs during service encounters, or at least that they can somehow be made to communicate them. But can they? And if so, how? What exactly goes on during service encounters that may either facilitate or hinder such processes?

Resulting from the above questions, the focus of both the articles to come and the overall thesis is on *whether it is possible for frontline employees to gather ideas for innovation from service users during the service encounter, and which processes and factors that influence this and how*. This has led to questions such as: Out of the many elements of which service encounters consist, which are relevant to such an endeavour and are they drivers or barriers? And how are the users generally motivated to state ideas? In the end, the focus falls on the microprocesses that take place during service encounters, how frontline employees relate to the service encounters and users, and what this means for transferring ideas for innovation during these encounters. In particular, we will discuss the different kinds and patterns of exchange or reciprocity in which service organisations engage through the encounters. We will also address the professionalised role of the frontline employees in a service organisation and what effects it has on whether ideas for innovation can be sourced through these encounters. And finally we will address the resulting mental process

of othering which results from this professional role. This means that we are not so much concerned with the processes of service innovation themselves or what the ideas for innovation might be; rather we are concerned with the preconditions of encounter-based service innovation.

### Mode Of Enquiry

In investigating the questions posed above, this thesis is characterised by an anthropologically oriented mode of enquiry. This means that it is empirically oriented, it investigates and questions the details of everyday life, and it attempts to identify underlying assumptions and see deeper patterns of thinking and meaning in these details. The empirical material on which this thesis is based comes from two case studies. One was done at a café in central Copenhagen, the other was done at a major tour operator which provides services for many travel agencies. As the thesis is empirically oriented, innovation and services as theoretical concepts form a more distant background, but as empirical phenomena they make up a closer context. However, they are not the primary focus of this thesis. The main focus here is on the frontline employees, although both managers and users have been interviewed and included in the findings and analyses. The reason for this is that if we are to “catch ideas” from users during service encounters, then it is these employees who have to motivate users to state them, spot them when they are stated and in whatever form they are stated, “catch” them and remember them, and finally pass them on to the rest of the service providing organisation. They are the central hub of the wheel so to speak, around which the users, service providing organisation, service product and all the other spokes revolve. But more than just the frontline employees, the focus is also on the concrete empirical processes of service encounters and their meaning to those involved. This includes both the interchanges taking place during service encounters, the behaviour of the frontline employees and users, and their concomitant mindsets.

These elements are investigated through an ethnographic exploration of the everyday details of service encounters. This consisted of fieldwork including methods such as participant observation and interviews. In addition, the empirical findings have been analysed using a combination of anthropological, sociological and business theory. The results of such ethnographic exploration are of a different nature than much business literature; it is of a descriptive nature, rather than being prescriptive. It does not aim to be instrumental and provide ready-made



universally applicable managerial tools with which to better control the employees; rather it is investigatory as it explores and describes the underlying mechanisms and assumptions of the action and interaction of humans. The results produced are grown out of a specific context, but often have wider application. It is then the aim of this thesis to further the readers' understanding of what goes on during service encounters and how the frontline employees relate to this, thereby leaving the readers to draw any instrumental conclusions for themselves – however, on a more enlightened basis.

### Structure Of The Thesis

The research topic was explored in three articles which form part of this thesis. They are written in the structure of articles, though their forms diverge. Therefore the thesis is composed by some theoretical and methodological frame chapters followed by the three articles and lastly a concluding frame chapter. The thesis consists of eight parts. After this initial introduction, there will be a short review of innovation and services, which points out some different conceptualisation of these concepts. This is followed by chapter 2, which is a conceptual history and discussion of the professions and professionalism, which will provide insights to what professions are, how this has changes, how professionalism has become an ideology in its own right, and why professionalism is an attractive ideology for managers and service employees alike. Chapter 3 will provide an overview of some different conceptualisations of the concept of role, with a more detailed presentation of the concepts of Goffman's role theory as they are primarily what the role analyses of the articles are based on. This chapter also includes other uses of the concept of role and takes a critical stance to the use found in much business literature. Chapter 4 will describe and discuss the methods used in this thesis. This includes both the research design methods, data collection techniques, data analysis methods and problems, as well as some data presentation topics. After these initial 4 frame chapters follow the three articles. The first (chapter 5) is a lengthy article titled Reciprocity in Service Encounters. It presents a reciprocity view of service encounters and identifies three different kinds of reciprocity termed formal, social and personal reciprocity, which take place during service encounters. It also identifies certain patterns and networks of reciprocity and is concerned with the formation of the service relation. The second article (chapter 6) is titled Taming Professionalism. It addresses the professionalised role of frontline service employees,

which were formerly considered unprofessional. What effect the new demands of professionalism have on their role, and how this effects the possibility of sourcing ideas for innovation during encounters, will be analysed. The third article (chapter 7) is titled Othering in Service Encounters. It addresses a particular result of the attitudes of professionalism of the frontline employees. In addition to their work role and interaction with the users being affected, their mindset is also influenced by these developments. This includes how they view their job, and how they view the users. Furthermore, the employees formed certain spheres of social interaction between themselves, which are in the article called space of living, and these also have effects on whether and how innovation ideas can be sourced. This article has been published as part of the book User-Based Innovation in Services (Sundbo and Toivonen 2012). The final part of the frame, chapter 8, summarises the three articles briefly and ties the insights of the various parts of the thesis together, thereby providing some conclusions. The chapters 1, 2 and 3 thus provide the theoretical and conceptual foundations for the empirically based analyses and discussions of the chapters 5, 6 and 7.

### Acknowledgements

As is customary in PhD theses, some words of gratitude are in order. I want to thank my supervisor Associate Professor Lars Fuglsang and my secondary supervisor Associate Professor John Damm Scheuer for all their comments on earlier drafts, insights provided, and general coaching. I also want to thank Professor Jon Sundbo for comments, inspiration and support throughout the PhD process. Furthermore, I thank Birgitte Sundbo and Martin Eberhardt for their practical assistance in creating the role figure presented at the end of chapter 3 and the front page picture. I would also like to thank Fraser Ainslie for linguistic comments and moral support through the duration of the PhD process. Finally I thank all my colleagues at the Institute of Communication, Business and Information Technology at Roskilde University for comments on earlier drafts and collegiality throughout the duration of my appointment as a PhD scholar.

May this project inspire whoever reads it.

## **References**

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INNOVATION, SERVICE AND THEIR COMBINATION**



# Innovation, Service And Their Combination

The following sections will describe and discuss the topics of innovation and services. In the articles to come, as well as in the overall project, the aim is not to analyse the nature or definition of innovation and service *per se*; rather, the focus is on a particular kind of innovation in which users are involved. This will be termed user innovation. Likewise, the focus is not on services in general, but on service encounters in particular, meaning the situation where user and frontline employee of the service providing organisation meet and in which the service is actually provided. However, user innovation and service encounters are not the concrete objects of study, but form an analytical background or frame. Rather, the object of study is the *preconditions* for user innovation during service encounters, whether and how this might be possible. As the topics of the following sections merely form the background, they will be relatively short. First the concept of innovation will be discussed, including user innovation. Then some theoretical approaches to services will be briefly addressed, and service encounters in particular will be discussed. Finally, service innovation will be addressed and discussed.

## Innovation

In this section, the history and nature of innovation and particularly user innovation will be briefly addressed. Innovation has today become a ubiquitous word in society and academic literature. However, it is used in many different ways and with many different meanings, which would account for the cornucopia of definitions which has appeared in the literature on this topic. The meaning of the concept and the way it has been used has changed considerably through time, from simply meaning change over meaning something new to the specific meaning it has today (see below). Godin has outlined the genealogical history of innovation as a category in terms of the three concepts of imitation, invention and innovation (2008). The two former have been seen as in opposition to each other, and this is then resolved in the concept of innovation, but Godin suggests instead viewing them as sequential steps in the evolution of innovation. *Imitation* is a mimetic

process by which certain elements are combined; usually the best elements are combined in a new way (which makes it different from copying (2008: 12). The imitations can then be diffused to others and adopted by them. *Invention* has in the sciences come to mean finding or discovery of new knowledge, and in the arts it has come to mean creativity or the process of creating something (2008: 19). With this concept, imagination the creative dimension gain increased importance. In time, focus has turned primarily to mechanical and technological invention. *Innovation* originally meant renewal or change, and it is only in the twentieth century that the aspects of creativity have been added (2008: 24). Now the ideas of imitation, transformation and improvement of the existing have given way to a focus on creative factors such as originality and the novelty aspect. This parallels the distinction between radical and incremental innovation and the current prevalent focus on the former (Henderson 1993).

In time, however, innovation has come to be synonymous with a particular conceptualisation characterised by two particular properties. First, it has come to mean *technological innovation*. Grown out of the material culture of industrialisation, this generally implies the innovation of reified products – although, as Godin points out, technology might just as well refer to techniques as to objects (2008, note 15). This means that technological innovation can also be processual. Secondly, it is generally taken to be *commercialised innovation*. Adapted to a modern capitalist context, this means that it must be implemented in an economic market. There has to be adoption and use, so the benefits from the innovation can be reaped (2008). In the following texts, the conceptualisation of innovation which will be used shared the commercialised property. However, it is not technological innovation, neither in the reified nor in the processual sense, as the focus is not on objects or the creation of them. As there are myriad definitions of innovation, we will not add yet another to the pile; instead the conceptualisation used in the following can be clarified by elucidation of its core elements. The three concepts which Godin has pointed out, imitation, invention and innovation (in the commercialised sense), correspond to the three core elements in our understanding of innovation. The first element is an *idea*, which through associative thinking is inspired by something. This can be a need to fulfil, a problem to solve, a situation to cope with, and so on. The next element is then the *development* of this idea, meaning the creation of the idea in practice and “making it happen”; but it also involves making sure that it is original and possible to create. The final element is the *implementation* into a market, meaning the diffusion of what is created, the adoption of it by others, and the ensuing use of what is created. What is created can be something external such as a product or a process, but it can also be personal such as human



behaviour or interaction, or even internal such as a way of thinking about something or a perspective or world view. In the following texts we are not concerned with the latter two elements, nor with how the idea is created. We are, however, concerned with how this idea as such might be transferred from a user to the service provider, who can then take it through the other two stages. In essence, we are not concerned with innovation, but with *ideas for innovation*.

Joseph Schumpeter is often seen as one of the early foundational theorists of commercialised innovation. In analysing how entrepreneurs can bring about change, he conceptualised innovation as “spontaneous and discontinuous changes in the channel of the circular flow [of economic life] and [...] disturbances of the centre of equilibrium” (1961: 65). In other words, innovation is sudden or abrupt changes to economic life. Interestingly, he takes the view that “to produce means to combine materials and forces within our reach [...] to produce other things, or the same things by a different method, means to combine these materials and forces differently” (ibid.). This leads to his famous systematics of five kinds of innovation (or development as he terms it), which are “the introduction of a new good”, “the introduction of a new method of production”, “the opening of a new market”, “the conquest of a new source of supply of raw materials”, and “the carrying out of the new organisation of any industry” (1961: 66). In other words: product innovation, process innovation, market innovation, resource innovation and organisational innovation. These systematics seem to be designed with object innovation in mind; in a sense, neither of the above five kinds apply to the kind of innovation which is addressed in the following texts. We are neither concerned with products or the method of producing them, nor with new markets or resources. Though the idea for innovation may lead to an organisational change, this needs not necessarily be so. The ideas can, however, make up discontinuous changes to the *product delivery* so to speak, meaning the service provision.

Though Schumpeter has analysed innovation as coming from entrepreneurial producers, in fact it can be based on many sources. It can be based on internal research, on partners in the network of the producer, for example suppliers or intermediate users (Bogers et al. 2010), or be open innovation (Chesbrough 2003). One particular version is what von Hippel has called user driven innovation (1988, 2005). His focus has been on so called lead users, who are ahead of the market in terms of solutions to problems. Businesses can then learn from these solutions, and either put them in production (imitation), or be inspired by them and further develop them before they are implemented into a market (invention). While the idea behind user driven innovation is that the users drive innovation, there are also other kinds of innovation involving users. For example, the

innovation can be driven by both user and producer together, which has been termed co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2003). In the following texts, the type of innovation we are concerned with primarily involves the users as a source of ideas. Whether these are then developed and implemented by the provider alone or in conjunction with the users is beyond our focus as we are not addressing the innovation process itself.

## Service

Since before the 1970s, service has been an independent area of research (for example Regan 1963, Rathmell 1966) and it has continued to increase in scope and importance to society. The academic take on service, however, has changed considerably. In the early periods of service research, focus was on defining services and identifying in what ways they are different from goods (Regan 1963). One result of these aims was that four unique characteristics of services were identified (Edgett and Parkinson 1993), namely physical *intangibility* (Bateson 1977), *inseparability* of production and consumption (Kotler 1982), *heterogeneity* in delivery (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1985) and *perishability* as they cannot be stored (Rushton and Carson 1985). Since then, these characteristics have been debated; for example, one might say that service also has a tangible element to it as it is performed in servicescapes (Bitner 1990). In time, the focus on setting services apart from production has been replaced by an overall emphasis of service as performed action and thereby as a *relation* between provider and user (Grönroos 2000). So far, the focus of the paradigm has been on this relation. But the view of the service relation itself has also changed dramatically from a somewhat confrontational view (Levitt 1972, Normann 1991), over a more collaborative relation (Gummesson 1996, Grönroos 2000), to users as a direct source for ideas and development (Alam and Perry 2002, Gummesson 2002).

At least four different foci have resulted from these developments. First, in the field of marketing, the relational nature of services led to a new focus called *relationship marketing*, which was primarily aimed at services (Berry 1983). It began with the realisation that service marketing was fundamentally different from product marketing (Shostack 1977, Berry 1980), and has since gone on to address service-related phenomena such as rapport (Gremler and Gwinner 2000), trust (Macintosh 2009), word-of-mouth (Gremler et al. 2001) and loyalty (Gremler and Brown 1996) and so on. Another focus has been that of *service quality* (Grönroos 1988, 2007). For example, Christian

Grönroos (2000) has developed a model dividing this into the technical and functional dimensions. A third development has been *service engineering*, which has been focused on engineering approaches to services such as blueprinting (for example Baum 1990). And finally, the emphasis on differences between goods and service has been replaced by the avocation of a new dominant logic valid for both (Vargo and Lusch 2004). In addition, there have been other foci, such as service innovation which will be discussed in more detail below.

In the following texts, we take the view of services that they are *performed*, that they contain a *processual* element, and that they are *relational*. They are performed in the sense that someone acts purposefully to help someone else (either directly or by constructing something that can provide this help) and that the acting person somehow mentally relates to this process; the performance then involves these two elements, behaviour and mindset. And as services involve acting, they always contain a processual element regardless of whether or not the end service product is this act in itself or the help-providing entity referred to above. Finally, services are relational in the sense that the actions induce thoughts or emotions in the mind of the receiver, and as the expression of a service creates an impression in the mind of the receiver, a relation between expression and impression has been established (regardless of whether a relation between the two persons exists).

### The Service Encounter

Service encounters have been seen as an essential element of service provision (Czepiel, Solomon and Surprenant 1985). They are the moment of truth (Normann 1991) in which the strategies, designing and planning, as well as the marketing and managing all comes together to provide the user with a service. It is primarily through these encounters that the relation, with which relationship marketing (and service studies in general) is concerned, is created and maintained. Therefore we focus on them in the analyses of the following articles. Service encounters have been analysed and discussed by a number of authors (Czepiel et al. 1985, Corvellec & Lindquist 2005), and different elements of them have also been analysed, such as the employees (Lewis & Entwistle 1990, Gwinner et al. 2005) and the users (for example Meuter et al. 2000).

For the last three decades, the service encounter has been thoroughly analysed and discussed, especially within service marketing and service studies in general, producing a veritable

cornucopia of topics, perspectives and insights. Topics addressed include that it is important (Normann 1991), the preparation of it (Shostack 1985), pre-encounter expectations (Hubbert et al. 1995), post-encounter reflections (Nyquist et al. 1985), the consequences of it (Mooradian and Olver 1997), that it is the “face” of the service provider organisation as it is represented through it (Tansik 1985), that relations with users are created through it (Bitner 1995, Hennig-Thureau et al. 2006), the physical setting of it (Bitner 1990), emotional aspects (Bailey et al. 2001), and the list goes on. Often these analyses have an instrumental aim (e.g. George et al. 1985), and therefore they are of a prescriptive nature with focus on controlling frontline employees (Mills 1985, Broderick 1999). While many service encounter analyses have focused on the value for the user or the relation between the provider and user, less attention has been given to analysis of the creation of this relation through in-depth analysis of specific actions, statements and concrete interactions. There is a fundamental understanding of the processes of service encounters to be found in such description and analysis. In the articles we will take an anthropological approach which involves investigating and questioning the details of everyday life – in this case the microprocesses of service encounters. This is done to identify dynamics and find underlying patterns, assumptions and meanings which can account for why those involved in service encounters behave and think the way they do. And ultimately, it will further our understanding of which factors influence users stating ideas for innovation during encounters and how.

Exploring such a topic assumes that there is interaction during the service encounter, through which such ideas can be transferred. Therefore, the empirical cases, on which the following articles are based, will focus on situations in which services are provided *personally* and *directly* to a specific other person with whom the employee communicates; either directed at end users in face-to-face encounters, or at specific middle-users in the forms of face-to-face encounters, over the phone, or via email or messages in software systems. All encounter situations analysed then have this in common, that the service provided is directed at a particular person directly and not for example at a company in general; and that one employee communicates personally with another person (who can be another employee in another company or an end user). For these service encounters, then, the above view of services is also valid; they consist of performed behaviour and a concomitant mindset; they are processual as they consist of actions; and as they consist of direct interaction, they are also relational. In addition, they are dynamic and fluid as they depend on who the frontline employee and user are, and how the interaction unfolds.

Having discussed innovation in general and user innovation in particular, and briefly addressed services and discussed the literature on service encounters, we now turn to the topic of service innovation, specifically how it differs from industrial innovation, and provide a brief discussion of some models and theories of the field.

## **Service Innovation**

Since the 1960s, various areas of research in services have been explored, such as what constitutes a service, service management, service quality and service marketing. But it is only much later that the research area of service innovation has received attention on the same scale (Gallouj and Weinstein 1997, Tidd and Hull 2003). We will therefore outline how service innovation differs from product innovation and briefly mention some theories on service innovation.

### Service innovation is different from product innovation

Traditionally, services have been seen as not as innovative as the industries; they have also been seen as having low performance or production levels, and involve low levels of skills and knowledge (Gallouj and Djellal 2010). However, this is only when seen from a technological innovation perspective (see above); service innovation often on a fundamentally different character than product innovation and therefore it is not a question of being less innovation, but rather of being innovative in different ways. While services can have tangible elements and these can be innovated, services also often have (primarily) intangible processual elements which can also be innovated. This type innovation, however, is less conspicuous as it can consist of changes to various details or procedures, which may not be salient to someone who is not very familiar with the specific service. Seen from a technological innovation perspective, such innovations are invisible.

In this way, innovating services is fundamentally different. The traditional technological research and development approach to innovation does not work the same way as in the industries as it is difficult to “develop” something as fluid, dynamic and *processual* as service provision. Neither can experiments be made in the classic laboratory sense, as these would take

place in an artificial environment. Although there are a few examples of laboratory experiments in service organisations (Sundbo 2011), the fact that it is in an artificial environment influences the *relational* aspect of the service and therefore also the *performance*. This does not mean that services cannot or are not innovated of course. While they are not innovated in the classic Schumpeterian sense of product or production method innovation (see above), there is a *process* innovation taking place in services in terms of the processes of providing the service, the processes of preparing and planning this provision, and the processes of designing and creating the service overall.

As Gallouj points out, on one hand this makes it difficult to intentionally change and innovate services, and maintain the innovation through time; on the other hand it does allow for flexibility and improvisation (2010). Furthermore, as services are relational and interactive, so has service innovation been (Kline and Rosenberg 1986). This means that often innovation has come from those who perform the service, the frontline employees, in relation with the users (Gallouj and Djellal 2010). And often the creation of a service innovation has included many informal activities and processes by various individuals with various different functions (Fuglsang 2008). Therefore this important relation between frontline employees and users will be addressed in the articles, and in a way primarily seen from the perspective of the employees. Returning to the question of research and development, research is plentiful and development also exists, but in a different form than in the industries. Often, it is done not through structures of a permanent nature and set apart from the service organisation as a special department, but rather through a series of interactive processes and temporary formal or informal task force groups (Gallouj and Djellal 2010). To sum up, while product innovation can be planned, structured and reified, service innovation tends to be interactional, ad hoc and processual.

### Service innovation theories

Since it appeared as a research field in its own right, many theories have been put forward to describe and analyse service innovation. However, since the field is still relatively young, it is not a coherent field with one paradigmatic theory. Instead, at least four different models have so far been constructed (Sundbo 2011). The first is the *reverse product cycle* (Barras 1986). Whereas the “normal” product cycle has focused on technological innovation in which a product innovation leads to innovation in processes; in the reverse product cycle an innovation in

(service) processes leads to innovation of the (service) product. Another model is the *taxonomic* model (Soete and Miozzo 1990), which divides service organisations into different types that each innovate in their own manner. A third model addresses the different *service innovation types* (Gallouj 2002) and constructs a scale going from radical to incremental innovation (and in this way it parallels the difference between radical and incremental industrial innovation discussed above). The last model is the *service innovation development* model (Sundbo and Gallouj 2000). It addresses different forms of service innovation from a research and development approach to the more pragmatic or practice based “artisanal pattern” (2000: 29).

According to Sundbo (2011), the beginnings of an overall service innovation theory can be found in *strategic innovation theory* (Mintzberg 1989, Tidd et al. 2005). It is concerned with the interaction between service stakeholders (for example employee and user) which results in a series of incremental innovations. These are then identified, structured and implemented by management through the strategy. This means that service innovation involves processes going in two directions, from the employees to management and from management to the employees (Sundbo 2011). The strategy both guides and inspires the innovations, and therefore the creation and readjustment of it should involve the employees. Furthermore, strategic innovation can have a number of challenges such as work conflicts, resistance to change and coordination of time allocation to both innovation and other work tasks. Inspired by the industries, service organisations are now experimenting with how to organise innovation processes. Rather than creating a separate department for research and development, service providers tend to take an *interactive* approach and include practice-based learning, which puts a limit to both standardisation and the laboratory method; instead, both their own and university research is taken into account (Sundbo 2011).

One particular form of interactive approach is the one based on service encounters. This approach involves the users in various forms and therefore forms a service parallel to user innovation in the industries (see above). As service organisations often meet their users directly in these encounters, they can use them as a source of ideas for innovations. However, the users far from always have a solution to their problems and needs, and often they may not have a full finished idea at all; in fact, sometimes they may not even have a clear acknowledgement of what their need or problem is. Therefore it becomes the task of the frontline employees to help elicit and elucidate this in cooperation with the user through the service encounter (see for example the ICE project 2009).

To sum up, the field of service innovation research is to an extent fragmented and no one theory has so far become paradigmatic. We see this as beneficial since it makes the field more flexible and open to new insights, and this also reflects *the nature of service innovation itself*. Service innovation is less systematic and more difficult to plan than industrial innovation, but it is more interactive and naturally involves the users; it is necessarily dynamic and flexible; and it is often based on particular persons having or identifying, developing, and implementing ideas. In other words, like services, service innovation is relational and processual and performed.

In the articles to come, we will address the service encounter, which is important both for service provision and for service innovation. As the frontline employees are the central element in this *encounter-based innovation* and have the crucial role of identifying problems and needs and existing solutions by users, developing the needs and problems into ideas, remembering them and communicating them to the service organisation, then they will be the main focus of the empirical investigations and analyses of the articles.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

# **PROFESSIONS AND PROFESSIONALISM**



# Professions And Professionalism

## Professions And Professionalism – An Introduction

In the articles to come, the role behaviour of some service employees and its consequences for whether ideas for innovation are stated by users will be analysed. An important aspect of this role as it is expressed in practice is the supposed professionalism of these employees. In order to understand what this professionalism means to the employees, why they express their professionalism the way they do, why it takes the form it has and what effect it has on user innovation, this section will describe and discuss what it means to be professional.

In her article outlining the history and current state of professions and professionalism, Julia Evetts (2003) makes a discussive overview of some of the writings within the profession literature. In it she distinguishes between *professions*, which were the classical focus of the profession literature, and *professionalism*, which is a newer focus. In other words, professions and professionalism are not the same (though they have been used interchangeably in most of the literature). Professions, as an archetype, are a specific type of services, which are knowledge-based (Cruess et al. 2000) and relatively independent as they are primarily responsible to their peers (Freidson 1999). More recently, then, professionalism has emerged as both a theoretical focus and an independent empirical phenomenon motivating and controlling employees in non-professional and newly professionalised occupations (Evetts 2003, Fournier 1999). In this guise, professionalism includes the attitudes and approach to working characteristic for the traditional professions, and also some of their underlying values – albeit often in a new form. In the following, the authors quoted use the two terms profession and professionalism interchangeably, but following Evetts (2003) we would emphasise making a distinction between the two. In the first two sections we will discuss professions as specific types of vocations based on certain characteristics, and the concomitant organisations and associations. First the traditional occupations considered professions will be discussed, then some new developments within the professions will be addressed. In the last section we will discuss professionalism as attitude, role and mindset. The former then implies specific jobs whereas the latter implies an ideology and approach to working.

## **Traditional Occupational Professions**

### The definition debate

Within sociology there has long been a discussion on the nature of professions and how professions should be defined (Dingwall & Lewis 1983). This has included how they make individual needs yield to the needs of the overall community (Tawney 1921) and how the independence of being a professional provides freedom against the bureaucratic hierarchy (Carr-Saunders & Wilson 1933). Professions have also been characterised as moral communities based on contractual relations (Durkheim 1992), which are part of modern capitalism as an alternative to bureaucratic order (Parsons 1951). And the professions have been seen as having a service orientation towards society (Marshall 1950). According to Cruess et al., “society has used the concept of the profession to organise and deliver many of the complex services” in which “the expertise necessary to the practice of certain vocations is not easily comprehensible to the average citizen” (2000: 156). This view then defines professions as a particular type of knowledge-based service. The debate on what exactly constitutes a profession and how they should be defined is still going on (Sciulli 2005). In the light of current disputes, we will not offer a definition *per se*, but instead discuss the elements which have been seen as characteristic of the professions. Cruess et al. have stated that “the core elements of a profession are possession of a specialised body of knowledge and commitment to service” (2000: 156). To this we would add autonomy and a particular form of community. These four core elements will now be briefly discussed.

### *Special knowledge*

Perhaps the most characteristic property of the professions is that they are based on what we call *special knowledge*. This can consist of two elements, knowledge and skill. The knowledge which the professions possess and use is specialised in the sense that consists of complex information which, due to its inaccessible nature, is hard to understand for outsiders (Cruess et al. 2000). This means that it is not only complex, it is also of limited distribution (*ibid.*). It can often also be in the form of tacit knowledge. Whether complex or tacit, its inaccessibility makes it less-



than-transparent for non-professionals (ibid.). Acquiring this knowledge and thereby becoming a professional requires long periods of education (Evetts 2003).

Another element to the special knowledge of the occupational professions is skill. Unlike what Freidson has called “mechanical specialization” involving “simple, invariant, repetitive actions”, the professional work “cannot be performed mechanically because the contingencies of its tasks vary so greatly from one another that the worker must exercise considerable discretion to adapt his knowledge and skill to each circumstance” (Freidson 1999: 119). The skills of the professional must then be as flexible and variable as his work tasks. In other words, it is something which is difficult to do, and therefore the skills are also of limited distribution and require training (Cruess et al. 2000). To sum up, a profession is distinguished from for example craft work by being based on special knowledge, or what Freidson has called “a theoretically based discretionary specialization” (Freidson 1999: 119).

#### *Commitment to service for the common good*

The second core element of a profession is the commitment and dedication to providing a service for the common good. This involves “a public commitment to a set of values” (Cruess et al. 2000: 156). For example, in the case of the medical profession, this value commitment is expressed in the Hippocratic Oath. So professions are value laden occupations adhering to a normative set of virtues and moral. In principle this also entails that professions should have an altruistic approach to their occupation, although Cruess et al. have pointed out that there have at times been a “tension between self-interest and altruism” (2000: 157). As the special knowledge is inaccessible to the unprofessionals and the professions have this commitment to service, this creates a service relation of trust with the clients. As Evetts has put it, the “lay people *must* place their trust in professional workers” (Evetts 2006: 134, her italics).

#### *Autonomy*

The complex and inaccessible character of the special knowledge and the moral virtue of service for the common good means that externally imposed rules and regulations governing or

controlling the professions are minimized (Evetts 2010). This means that the professions have had a certain degree of autonomy. The question of who is qualified to judge the professions, the altruistic focus on the common good, and the service relations which must necessarily consist of a certain level of trust, are all factors which have led to the peer system of the professions. Only other members of the same profession have been viewed as qualified, morally entitled and trustworthy to have professional jurisdiction. In addition, the professional himself is assumed to embody the values of moral servitude. On these grounds, the professionals have been granted authority over themselves (Parsons 1939, Evetts 2010). This authority rests on the knowledge mandate (Halliday 1987) of their special knowledge. However, there is variation among the professions concerning the knowledge mandate as their socioeconomic situation determines to which degree they are independent from outside control (Larson 1977, Abbott 1988, Freidson 1999). This means that the professions are given a monopoly not only on their special knowledge but also how it is used, and that they are responsible for “the integrity of their knowledge base” and “its expansion through research” (Cruess et al. 2000: 156). They also have autonomy to establish standards of practice and assure quality. This situation of self-regulation means that the professionals are in a sense more free, but therefore also less accountable outside their own circle. This autonomy rests on a “social contract” (Cruess et al. 2000: 157) between a profession that adheres to the moral virtues of providing service for the common good and a society that in return grants it authority over itself.

### *Community*

This means that the peer system becomes the primary control mechanism for the occupational professions. Therefore the final core element of the occupational professions is the professional community. The system consists of three elements: collegiality, a shared professional identity and similarity. The collegial nature of the professions has been frequently noted, for example by Evetts who explains that “professional relations are characterised as collegial, cooperative and mutually supportive” (Evetts 2010: 5). This collegiality of relations also extends to the professional associations, which “use collegiality to establish common goals and encourage commitment to them” (Cruess et al. 2000: 156). But the community element goes beyond mere collegiality. The education and training of professionals is lengthy, and during this time a community forms. But the education and training also function as a socialisation process (Hughes

1958) creating a “shared professional identity [...] associated with a sense of common experiences, understandings, and expertise, shared ways of perceiving problems and their possible solutions” (Evetts 2006: 134). This shared professional identity is further reinforced by the membership of professional associations. In short, the shared identity is based on competencies learned through education and training and guaranteed by licensing (Evetts 2010). The final element of the community factor is the similarity between professionals. This is also a consequence of the lengthy educative socialisation process which professionals must go through to acquire the necessary special knowledge: “One result is similarities in work practices and procedures, common ways of perceiving problems and their possible solutions and shared ways of perceiving and interacting with customers and clients” (Evetts 2006: 135). This “was regarded as similar across occupations and between societies” (ibid.). In other words, there is a tendency of standardisation within the professions, and importantly, this pertains both to their work and to their behaviour and interaction with the users.

The occupational professions are then characterised by a special knowledge, a commitment to certain ethics concerning providing service for the common good, autonomy and a strong community adherence. These special privileges and obligations of the professions have led to debates and discussions on the nature and justification of these (Parsons 1939, 1951, Craib 1997). One proponent for professions as a particular way of organising work is Freidson, who has outlined the differences between professions and other ways of organising work (1999, 2001). This will now briefly be discussed.

### The professions in contrast to other vocations

The professions constitute a particular way of organising work, which is fundamentally different from other vocations. According to Freidson, they have certain defining characteristics such as an official body of knowledge and skill, a particular division of labour (concerning which functions fall under their jurisdiction), an occupationally controlled labour market in which only those sanctioned by other members of that profession are allowed to enter, and occupationally controlled education and training. (Freidson 1999). He has developed a model based on the knowledge and skill of different forms of work (1999, 2001). In this model, Freidson poses the professions as a specific approach to work. His model divides work organisation into

three different types based on control. In the rational-legal Weberian bureaucracy, the employee is under managerial control. In the free market, a producer or service provider is under the control of the labour consumers. The professions then make up a third category, in which “the knowledge and skill [...] is exogenous to both consumers and managers”, and therefore the profession is under its own occupational control (Freidson 1999: 118). In defining professionalism as “the occupational control of work” (ibid.), the special knowledge, which is a defining possession of the professions, also becomes both an incentive for and control of the professionals, a motivational and a coercive force simultaneously.

Freidson is a proponent of professions as “the third logic” (2001) which is particularly well suited to the service function which they have. So Freidson (2001) has reiterated Parsons’ (1951) view of professionalism as a distinct mode of organisation and in Freidson’s view, professionalism is seen as a positive motivator and third alternative to the free market and Weberian bureaucracy which both have an alleged tendency to standardise services and demotivate employees (Freidson 2001).

### The ideal of professionalism

As Freidson (2001) pointed out, the way the professions organise their work is important to many kinds of service provision as it is an ideal way. Seen from this perspective, professionalism becomes an ideal for the professions to follow. Cruess et al. have pointed out “society’s [...] belief in the inherent virtue and morality of professionalism” and that the social contract between the professions and society hinges on this ideal (2000: 156). It has guided the professions for the last three centuries and continues to do so today. Of course, this does not mean that all professionals at all times have lived up to this ideal without compromise, personal interest or corruption. This is not a ubiquitous feature of the professions but rather a moral ideal, that professionals should be knowledgeable, altruistic and self-sufficient, for on these grounds rests the justification for their self-authority. The professions are tangible communities and associations with particular ways of organising work; but “professionalism remains an ideal to be constantly pursued” (ibid. p. 157).

## **Post-autonomous Professions**

More recently, however, there have been some new and radical developments in the fields of the professions. Perhaps most importantly and spectacularly, they have lost considerable amounts of their autonomy.

### 1960's, 1970's and 1980's – the critical period

During these three decades, all establishments were critically questioned and often rejected, and indeed the professions with their status, power and autonomy were not spared either. The inaccessible knowledge and reliance on internal community lead to criticism of the closed nature of the professions. The inaccessibility of the professions was also criticised regarding who was allowed to enter the field in terms of gender, race and ethnicity (Cruess et al. 2000). In addition, the occupational monopoly that the professionals exerted was pointed out (Larkin 1983), as well as how the market closure lead to dominance of certain occupations (Larson 1977). For example, Cruess et al. have pointed out how medicine “controlled its own market” (Cruess et al. 2000: 157). A third point of criticism was that the collegiality had been (ab)used to protect colleagues and “had led to a spectacular failure to self-regulate” (ibid.). This prodded a general critique of the power and ideology of the professions (Johnson 1972). This also led to a final point of criticism, that some professionals had a focus on self-interest rather than serving the common good. For example, the affluence of the professionals meant that they were seen as profit-oriented businesses, which lead to analyses of the professions as a particular system serving to protect self-interest in the forms of money, status and power (Abbott 1988). This critical strain of literature saw an overall conflict between the privileges and promotion of self-interests of the professions on one hand, and their obligations to provide service for the common good on the other, and this was seen as a fundamental flaw in the social contract. This eventually led to increasing involvement by the states and business corporations into the affairs of the professions.

## The new kinds of professions

In effect, the expectations of the professions were changed and their role was radically redefined leading to what Evetts has termed new professionalism (2010). Amidst calls for greater transparency, the autonomy of the professions was limited by the states and organisations. The effect was that the professions were met with demands of *accountability* and increased scrutiny from society. This came in the form of increased state regulation and bureaucracy as well as critical interest from the press. As a result, the professions are now changed. Some professionals have left their autonomous life to pursue a career inside organisations. Others have remained inside their traditional professions, but they too face the increased scrutiny and regulation. In either case, there has been considerable change for both those moving into organisations and those that remain more independent. Evetts has contrasted the traditional “occupational professionalism” which was outlined above, with this “new professionalism” or “organizational professionalism” (2010: 3) and has stated that there are a number of “new and different elements and characteristics of professionalism [...] which would make it a distinctive and new variant different to both organizational and occupational forms of professionalism” (2010: 13). Following Evetts, we will in the following discussion use the terms *organisational professions* and organisational professionals about those moving into organisations, and the publicly managed services and independent professions will be termed the *new professions* and professionals; both are in contrast to the traditional *occupational professions* described above. This does not necessarily mean that there are different professions than before (though there are examples of this), but that the way in which they are organised and approach work has changed. In other words, the “new” does not refer to entirely different professions but to a different approach. Some professions (such as smaller law firms and general physicians) have remained largely independent, but they too are increasingly faced with state regulation nonetheless and therefore under the same category as the professionals in large public institutions. There are several similarities between these two new kinds of professions, but also dissimilarities due to the differences between large private sector firms and publicly managed services (as well as independent services under public regulation).

These developments have been both deplored and welcomed by theorists, the professions themselves and the general public. In her own words, Evetts has seen “professions as passive victims who are relatively powerless against demands for regulation, increased bureaucracy, transparency and accountability” which “might involve a return to notions of proletarianization or

de-professionalisation” (2010: 3). However, there is also a more optimistic view present in the recent writings of both her and others (ibid., Freidson 2001). We will now discuss the situations of these two kinds of professions.

### Organisational professions

Since the mid-1990s, many professionals are no longer independent but often employed in large hierarchical organisations, where they are subject to the demands, wishes and strategies of that organisation. This therefore constitutes a new type of profession and a new type of professionals. One major change is that the autonomy factor is no longer a defining characteristic of these professionals as they are now under hierarchical managerial control. This is one of the basic differences between the occupational profession(alism) which some have advocated (Parsons 1939; Freidson 2001) and the organisational professionalism (Evetts 2004, 2010; Falconbridge and Muzio 2008), which “is now organizationally defined and includes the logics of the organization and the market, managerialism and commercialism” (Evetts 2010: 3). The logic of altruism has then been converted into the logic of profits meaning that their product is no longer created on the basis of ethical codes of a profession, but on organisational strategy. In addition, the previous occupational peer control (Freidson 1999, 2001) and autonomy (Cruess 2000) is replaced by managerial control in the form of accountability (Fournier 1999). Many professionals entering organisations have become middle managers. This has meant that the authority over oneself characteristic of occupational autonomy is replaced by an authority over others characteristic of hierarchical organisations (Parsons 1939, Evetts 2010).

Evetts has listed a series of changes in the professions as they transition from occupational to organisational (2010). These include the discourse created by the profession being supplanted by a managerial discourse of control, collegial authority replaced by hierarchical, autonomy is given up and instead standardised procedures must now be followed, and professional ethics being replaced by external accountability and regulation. In addition to this list, there are some further fundamental changes. The professionals are now required to codify their competences and output. These then become standardised service products, and in this way the skills and services of the professions are commodified (Svensson and Evetts 2003). Likewise, the trust relation between professional and client is also standardised and de-personalised; it now requires managerial supervision, customer satisfaction questionnaires and performance evaluation. Furthermore, the

professional community and cooperation is replaced by internal struggles between departments for limited resources. Simultaneously, the connection with the professional community at large is replaced by a work identity connecting the employee with the business organisation. This means that the work context of the professional changes from a mutually supportive knowledge-based community to a competitive profit-oriented organisation. To sum up the changes, autonomy has been replaced by managerial control, authority over oneself has been replaced by authority over others (who are not members of the profession), service for the common good has been replaced by logic of profits and organisational strategy, services have been standardised and commodified, the service relation to users has become impersonal, cooperative peer relations have been replaced by a competitive struggle for resources, and the work identity is no longer primarily that of the occupation but of the organisation. The organisational professional does, however, still possess a special knowledge.

### New professions

As the above radical developments appeared, Cruess et al note how “titles such as “Professionalism reborn” or “The new professionalism” appeared” in the literature (2000: 157). Even for those who did not move into organisations, the terms of profession have changed considerably. The increased state intervention and regulation (Hanlon 1998) has meant some drastic new developments for these professions as well. In general, there has been a disillusion in the public with the professions, which has led to a loss of control for them, as well as new forms of accountability and integrity.

### *Disillusion*

In addressing the changed conditions of the medical sector, Cruess et al. noted that “society [...] seems to have lost its faith in medicine’s ability to uphold its part of the contract” (2000: 157). The dissatisfaction with the performance of certain professions in general and certain professionals in particular has been supplemented with public concerns about the integrity and quality of their knowledge base and an imperfect self-regulation leading to selfish behaviour (ibid.,



Johnson 1972, Abbott 1988). All this led to a general disillusion with the professions, who lost their status. In a sense, the social contract was cancelled and replaced by regulation.

### *Loss of control*

As a result, the entire concept of professionalism as a special moral virtue expressing altruistic ethics was changed. Not only the status of the professions was altered, their autonomy has also been severely challenged. Some professions have lost control over their own marketplace (Cruess et al. 2000). Others retain control over their marketplace but now face governance and community controls, which means they must learn to navigate the complexities of bureaucracy as a large number of agencies, institutions and interests must be taken into account. The retention of some degree of autonomy has come at the price of voluntary effort and self-regulated motivation (Evetts 2010). For the individual professional, the change has not only meant a relative loss of control, but a change of control. Like the organisational professionals which gave up occupational control for managerial control, so the new professionals have been forced to relent part of their autonomy for the regulative and budgetary control of the state – and, in addition, the scrutiny of the press.

### *New forms of accountability*

The increasing cost and complexity of the professions has also led to new forms of accountability. Following medical scandals, immoral law practice and other breaches of the ethical codes, the professions have faced demands from society of accountability, transparency and sound standards. The purpose of the bureaucracy, output measures and standardisation was to ensure this greater accountability (Evetts 2003, 2010). As Cruess et al. note, “these levels of accountability are now part of professional life and have had a wide impact on the practice of medicine” (Cruess et al. 2000: 158). This has meant two important changes in accountability. First, the views and nature of professional work has been redefined as something which can be measured according to standards of money and quality by “centralizing, regulatory governments, intent on demonstrating value from public service budgets” (Evetts 2010: 13). Secondly, whereas the occupational professions such as medicine were responsible to patients and colleagues, the new professions are accountable to those

that pay (the state, companies and patients) and to society for their impact on the community (Cruess et al. 2000). Accountability, then, comes not just in the form of consequences of actions, but expressed in standardised bureaucratic ways.

### *New forms of integrity*

The final major change which the new professions have faced is a new kind of integrity. Rather than relying in the integrity of their knowledge base, which served as the foundation for their autonomy, the integrity of the new professions is evidence-based rather than trust-based. As trust in the integrity of occupational professions waned, they faced increasing demands of renewed and increased certification and validation by public authorities. This what lead Cruess et al. to conclude that “the social contract must be renegotiated carefully” and that “more rigorous self-regulation must occur” (2000: 158).

Despite the loss of autonomy and the new forms of accountability and integrity, the new professions are still characterised by a special knowledge, although the integrity of it must now be proven under much scrutiny. And unlike their organisational colleagues, they have retained their adherence to a professional community. Such drastic changes for both groups, however, have of course not gone unnoticed by the professions themselves.

### Responses from the professions

The developments outlined above have not entirely been negative for the professions; and not for society either. In addition, there are signs of changes to the new demands as the autonomy of the occupational professions has shown some advantages. We will now briefly outline these factors for the organisational professions and the new professions, and point out some new opportunities.

### *Organisational professions*

Many of the professionals which entered into organisational hierarchies have joined complex bureaucracies. This organisational complexity gives room for agency for the individual professional as he or she negotiates different and at times opposing interests of others. Furthermore, the professions entering into organisations have managed to at least partially retain their high status (Evetts 2010). This has given them both power and a certain degree of autonomy even within these organisations. Therefore, they can to a certain degree resist managerial intervention. In addition, as the professions have joined the ranks of employees, there have been changes within the organisations themselves. A new realisation of the nature of professional work and the complex special knowledge on which it is based has led to new managerial perspectives. The outputs and success criteria of the professionals have often proven difficult or even impossible to standardise and measure. This has been exacerbated by the intangible and processual nature of the services which the professionals provide. And lastly, the organisations have realised that the standardisation, imposition of targets and performance reviews with which the professions have been met have some unintended consequences in terms of productiveness and the prioritisation of work tasks (Evetts 2010).

### *New professions*

The new professions have also voiced their concerns with society in terms of budgets and bureaucracy. The restrictions and regulations imposed on them and the cost-oriented accounting logic with which they have been faced has meant a loss of control over knowledge-based decisions. For example, certain medical procedures which may have been in the patient's best interest have been re-evaluated due to high costs (Cruess et al. 2000). In addition, there have been examples of financial incentives compromising the principle of the common good and the values on which it rests. These effects have caused widespread frustration among the new professions, which has been voiced publicly. These dilemmas led Cruess et al. to advocate that "efforts must be made to incorporate the ideal of professionalism, with its underlying foundation of altruism, morality, and virtue into the regulatory procedures" in a way "so that physicians have the time and the needed

autonomy to serve the patient” (2000: 158). On the other hand, the medical profession must also embrace these changes as it is impossible to go back to being a traditional occupational profession. The new professionals have also found room for agency in the web of bureaucracy in which they have been entangled. It would seem that while the *external* frame of structure with its focus on measurement has changed for the new professions, the *internal* approaches to tasks, relations, norms and attitudes remain resilient or even defensive to such regulatory attempts. In fact, “professional strategies are increasingly resistant, defensive or conservative which seek to protect jurisdictions and privileges” (Evetts 2010: 16). But it is not only in the professions themselves that one finds a counter-movement; Evetts points out that there “might be a retreat from or a substantial redefinition of certain aspects of managerialism and NPM by policy-makers” (2010: 17).

### *New Opportunities*

In addition, these developments have created some benefits which were formerly not standard. For example, human resource management practices of organisations, such as formal job contracts and sickness pay, have become standard in most professions. Furthermore, standardisation of hiring procedures is also commonplace, which limits nepotism and career inequality (Evetts 2010). In addition, there are also new opportunities for the professions. On an individual level new opportunities appear as professionals can now use the management system to pursue a career in the organisational hierarchy. Likewise, certain vocations have been successful in gaining status and respect by adding management practices to their approach to work. For example, German social workers now have management training as part of their education (Evetts 2010). Another interesting development has been that the professions have influenced the systems they have become part of. One might say that, in addition to the professions being taken over by organisations, the organisations get taken over by the professions. Professional dominance and control has been successfully established as certain tasks have been controlled by professional interests (Evetts 2010). Finally, the organisational focus on service quality has had beneficial effects on the service orientation and relations of the professions. From closed systems of monopoly, the professions must now work within competitive environments, and this forces the professionals to focus on user needs.

### *From professions to professionalism*

The developments of the professions have had many effects for the daily life of the professionals. The uniformity characterising the occupational professions has disappeared as some move into diverse organisational climates and systems, and the new professionals face different demands of accountability from the state and society. In addition, the autonomy of traditional occupational professions has diminished considerably, and in some cases it has entirely disappeared. As professionals move into organisations or are faced with an accounting logic and financial incentives compromising the principle of the common good, the altruistic service orientation of the professionals has also changed. Now, the only real defining characteristic of the professions is the special knowledge and the concomitant knowledge mandate (Halliday 1987).

Curiously, as professions have faced criticism, have been regulated and subjugated to various systems, and are now negotiating a new understanding with society, the notion of *professionalism* seems to appear more often in society. This ideal is increasingly seen as of great importance in the business world (as elsewhere) and it has affected the lives of employees in many types of service organisations (as in other organisations).

### **Professionalism As Ideology**

As Fournier has noted, “it seems paradoxical that as the professions are being threatened by various trends of organisational, economic and political change [...], the notion of ‘professionalism’ is creeping up in unexpected domains“ (1999: 280). The notion of professionalism has become detached from the professions and seems to have taken on a life of its own. As this process has taken place, professionalism has transitioned from an *ideal* to an *ideology*, which has then been applied to new occupations which were formerly not considered part of the professions. This can happen either *internally* as an expression of the wishes and aims of the employees in these occupations, or as an *externally* imposed ideology. These occupations have become what we term the *neoprofessionals*. As the notion of professionalism has transitioned into ideology, some features have been preserved while others have been radically altered, and this has

had considerable consequences for the neoprofessional employees of these occupations. These current developments and what they mean to service employees will now be discussed.

### From Ideal To Ideology

As we have transitioned into the knowledge society or service society, the ideals of knowledge-based service characteristic of the professions has become ubiquitous and paramount. Now, all work functions must be done “professionally”; doing something “unprofessionally” has become synonymous with poor quality. But as society has transitioned, so have the ideals of professionalism. Torn from the knowledge-based occupations from which they derived their meaning and purpose, the ideals has been amalgamated into one collective package or unit and transmuted into an *ideology*. The icon of the (occupational) professions with their strong capability and will, their inaccessible and complex special knowledge, their altruistic ethics, their commitment to service for the common good, their dedication to the users and their autonomous self-reliance has been embodied in this version of professionalism. However, these ideals (which were never fully obtained by the professions themselves) have now been applied to new occupations which do not share the preconditions of the classic professions. As professionalism has become detached from the professions and applied to new contexts, it has taken on new meaning. From a guiding ideal it has become a self-contained goal which – if difficult for the professions to reach – is near impossible for the neoprofessionals to live up to. Yet this is the demand with which they must cope when faced with professionalism as ideology.

### *From above and from within*

Building on McClelland (1990), Evetts (2003) suggested analysing the two different notion of professionalism as respectively “from within” and “from above”. The former would then denote an occupational value (Parsons 1939; Freidson 1999, 2001) and the latter a controlling discourse (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2003). Those advocating professionalism have generally taken the former stand and those deploring it have taken the latter. Professionalism from within appears as members of an occupation strive to add legitimacy or status and respect to their vocational

reputation by either adding special knowledge to their field or by attempting as best they can to live up to the ideals contained within the ideology of professionalism. Generally this is a voluntary process seen positively by the members. In contrast, professionalism from above has come to mean a superimposed demand of employees that they should live up to the ideals of the ideology of professionalism, a view which the members themselves may not necessarily share. Evetts (2010) has listed the advantages which professionalism (as ideology or ideal) from within has supposedly had. The list includes the control of work, the professional association as provider of ethics, collegial authority and cooperation, lengthy education and training, strong occupational identity, strong sense of purpose, discretionary judgement and evaluation, and trust and confidence in the service relations. These have not been present in all professions at all times, but they have all become part of the ideal (or ideology) of professionalism. They explain the appeal of professionalism as an occupational value and serve to create the ideal type of professionalism from within. In the case of professionalism from above, far from all neo-professionalised vocations have these preconditions. But regardless of for example length of education or collegiality, the advantages of such preconditions are nevertheless judged obtainable by those that impose the ideology.

### Continuity: Great Expectations

The change in concepts signals a fundamental change in what is considered desirable, as if to say “the professions are dead, long live professionalism”. Unlike the organisational and new professions, which have to some extent lost autonomy and service-commitment, in professionalism as ideology the autonomous self-governing, self-reliant, self-contained employee with an altruistic and dedicated service-orientation has become a not only an iconic myth, but also a goal to reach for the neoprofessional employees whether they possess a special knowledge or not. As a result, the attitudes and display of responsibility and capability are important features of professionalism. Though the autonomy of the employee is in reality compromised or absent, the attitude of independence and capability is still to be found in the normative ideology of professionalism (Freidson 1999). In other words, the status of the professions might have diminished considerably, and their professionalism *as real* might have gained a somewhat tainted reputation, but society’s

confidence in the virtues, morality and benefits of professionalism *as ideal* lives on in professionalism as ideology.

Another feature of professionalism, which has continued from the traditional occupational professions, is the uniformity. However, again the meaning of this phenomenon has been transmuted from an empirical fact due to educational circumstances into an ideological goal due to service standardisation and ease of management. Though this feature has diminished considerably in the organisational and new professions, in the ideology of professionalism the expectation of similar work procedures and ways of perceiving and interacting with customers persists and is even reinforced (as the articles will show).

### Change: Neoprofessionalism

As some occupations have in a sense become de-professionalised, others have become professionalised. The ideology of professionalism is no longer only for the traditional professions (if ever it were). As professionalism as ideology is applied to new vocational groups, they in effect become the neo-professionals. This process can take a number of forms. Some occupations also have special knowledge added to their field and thus make up a new profession in the classic sense (cf. the German social workers mentioned above). The less fortunate vocations, however, have not been professionalised in the sense of having special knowledge and skill added to their field. They are nevertheless facing increasing demands of professionalism and so they are left with no alternative but to adopt professionalism only in behaviour, manner and attitude. In either case, they become part of the supposedly professionalised occupations, the neoprofessionals. Relating this new situation of some occupations to Freidson's distinction between craft work and professional work above, one can say that the neo-professionals who do not have knowledge and skill added are basically crafts with the ideology of professionalism applied to them (1999). On the other hand, some neoprofessionals do have new special knowledge added to their field. Likewise, autonomy is also "of increased importance in some newly powerful professional groups such as international accountancy" (Evetts 2010: 13). In addition, some groups have even been able to reclaim their professionalism, and some have been able "to secure new tasks, responsibilities and recognition" (ibid. p. 14). Professionalism as ideology thus contains elements of continuity from the occupational professions, but also very important changes from the ideals on which it is supposedly



based. The analysis of what characterises a profession and how this has changed has shown the origins and power of the ideology of professionalism and why it has been applied to so many other occupational groups. No doubt, its current popularity in (service) businesses is also due to its usefulness as a managerial tool of control. This particular use of professionalism and what it means for the employees will be the topic of our final discussion.

### Professionalism As Controlling Ideology

The basis for professionalism as a controlling ideology has already been established above. In addition to professionalism as an occupational value coming voluntarily as a virtue from within the members of an occupation, a different view has been that of professionalisation imposed from above (or from outside the group of employees) as a *controlling discourse* (Fournier 1999, Evetts 2003). The appeal to professionalism has been used intentionally and purposefully by managers as a disciplinary mechanism instilling properties seen as desirable by the manager or organisation into the employee. As neo-liberalism and New Public Management have gained ground in Western societies, the self-governing service-oriented employee expressed in the ideology of professionalism has become the ideal for workers to emulate and even internalise (Hanlon 1998, Fournier 1999, Evetts 2009). For example, the notion of *professional competence* defines what is considered moral conduct (Fournier 1999) and thereby sets the frame for behaviour both in terms of guidance (what the employee should do) and limits (what the employee should not do). According to such philosophy (or policy), if they can be made to believe in the ideology, employees can be not only managed, but *governed*. However, in these cases of professionalism from above, the values and ideals “are inserted or imposed and a false or selective ideology is used to promote and facilitate occupational change and as a disciplinary mechanism” (Evetts 2003: 409). In other words, it is not constructed by the employees themselves but intentionally (mis)constructed by managers in order to control the employees.

Professionalism as ideology has come in the form of explicit regulation under which the neoprofessionals have become subject to new demands (Evetts 2009, Freidson 1994). Fournier has analysed “professionalism as a disciplinary logic which inscribes ‘autonomous’ professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance” (Fournier 1999: 280). There are two paradoxes here. First, the expectation of self-regulation which

was part of occupational professionalism has continued as part of the new ideological professionalism. However, as discussed above, the knowledge base on which such self-regulation rested in the traditional professions is not necessarily present in the neoprofessions. Secondly, as organisational employees they are under managerial scrutiny. Thus the neoprofessional employee faces the dilemma of having to be autonomous yet accountable simultaneously. Unlike the organisational professionals which see the occupational peer review replaced by managerial accountability, the neoprofessionals are doubly regulated by both self-regulation disguised as autonomous practice, and organisational regulation.

This externally inserted self-regulation of the neoprofessional employee is what Fournier meant with governing at a distance. In addition to being yet another set of explicit regulations, professionalism also becomes an implicit – and, for the neoprofessional, often unconscious or unaware – device of control. In this way “the appeal to the discursive resources of professionalism in new occupational domains potentially acts as a disciplinary mechanism that serves to profess ‘appropriate’ work identities and conducts” (Fournier 1999: 280). The prevalence of the professionalism metaphor is then also an effect of the changing conditions of work in modern Western societies. As many vocations deploy ever more flexible strategies in the pursuit of profit, the appeal to professionalism as ideology is a way for managers to retain control over their members at a distance. The authority over oneself which the occupational professions enjoyed was changed to authority over others in the case of the organisational professionals. In the case of the neoprofessionals, however, this is transformed into the internalisation of the authority of others over oneself. Their government becomes voluntary self-government in the case of the neoprofessional. Fournier has analysed professionalism as a disciplinary regime in terms of Foucault’s concept of governmentality (1999); an alternative conceptualisation would be that of hegemony, which is the power of others internalised into one’s self to the point where it is taken for granted and therefore seen as natural and not questioned (Gramsci 1975). When the supposedly inherently beneficial values of professionalism are successfully instilled in the subject employees, these start believing in them and act accordingly while being largely unaware of the regulatory and controlling effect it has on them. In other words, the explicit appeal *to* professionalism by managers is supplemented by the internal appeal *of* professionalism in the eyes of employees wanting to perform their work well.

As described above, these new developments are not confined to professionalism as ideology, the professions themselves also face them. Evetts writes about the new professions that “this quest for professionalism and accountability [...] is also a bureaucratic means of regaining

control.” (Evetts 2010: 12-13). Ironically, “attempts to demonstrate professionalism actually increase the demand for explicit accounting [...] demands for quality control and audit, target setting and performance review become reinterpreted as the promotion of professionalism” (Evetts 2010: 12). In other words, professionalism as ideology – while pretending to promote a sense of responsibility, self-accountability and individual freedom – as a managerial tool of control in fact does the exact opposite!

Professionalism as ideology contains some valuable aims which are attractive not only to managers or organisations, but also to the neoprofessional employees themselves. For example, the image of (neo)professionalism still relies heavily on display of noteworthy capability, integrity, self-reliance, independence and special knowledge. This is (so far) the last point on the journey of the notion of professionalism. The set of virtues, values and morality of the occupational professions created the ideal of professionalism *from within*, and this was created, enforced and maintained by the professionals themselves. But the ideal was then detached and *decontextualised* into an abstract ideology of behaviour and mindset, and now it has been *recontextualised* and transmuted into a managerial tool for control at a distance *from above*. This has been legalised and naturalised so that the neoprofessional employees accept it regardless of whether special knowledge has been added to their field or not. In essence, the employees have now been subjugated to the managerial or organisational will in intricate ways and have even internalised this will (Fournier 1999). Professionalism in this guise stands in stark contrast to Freidson’s definition of professionalism as “the occupational control of work” (1999). As ideology, it has rather become the managerial work control of occupations.

The process of professionalisation is a complex and multi-sided one. On one hand, “professionalism is being used as an ideological instrument [...] to convince, cajole and persuade employees, practitioners and other workers to perform and behave in ways which the organization or the institution deem to be appropriate, effective and efficient” (Evetts 2003: 411). On the other, “workers are very keen to grasp and lay claim to the normative values of professionalism” (ibid.). These are then the two driving forces behind neo-professionalism. Together they have created and maintain the ideology as long as it holds value to them. However, without the defining characteristic of special knowledge, many neoprofessionals must look to other foundations for their neoprofessionalism. The reactions to the imposition of this ideal have been varied. There have been few (if any) examples of open protest. But some resort to everyday forms of resistance towards this new superimposed demand which means intentionally doing things slowly or not very well or

putting in less effort (Scott 1985). In other cases there may be a mock-adoption of the neoprofessional role, in which case the employees will try to live up to the new demands, but only in attitude as they do not possess special knowledge.

As the articles will show, there can also be an over-adoption of this role. In such cases, the employees not only embrace the demand, they come to rely on it for validation of work performance and job- (as well as self-) satisfaction. In fact, in some cases, they indulge in the display of professional attitudes, as if over-compensating for the lack of special knowledge (this is what we in the articles call *hyperprofessionalism*). A proper comprehension of this phenomenon can only be obtained by a contextualised understanding of how it has become the way it is. Above, then, we have outlined this context and the resulting version of professionalism. We have started with the characteristics of the classic occupational professions and in which ways they have been attractive to their members, continued with how the professions today have significantly altered conditions of work which excludes many of the initial properties and privileges of earlier times, outlined how the attractions of the classic professions live on as iconic myth in professionalism as prescriptive ideology and why this is attractive to both managers and the employees subjected to this ideology, and ended with an analysis of how it has become a managerial tool of control. In the articles, it will be shown how professionalism takes on a radically different form in a case where the service employees do not have a special knowledge on which to base their professionalism. We take the stand of the “professionalism from above” school as we analyse the effects of its use as a managerial tool and demand (and indeed a demand from society in general); however, we diverge from this perspective as the deploring approach to such developments has been substituted for an empirical analysis of how the employees manage these demands and how their “professionalism” come to expression in everyday hyperprofessional role behaviour. Ironically, there is no reason why this should be limited to the neo-professionals; the new professions such as hospital doctors might just as well be found displaying hyperprofessional attitudes or even playing a hyperprofessional role. Interestingly, as will be discussed in the articles, the neoprofessional service employees are not helpless victims caught in these developments; there are examples of intricate and interesting ways of coping and even turning this into their advantage.

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# **CHAPTER 3**

## **ROLE THEORY**





# **Role Theory**

The concept of role has been used in a number of different ways in various strands of social theory and it is therefore a complex notion which is conceptualised in various different ways dependent on time, author and perspective. Several disciplines such as e.g. social psychology have made use of, and helped evolve, this concept. Here we are most concerned with sociological and anthropological theories which analyse the socio-cultural aspects of roles. In time, two different main conceptualisations have evolved. The first we have termed the fulfilment perspective and it takes as its departing point of view culture or society at large. This is role as seen “from above” and endeavours to describe and analyse its functions in the structure or system of human social organisation. To this macro-perspective belong mainly the Marxist, functionalist, structural functionalist and structuralist strands of theory. The other strand of conceptualisations we call the enactment perspective and it employs another level of perspective which is the everyday lived life of humans. Here, role is described and analysed as individual experience, so in the individual-versus-structure relation this is role as seen “from below”. In this perspective, the focus is on how role is experienced, enacted and constantly adapted to changing circumstances. It is in this micro-perspective strand of theory that we find symbolic interactionism. Some main parts of both perspectives will now be summarised.

## **Fulfilment-perspective**

Both within the academic discipline of anthropology, which has analysed society as culture, and within sociology, which has analysed society as social systems, has the concept of role been used to account for various aspects of individual behaviour such as similarity, institutionalisation, conflict, solidarity and so on. In these theoretical strands, the concept of role can be seen from an individualistic perspective, but often it is seen from a society or systemic perspective. For example, in analysing the existence and consequences of class difference, Marx pointed out the social, political and economic divisions of humans; in so doing he was also trying to account not only for different roles but also for differing interests and expectations which humans

have to other roles (for example Marx 1867). His writings thus constituted an early role analysis in a sense. We will now describe two later conceptualisations of role; those of functionalism and structural functionalism. The following summaries and discussions are not necessarily chronological in terms of publications dates, but rather content-based in terms of responses to and further development of ideas and concepts.

### **Role in functionalism**

Functionalism in anthropology was a reaction against the previous evolutionist and diffusionist discourses which focused on the evolution of mankind both physically and culturally and the diffusion of cultural traits and institutions. In the evolutionist world view, all cultures could be seen as more or less primitive, and so this implied a normative scale on which white Western culture was on top as the most evolved. It was against this view that functionalists such as Edward E. Evans-Pritchard and Bronislaw Malinowski reacted in the 1920s and 1930s as they moved focus from evolution to the inner workings of culture and society. Seeking instead to explain how cultural phenomena contributed to making cultures and societies function, various practices, institutions and cultural elements were described and analysed through an organic analogy, viewing them as parts of a whole, like the organs of an organism. Anyhow, one of these socio-cultural phenomena was the concept of role.

### **Linton**

Perhaps the most prominent scholar in terms of anthropological theory on role was Ralph Linton. In his seminal book *The Study of Man* which was first published in 1936, he devoted an entire chapter to discussing the function of role and status in various societies. He describes societies as patterns of reciprocal behaviour and defines status, in the abstract, as *position* in these patterns (Linton 1964:113). As each individual participates in several patterns of reciprocity simultaneously, this means that he or she has several statuses. But status is also used in a singular or rather compound sense, the sum of all of an individual's statuses. He emphasises that status in this sense does not equal the person who holds them, but is rather the various rights and duties which

the person exercises; in other words, a point in the reciprocal system (ibid.). Role, then, is the enactment of a status, a performance of the rights and duties prescribed to the status. And like status, role exists on two different levels, a specific role for each reciprocal pattern in which a person holds a place, and the general role of a person, which is rather a role-of-life, e.g. “being Ralph Linton”. To Linton, status and role hold an organising function coordinating individual behaviour with that of other individuals and reducing “the ideal patterns for social life to individual terms” (1964:114).

However, they do not come naturally but must be learned and the earlier in a person’s life the better they will be so. This creates a dilemma as personal potential often appears later in life, after the ideal point at which an individual should begin training for a particular role. This has been solved by the various societies by dividing statuses into *ascribed* and *achieved*, the former being assigned to individuals from birth and the latter being obtained by individuals through competition and personal ability. The reference points for the former include various biologically and socially pre-given facts such as gender, age, family relationships and class (which Linton goes on to describe at length in a comparative and eclectic study of various cultures). He finds that the actual contents of the various ascribed statuses and roles, e.g. gender roles, are to a minimal degree based on biology, but are rather socially determined and vary considerably between cultures. The number of “access roads” to achieved statuses, however, is usually limited as the competition to get them will break the stabilising ascription pattern. However, as society or the external environment changes, the prevailing culture will become maladjusted which leads to more statuses being open to competition, i.e. achieved, in order to adjust. Thus the higher the environmental and social volatility, the higher the number of achieved statuses.

Linton was seminal in wording, defining and analysing roles, and has by later scholars been considered one of the founding fathers of role theory (e.g. Merton 1957). Importantly, he linked role to the position of an individual in society, but also to the patterns of reciprocity in which such an individual took part. His aim was to describe how a person could fulfil such a role as given to him by society. However, being a functionalist, Linton took an individual or agent-perspective when looking at the creation, constitution, continuation and overall function of roles. This stance was criticised by the structural functionalists (see below), who believed that scholars such as Linton focused too much on individuals in order to explain statuses and roles and how they interact with other statuses and roles and the system at large. Instead, the structural functionalists thought that one must take a higher perspective as point of view, namely that of the system. The function of

roles was still an important issue, but this function could only be understood when seen in relation to the overall socio-cultural structure of which it was a part. Therefore they moved focus accordingly to develop role theory further. Nevertheless, Linton had given some basic and astute insights to the concepts of status and role, and in so doing he greatly influenced later scholars and played a vital role in setting the stage for role theory.

### **Role in structural functionalism**

The structural functionalism of the 1940s and 1950s in anthropology and sociology was born out of functionalism and despite its critique of the latter, structural functionalism did not represent a break with it per se; rather it was a continuation which shifted perspective somewhat. Where functionalists often analysed cultures in terms of individual practices and how they related to the overall culture, structural functionalists moved the focus to the overall structure of society. Emphasis was still on the function of practices, but now seen from a structural or systems point of view. Instead of asking questions such as “how does this cultural trait work?” the question now became “what role does this trait play in the overall structure of society?” and so focus was moved from individual cultural agent to the fabric of (cultural) society.

### **Merton**

Within structural functionalist sociology, the description and analysis of roles continued in the writings of Robert K. Merton. Already in 1949 in his book *Social Theory And Social Structure*, he wrote on the *Role of the Intellectual in Public Bureaucracy*” (Merton 1968). Writing in terms of class – or rather group – conflict, he problematises the role of intellectuals in terms of their role options, conflicts and frustrations when faced with institutional pressure to conform to external role expectations mainly from administrators and politicians. He goes on to describe the plight of the intellectuals who become part of public bureaucracy, especially how they come to play a role similar to, or indeed are transformed into, “technicians who are professedly indifferent to any given social policies” (1968:267). This is because the behaviour of a person

fulfilling a social position (i.e. role) is shaped by external demands and expectations. In that sense, Merton adds an externally induced social dimension to role *performance* to Linton's focus on the social *definition* of roles – whether ascribed or achieved. In other words, not only role description but also concrete role behaviour by the occupant is shaped by social context and, for the occupant, often unconsciously so. Like Linton, Merton overall presents role as a social position separate from concrete persons, but also specifies that he is analysing the intellectual as “a social role and not ... a total person” (1968:263) thus equalling a Lintonian role in the specific sense, in this case the role as an intellectual rather than for example a father or a garden enthusiast.

In his article *The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory* (1957), Merton fully and explicitly develops his conceptualisation of role. Linton defines role as the enactment or putting into effect of a status, and Merton interprets this as behaviour which is similar. However, being a generation later than Linton, Merton – who is clearly inspired by Linton – here departs from the Lintonian conceptualisation of role. In the Mertonian conceptualisation, to each status (i.e. position in a social system) corresponds not one, but several roles. That means that an individual occupying one status has a different role for each other (type of) status occupant with whom he interacts, thus ending up with a series of roles or rather *role-relations*. This series he terms a *role-set* and defines it as “that complement of role-relationships in which persons are involved by virtue of occupying a particular social status” (1957: 110). Though Linton focused on the social definitions of role, his analysis is still seen from the point of view of the individual status occupant, whereas Merton emphasises the relations which the occupant has with others. Merton thus stresses the social or relational aspect of role to a more explicit extent than Linton, leading him to the further subdivision into role-sets. To be clear, it does not refer to multiple roles in the Lintonian sense, but rather multiple relations which an individual has while having one specific role. In this way Merton has a different conceptualisation from Linton in two important ways: a) role is not self-contained but relational, and b) there is therefore not one role, but as many roles for one specific status as there are role-partners or as Merton calls them: role-set members.

Like the functionalists, structural functionalists are preoccupied with how socio-cultural systems find order by creating and preserving equilibrium; a major focus for Merton therefore becomes how conflict between different role expectations is avoided. As a consequence, he proceeds to identify and discuss the social mechanisms which articulate the various expectations for the occupant, and which either coordinate and integrate these (which in the structural functionalist view is preferred) or fail and thereby generate conflict. These mechanisms include:

- Difference in importance of statuses, i.e. how prestigious or socially important a status is both to individual role-set members and overall in the social structure and thereby how much attention will be paid to the occupant
- How much power and authority – i.e. culturally sanctioned room to execute that power – different role-set members hold
- Observability of role behaviour, i.e. how direct the social control of the occupant by other role-set members is (there is an optimum as the occupant must still be held accountable to an extent)
- Salience of conflicting demands of various role-set members forcing them to either battle it out or compromise, and for a time leaving the occupant at the peaceful eye of the hurricane
- Role solidarity among occupants of similar statuses who form associations to make explicit the conflicting demands
- Severing relations with a particular role-set member, though this latter mechanism is rarely an option.

Of course all these mechanisms may still fail, which leads to conflict and “role-systems operating at considerably less than full efficiency” (Merton 1957: 118). Beyond the maintenance of structural equilibrium, there is another point to Merton’s analysis of these social mechanisms, one which he does not state clearly and specifically himself. Not only do they articulate expectations of different role-set members thereby lowering the potential for conflict, they also create space for individual manoeuvrability and personal agency for both the status occupant and the other role-set members who in turn are also status occupants in their own right. In other words, contextually inherent differences and conflicting structural mechanisms create room for agency for the strategic individual.

Unlike their functionalist predecessors, the structural functionalists were to a larger extent concerned with a systemic point of view, but their main focus remained the function of roles, i.e. why they existed, what they did, and what effect they had – for the individual (functionalists) as well as for the overall structure (structural functionalists). In the latter case, however, focus was more on the social structure of society. Nevertheless, one must admit that Merton made a significant leap forward in role theory by subdividing the Lintonian role into various roles depending on role-set members. Thereby he acknowledged both a relational element and the existence of conflict.

Meanwhile, the progression of modernistic social theory continued as anthropology and sociology moved further towards structuralism.

## Parsons

Another line of analysis applied to the concept of roles was found in the systems theory – or as he preferred to call it: action theory – of the sociologist Talcott Parsons. He wrote on various purposes and types of roles including e.g. the sick role as a liminal exemption-from-normal role, thus avoiding the rights and – especially here – duties, as Linton put it, of a normal role (1975). In some ways Parsons as a scholar defied classification since there were both similarities and oppositions between his ideas and concepts and those of various established schools of thought. For example, there are some structuralist elements in his writings. Parsons wanted to integrate all major theories of various social sciences into one overarching grand theory. He thus had a focus on overall systems and how they worked, and he aimed at identifying universally applicable types of social relations in order to form his general social theory which was to cover all social aspects in a holistic way (e.g. 1961). Thereby, he could be said to constitute a transition from functionalism and structural functionalism to structuralism, and he also followed all three of these in their focus on systemic equilibrium.

Concerned with social systems, Parsons wrote that “the social system is made up of the actions of individuals” (Parsons 1965: 190) meaning that actions (and social relations) make up the structure of society. When behaviour is repeated, both the concrete behaviour and other people’s (as well as the behaving subject’s) expectations for this behaviour become institutionalised into a *role*, which is then “the conceptual unit of the social system” (ibid.: 190). There is, however, great variety in how institutionalised or fixed roles are. To sum up, the social system (with which Parsons is ultimately concerned) is made up of roles, which in turn consist of somewhat institutionalised behaviour. The roles are played by individuals, but in a social system view these are less interesting as it is really through the role that the individual becomes part of the system. A role thus plays the dual part of on one hand being a section of the individual’s behaviour and actions (since a person is a composition of roles), and on the other being the meeting point between the individual and the social system. According to Parsons, the pivotal aspects of a role are the *role-expectations* which define the reciprocity and evaluations that take place in social interaction. But *sanctions* are equally

important, whether behaviour is condoned or condemned, since they act as re-actions or counter-expectations; so to each expectation there is a sanction and vice versa. Or to put it another way, role behaviour sparks off a reaction (sanction) of agreement or disagreement, which depends on what expectations existed previously to that behaviour. Of course, neither is universal as each role has different role definitions and therefore different expectations and sanctions. Following this division of expectation and sanction, Parsons divides the role into two aspects: one is the *orientation role* which is the individual subject oriented at another person who is the object; the other is the *object role* which is the individual being the object for the orientation of others (Parsons 1965). In other words, as the individual acts, he is also acted upon by others.

But in order for social interaction to make up a social system, there must be more than roles and acts. In order to be definable as systems, the roles and acts must be stable, which happens when behaviour obtains a specific meaning and is interpreted according to common socio-cultural *norms* to which the individual must conform. These norms are an important element of the role-expectations and act as “guiding mechanisms of the process” (Parsons 1961: 41). So norms do not constitute a fixed and linear pattern of actions and reactions but are rather the “rules of the game” of interaction. Using the analogy of chess, Parsons explains how social interaction entails a goal or motivation for playing a role as well as strategies which change according to changes in the game. On one hand, Parsons takes a dynamic ad hoc view on social interaction describing how the individual must improvise using the opportunities at hand and how no acts are prescribed, i.e. the roles are not scripted. On the other hand, however, he takes a more rigid and somewhat static view with defined goals and a “well defined set of rules which forms the center of the integration of the system” and “define the consequences of any given move” (1961: 41). Furthermore, in order for acts to be meaningful to more than one person, these rules must follow certain overall *values* which Parsons describes as “shared patterns of normative culture” (ibid.: 42). Role-expectations defining the rights and obligations of a particular role are thus found at the level of norms which are specific for each role; values on the other hand are more generally shared in society above any particular role. A role is then defined by Parsons as “the structured, i.e., normatively regulated, participation of a person in a concrete process of social interaction with specified, concrete role-partners” (ibid.: 42). So roles are norm-regulated behaviour. Each role is in turn part of a *collectivity*, which is a system of interaction between participants who share “a common normative culture” (ibid.: 42), i.e. values. In other words, though norms vary from role to role (and therefore not only from person to person but also for the same person since most people play more than one role), values are always



valid for everyone in a collectivity of roles. This collectivity can either consist of roles that are complementary to each other through differentiation (norms vary) or roles that are similar through segmentation, i.e. they have the same function within the social system (norms are the same); either way, the collectivity shares the same values. To sum up, according to Parsons a role is formed behaviour which is institutionalised in a field of expectations and sanctions, and the role is divided into orientation and object aspects. It should follow certain role-specific norms and is played out in a collectivity of roles which shares and is subject to certain overall values.

So Parsons has an entirely social conceptualisation of roles, which are units in a social system. In his theory, the individual is only relevant at this meeting point where he becomes part of the social system. To an extent, the role theory of Parsons resembles structuralism in its grand overall structure view or systemic focus and its preoccupation with “integration of the system” (Parsons et al. 1961: 42), “a stable system of interaction” (1961: 42), and “rules” without which “the interactive process could not be stable” (1961: 41). But Parsons also goes beyond this to describe more dynamic and personal role elements such as motivation and improvisation. And with his focus on the structural functions of for example expectations and sanctions, Parsons remains a structural functionalist to a large extent. Regardless of classificatory nomenclature, he still mainly focuses on systems as stable phenomena guided by fixed rules and defined goals. To this one could pose the question: “Are there clear rules in reality? And are they fixed?” Apart from possibly a few basic behavioural rules such as e.g. when stealing you will be punished, and a few environments such as e.g. a prison or kindergarten, the answer must be “not really” in the ever shifting sands of everyday life. And even in the former cases, there are many exceptions. One could also question whether there are any universal values for any collectivity and whether norms are always agreed upon, but for Parsons these issues are not so much a theoretical claim to be made convincing, but rather a matter of historical fact; to him there are values which are almost universally accepted in various forms, and norms and role expectations are often either agreed upon or at least followed by the individual. Despite a solely systemic perspective and a somewhat rigid and static view, Parsons nevertheless took the conceptualisation of role further in developing its social aspects, dividing it into an orientation and an object role, and discussing the expectations, sanctions, norms and values which have a direct effect on it.

## **The role in modernism**

So far we have explored three perspectives and conceptualisations of role within modernity. We have seen how Linton saw society as a pattern of reciprocity in which status was a position, and how status can both be a single status or the overall status of a person, and how it can be either ascribed or achieved. Linton conceptualised role as the individual behaviour according to, and thus fulfilling, that status; and accordingly, role could also be found in a specific and a general sense. However, the main argument against the functionalist view of culture put forward by later authors (e.g. Goffman 1955, 1959) also pertains to Linton: By focusing on which function cultural traits and practices have in maintaining the existing social order and cultural equilibrium, the analysis emphasises stability to an extent which portrays all cultures and societies as rather static. Everything is ordered and in its correct place: “Status and rôle [...] become models for organizing the attitudes and behavior of the individual so that these will be congruous with those of the other individuals” (Linton 1964:114) and “it is obvious that [...] the more perfectly the members of any society are adjusted to their statuses and rôles the more smoothly the society will function” (1964:115). By the same logic, achieved statuses are limited as the competition for these risks breaking the orderly cultural pattern. But such order makes it difficult to account for change. Indeed, as anthropology has later shown, both external and internal physical and cultural environments are constantly in flux, societal patterns change, and cultures are full of internal contrasts, divisions and oppositions; even cultural traits such as e.g. role definitions and content change and travel from one culture to another through contact and ensuing acculturation between different cultures. Therefore the same view on role may be found in two very separate places whereas two people from the same family unit within one culture might disagree on role content and enactment. And in both cases this is likely to change over time.

We have also seen how Merton added role performance to the role definition which was in focus for Linton; thereby adding a more clearly social dimension. Merton also subdivided a status into several roles or role-set depending on the various role-relations a person has with role partners. Following this relational conceptualisation of role, Merton then puts focus on conflict avoidance but also (indirectly) how an individual creates personal space for agency in this social web of relations and expectations. However, like the functionalists, structural functionalists within anthropology such as A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (e.g. 1952) and within sociology such as R. K. Merton also have a predominant focus on stability of the prevailing order, but in this guise cast as a

structural equilibrium. This, again, leads to a somewhat static view of both culture and social life which stands in contradiction to both the grand shifts of history and the dynamic pluralities of everyday life with its complex and ever changing attitudes, necessities, expectations and ensuing alternations on role definitions and role interpretations of both status occupants and those with whom the occupant interacts. Furthermore, this focus on which function cultural traits fulfil in the overall structure of socio-cultural life has moved emphasis away from subjective experience. Individual persons become transient occupants of roles that are to a certain extent structurally pre-defined; created and coordinated to function as optimally as possible within the given frame.

This last point was taken even further by the structuralists whose perspective was not that the structure is created by individuals but rather that it is pre-given to the individual born into this world and therefore a person has no choice but to adopt and try to fulfil a pre-defined role – though possibly with some freedom to change the role definition a little. Though not a structuralist, Parsons' systemic analysis version of role theory was, however, yet again in a transitional move further towards a static macro-perspective on rules, structure and systems. However, he also contributed significantly to the development of role theory in terms of social aspects and regulation by social norms and values. These social aspects were reflected in his emphasis on expectations and sanctions. He also further subdivided role into a subject or orientation and an object role. And the rules for fulfilling a role, the norms, were combined with higher level rules, values, governing the context of which a role was part, the collectivity. On one hand, with the change of focus even further towards structure, the function of role moved astern. On the other, though, he had a greater emphasis in the interactional formation of roles. This was in tune with another fundamentally different perspective which had simultaneously become widespread within sociology and anthropology and which not only focused on another level of analysis, but also took a fundamentally different view on social phenomena. This new perspective, symbolic interactionism, led to a rather different conceptualisation of role.

Functionalism and structural functionalism had different questions and answers when conceptualising role, but whether fulfilment of status, (a response to) social relations, or governed by social mechanisms such as expectations, sanctions, norms and values in a collectivity, modernist role conceptualisations (as well as other analyses of society) shared a view which saw society in a somewhat static way concerned with how equilibrium is created and upheld. In addition to holding the ideal of order, they also tended to see the function and structural position of role from a macro perspective, how it was created and what it did in and for society.

## **Enactment-perspective**

In contrast, the enactment perspective focused not on how a function or position was fulfilled, but on how a role was learned and performed. This quite different perspective arose in the 1950s, and was focused on a micro-level. Inspired by authors such as George Herbert Mead, the perspective came primarily from the symbolic interactionists such as his student Herbert Blumer (who coined the term symbolic interactionism). Mead (1934) explained how humans learn to take on a role as part of the socialisation which they receive in their childhood. This is role taking and children do this by imitating or mimicking existing roles during play with other children. In this way, the child learns how to act in the theatrical sense of the word; they acquire the skills of delivering pre-learned responses and reactions to social stimuli. These are not necessarily rehearsed, but are more often spontaneous yet following an internalised logic of that role. So what is acquired by the child is not a set of fixed responses, but rather a role understanding, or their own comprehension of that role. And as the role playing is learned through social play, the role is learned as a social phenomenon, as a social relation or bundle of social relations (cf. Merton's role-set). As adults, humans continue this process of role socialisation.

Using qualitative methods such as participant observation, authors writing within what we call the enactment perspective had a very different conceptualisation of role. They sought to see roles "from the inside" and rather than asking what roles did for society, they asked what roles did for those who performed them. This did not mean that roles were only seen as an isolated psychological one-person perspective; rather these authors were interactionists and saw social interaction as where the role was formed and performed. In that sense, the symbolic interactionists put an even greater emphasis on social relations than Merton and Parsons had, but rather on an individual level. And they also put focus on what meaning a role held to those who performed it and those towards whom it was performed. Unlike the modernist views, this "daily life" perspective was often seen through the individual's eyes. Therefore, symbolic interactionism represented a major break with the functionalist and structuralist preoccupation with socio-cultural equilibrium and its somewhat static overall view on roles as structurally constituted. This role performance-oriented

perspective has more recently been applied to organisational research in the shape of performativity theory (e.g. Butler 1990), but has so far been relatively absent in service research. We will now look at one of the foundational theories of this perspective, which has also been one of the few to include services and service encounter situations in its conceptualisation. This is the symbolic interactionism of Goffman.

### **The symbolic interactionism of Goffman**

A symbolic interactionist who discussed not only the concept of role but also several related concepts which can be seen as part of or directly influencing the role concept is Erving Goffman. He defines social role as “the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status” (Goffman 1959: 16), and although this definition is very similar to that of Ralph Linton, he applies it in a rather different way. Where Linton was concerned with a general theory of the creation and function of statuses and roles everywhere in the world, Goffman has a focus on the social face and the everyday processes of enactment or performance of role.

According to Goffman role is used in two quite different ways which must be kept separate. On one hand, role has a processual ad hoc element of performing it through behaviour; this Goffman calls a *line*. But on the other, there is also the reified though still dynamic result of that process, the impression left on others through the performance, and this he calls *face*. These are conceptually distinct aspects of role, which we would say resemble the difference between a verb and a noun. In order for social interaction and role performance to take place meaningfully, it is paramount that line, face and the overall social situation are congruent. So a role must follow the norms of the social context and the role enactor must even actively act on this context to make sure there is congruence between it and the role; Goffman calls this *expressive order*. Likewise, as “maintenance of face is a condition of interaction”, then *face-work*, or face-saving, becomes vital as “the traffic rules of interaction” (1967: 12). This is done through various “rituals” (as Goffman deals with symbolic components of role behaviour, he generally uses the term ritual to describe acts (e.g. 1967: 19)). Similar to his division of role into line and face, the *self* is also divided into a verb and a noun-aspect. The role is then the performance, and the self is the performer. And role is unfolded through social interaction or *encounters* between persons. These concepts are all linked to

overall impression management and role performance, and these will all now be summarised and discussed.

### Line

A line is basically the concrete acts of role behaviour of a person. Goffman defines it as “a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself” (1967: 5). It is important for a line of behaviour to be legitimated in order to be socially accepted, and therefore it is often institutionalised so that the same type of behavioural response is repeated in the same type of situation as this is the socially accepted reaction. The line of a role is assumed to represent an inner congruence so that when a person displays a few attributes, these are taken by others to indicate a number of other congruent attributes whether these are displayed or not. So being displayed as coherent and legitimated, line is the active dynamics of role performance act by act.

### Expressive order

Just as line is taken to indicate an internal congruence, there is also a corresponding external congruence between the line of a person and the social situation in which a line is performed, which Goffman calls the expressive order. He defines the expressive order of a person as “an order that regulates the flow of events, large or small, so that anything that appears to be expressed by ... [others] will be consistent with his face” (1967: 9). This concept may resemble Parsons’ *norms*, but in Goffman’s conceptualisation it is not rules for role conduct but rather for expressive control ensuring that face and external events remain consistent and congruent at all times. This is not to be confused with what Parsons calls the overall *values*, which Goffman calls “the social code of any social circle” (1967: 9) – social circle being the equivalent of Parsons’ collectivity. The expressive order dictates the desired ritual harmony of social interaction which all persons strive towards (1967: 23).

## Face

Just like line, *face* is not the entire essence of a social role, but rather the esteem, reputation and social position of it (Goffman 1967: 5). Face therefore covers only that part of role which consists of a person's general expression and the following impression he makes on others. In other words, where line denotes the acts of a person, face denotes the result of these acts in terms of the view others have of the acting person. Goffman defines face as: "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967: 5). There are different processes and conditions which relate to the face of a role:

- To have, maintain or be in face implies that the line has been socially successful. It is seen as consistent both internally and with the judgement of others. Further, it is contextually meaningful in the sense that it is consistent with the definition of the overall situation. In other words, behaviour in one situation must be congruent with overall social life
- To lose face is when the line has not been socially successful. This can be due to three different reasons. Firstly a person can be in the wrong face meaning his line was incongruent with a situation or the judgement of others. Secondly, a person can be out of face when not knowing what line or behaviour to display in a situation. And third, a person can be shamefaced when he has made a wrong move or social *faux pas*.
- To give face means to set someone up for success in their role performance, to attempt to provide conditions that will ensure internally and externally consistent behaviour of someone else.

Face is thus the lasting result of a role performance. It is whatever impression has been left in the mind of the other with whom a person has interacted which means that it is necessarily a social relation, or as Goffman himself puts it: "his social face [...] is only on loan to him from society" (1967: 10). This, however, does not mean that face is a static entity, in fact for each act face risks being changed for better or worse. Being internally consistent, consistent with the judgement of others, and consistent with how a situation is defined, is decisive for the success of a role performance, thus the performance can only be successfully changed if the definition of the

situation is changed, or the role or performer will be in the wrong face, out of face or even shamefaced.

### Face-work

Goffman defines face-work as “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face” and it “serves to counteract “incidents” ”(Goffman 1967: 12). So it is about following the rules for acceptable behaviour. All role behaviour is influenced or modified by face-work, but in different ways. From the amount of logically possible practices, every person and social circle chooses (or does not choose as the case may be) a repertoire of standardised practices for face-work. Either way, choosing the right role behaviour in terms of face-work is difficult for a person as several options are often available (1967: 26). Furthermore, in making the right decision a person must be socially perceptive and apply this perceptiveness in a defensive orientation (saving his own face) as well as a protective orientation (saving the face of others) (1976: 14). Goffman identifies three levels or types of transgressions of the congruence of face: the accidental where a transgression is unintended, the intentional malicious, and incidental when it is an unfortunate bi-product of other social behaviour (ibid.). Even when such a transgression has happened, there are some options available to the individual. The avoidance process entails certain defensive manoeuvres such as withdrawal from a situation, using go-betweens, keeping off topics, showing modesty or jesting, as well as some protective manoeuvres such as showing respect, politeness, using discretion, joking, forbearance, ambiguity or even deception (“little white lies” to protect someone else’s face), tactful blindness, ignoring occurrences, temporarily turning away from someone, or simply curbing own demands or at least providing explanations for them. If the avoidance strategy fails, the only resort is to be realistic and deal with the matter. However, even in this “established state of ritual disequilibrium” (1967: 19) there are a number of *corrective processes* to turn to, namely four moves of interchange which can reinstate ritual equilibrium. The first move is that behaviour must be recognised as a social offence or faux pas through being challenged. The second move is the offering of a redefinition or rectification of the faux pas: for example, it can be seen as an unintentional accident and therefore meaningless, a misunderstanding, unavoidable or understandable; there can be an exemption of guilt passing responsibility onto another person or external circumstances; compensation can be offered; or penance can be shown.



The third move is acceptance by the other persons and the fourth is gratitude by the offender. The whole four-step process can also be modified e.g. if the offender initiates it himself, if the offended is socially forced into a mock-acceptance or inversely if he makes excuses on the offenders behalf. When the avoidance and/or corrective processes are not followed, this can lead to conflict entailing a *competitive* or as Goffman terms it “aggressive use of face-work” (1967: 24). If a challenge (first move) is not accepted, the challenger can either give up the challenge, uphold it with resulting conflict and potential violence, or simply cut interaction by withdrawing and deny the offender interactant status. Although sometimes interactants vie for dominance in this way, there can also be more peaceful manipulations of the rituals of role performance such as a “fishing for compliments”. But there can also be a tacit *cooperation* in making an interactive role performance successful. This can be in the form of compensative efforts of others, e.g. making excuses on the offenders behalf as mentioned above, facilitating resolution, using circumventions such as hints, ambiguity and jokes; or through reciprocal self-denial such as modesty and giving compliments to others.

### The self

As a role is enacted, there must be something or someone enacting it. This someone is what Goffman terms *the self*. Corresponding to Goffman’s division of role into line and face, Goffman also divides the role playing social self into a reified and a processual aspect and these are the self as expressed or portrayed, and the self acting through social interaction. He describes them as “the self pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking; and the self as a kind of player in a ritual game” (1967: 31). Although he does not himself apply clear conceptual terms to them, for the sake of clarity we will here give them the terms *being self* and *doing self*. The being self is then the lasting impression of a person which is imprinted in the mind of others, and the doing self is the in-the-moment acting person. Goffman compares them to the difference between a particular hand of cards (being self) in a game and the ability to play them skilfully (doing self) (1967: 32). This separation has important implications for how acts influence (or not) the impression given to others. For example, though the doing self can demote itself through symbolic acts of humble self-castigation, the being self is not seen as less for that reason – in fact it might actually gain esteem (ibid.). This has to do with free will; if a doing self was somehow forced to perform in this manner, then the being self would be demoted. In short:

the doing self does not always have an effect on the being self, and even when it does, the effect might not be what was intended.

### Interaction and encounters

Face is created through social interaction, and the latter can be broken down into specific encounters with other persons. As the case was with the self, Goffman does not consistently use one term for an encounter but characterises it as “*an* occasion of talk or episode of interaction as a naturally bounded unit” (1967: 35, his italics). For every act and every encounter, a person makes line choices which have consequences for that person’s face. Goffman defines an encounter as “the total activity that occurs during the time that a given set of participants have accredited one another for talk and maintain a single moving focus of attention” (ibid.). This may seem like a very orderly definition of something, which can be very disorderly. Goffman specifically includes sociable chat and smalltalk, which can often be disorderly as turn-taking induces free association, interruptions and so on. But there is a specific point to his seemingly very orderly definition. Encounters take place qua an established agreement between the involved persons covering not just when, where and with whom to talk, but also on what topic. Therefore encounters tend to have a one-topic main focus in behaviour and thought: “a single focus of thought and visual attention, and a single flow of talk, tends to be maintained and to be legitimated as officially representative of the encounter” which means that “participants restrict their involvement in matters external to the encounter” to the point where “messages that are not part of the officially accredited flow are modulated so as not to interfere seriously with the accredited messages” (1967: 34-35). This leads to a very important point on social encounters: As one topic tends to be officially legitimised as acceptable, other topics tend to be restricted or at least modulated as they are not in focus. This is the definition of the situation and if it were to be opened up to other matters, the definition would have to be changed. In other words, the topics of accredited conversation are given already at the beginning of an encounter. This is not to say that there is always agreement in encounters or conversation, but a surface agreement must be maintained or at least agreement on what to disagree upon if the encounter is to be meaningful to the participants. And the rules for social interaction, which Goffman calls *the ritual code* (1967: 40), must be respected in order to have a functioning interaction; the wrong level

of for example perceptiveness, pride or considerateness will create a dysfunctional interaction in encounters.

### Impression Management And Role Performance

In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman writes about impression management, how the individual manages the impressions that others form of him/her through the role performance. As mentioned above, in “defining social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status” (1959:16), Goffman’s conceptualisation corresponds to Linton’s concept of a general role (1964) – except in his concept of *social role*, Goffman emphasises the individual agency and enactment of rights and duties attached to an overall status rather than the fulfilment of a pre-given status and role. This “pre-established pattern of action”(Goffman 1959:16), which corresponds to a Lintonian role in the specific sense, is termed *part* or *routine* by Goffman. The enactment of this is called *performance* by Goffman, and it is especially the performance which will be of concern in this discussion of impression management. The performer does not necessarily have to believe in their own performance. Whether the performer believes in his or her performance or not, each case carries its own attraction in terms of securities and defences (such as a wholehearted conviction or cynical distance). Performers can either lose or gain belief in their own performance repeatedly or live with a combination thereof.

An important part of a performance is the *front*. Goffman defines the front as “that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions [...] to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment [...] employed by the individual during his performance” (1959: 22). It consists of several elements. The first is the *setting* which is the physical surroundings and stationary props or “sign-equipment” (1959: 23) of a performance. Secondly there is the *personal front* which is personal characteristics or displays such as age, gender, clothes, speech, posture and so on; these can be permanent (such as skin colour) but also transitory (such as facial expressions). Personal front is subdivided into *appearance* which signals a social status, and *manner* which signals the performer’s current interactional situation (for example aggressive or apologetic); appearance and manner are generally expected to be congruent with each other, but can diverge (surprisingly to the audience). Likewise, setting and personal front are expected to be congruent and it is a surprise to the audience when they do not. Nevertheless, the

front of each performance makes use of general standard elements of setting, manner and appearance which could also be (and often are) used by other performances. This means that similar performances (such as a doctor and a dentist using the same type white laboratory coat or the standard travel agency front office decoration with maps and colourful photographs) may therefore share one type front; so the number of fronts is less than the number of parts performed and therefore spectators need only have the skills to interact with a limited number of fronts in their knowledge repertoire. This type of front shared by several parts is called “collective representation” by Goffman (1959: 27). So in most cases, a performance or single task has a pre-established front, although sometimes there is a choice between several fronts and choosing the right one can be problematic for the performer and audience as the former struggles to enact his or her part.

Vital to performing is the *dramatic realization* through which the enactor displays the front and part through signs. This, too, can be problematic as some parts do not lend themselves easily to dramatisation; and so expression can take more effort than the actual actions performed as certain routines need to be emphasised more than others to convey such an impression. Another important point is that the performance must also be socialised, meaning it must be accepted by the audience. One way of ensuring this is the shared front described above; another is an *idealization* of the performance making it very congruent with, and thereby confirming, the commonly accepted values of society. Often this means emphasising values and signs seen as desirable (they could be of high or low status depending on what impression is desired) and under this pretence hiding the less ideal segments of daily reality which is inconsistent with these standards. These in turn become a secret consumption, a *backstage* area in which to engage in secret activities and hide the process behind the product so to speak, whether too easy or hard compared with the ideal. This is also where errors are hidden along with that which is unclean, degrading or morally questionable and does not leave tangible evidence. The result is a portrait of the performer as having ideal qualifications and motives for the role. Furthermore, as a performer plays different roles to different audiences, a certain amount of audience segregation (for example separating colleagues from family) is necessary for such idealization to be convincing. In both the process of idealization and audience segregation the audience usually plays along as it has its own interest in these processes which create a stereotypical one-dimensional façade with which it is easier for the audience to interact. Performer and audience also join forces in pretending that each relation and encounter is unique and personalised.

In this way, expressive control is maintained. The expressive coherence is vital for a performance to be credible and convincing, and so the performer (and audience) is faced with the problem of disruptive involuntary gestures such as momentary lack of bodily control, under- or overreacting, or external factors such as wrong setting or timing. Such elements of a performance show the discrepancy between the performance and reality and break the illusion of a homogeneous, coherent and constant character; therefore the performer must socialise him- or herself into resembling the idealised self projected as much as possible. On the other hand, there is also the danger of an impostor intentionally *misrepresenting* him- or herself by gestures, appearance and manner. All role playing is misrepresentation to an extent, so such behaviour is only offensive to the audience when the performer is not entitled to perform the part, for example an unauthorised impersonation of someone with a higher social status than the performer can claim to merit in the eyes of the audience. The audience, however, will usually be forgiving of someone concealing a single flaw such as an embarrassing fact of their past, but not someone entirely posing as someone or something which they are not. Likewise, certain statuses, such as being a music-lover, are less well-defined and therefore more socially accepted to include in misrepresentation. One must therefore tell the difference between a barefaced intentional lie on one hand and “white lies [...] innuendo, strategic ambiguity and crucial omissions” (Goffman 1959: 62) on the other; the latter kind is both more socially acceptable and widespread, but can also be necessary and even institutionalised. They serve to maintain the status quo without a constant threat of social dissolution from any fact discordant with the role performed. So whether an individual is offering an honest or dishonest performance, expressive coherence can and must be safeguarded from disruptions.

An aspect of role performance which is related to misrepresentation is *mystification* whereby the performer seems or is allowed to be mysterious and secretive. This is created by the performer keeping a social distance to the audience thereby instilling in them awe and respect for his or her role, as seen in the army and in many religious orders. What is hidden this way is often what the performer would otherwise be ashamed of, and the audience in turn has an interest in keeping up this mystification. There is then “a basic social coin” of awe and shame on opposite sides (Goffman 1959: 70). This gives the performer some elbow room or room for agency in their role creation and enactment. Furthermore, often the big secret hidden is that there is no secret, yet the mystification still serves as a legalisation of the elevation of the performer.

A final important aspect of performance is sincerity. Role performers may be sincere or insincere, but this is not a rigid dichotomy. Rather, there is a continuum spanning various cases ranging from a genuinely sincere performer, an insincere performer convinced that they are sincere, an insincere performer who is honest about insincere (such as a stage actor), an intentionally insincere performer posing as genuine, and so on. So there may be a “statistical”, but not an “intrinsic”, relation between appearance and reality (1959: 71). Most performers are middle forms between sincere and insincere; and it is inadvisable for the performer to be either completely sincere (and incapable of performing and seeing the world in any other way than one’s own) or insincere (for example a criminal con artist). So from a few cues the individual can conjure up a situationally adequate performance based on pre-learned expressions and reactions which the individual has been socialised into. This not only means understanding and managing various expressions as part of one’s own performance but also understanding and managing those of other performers (which also makes us able to play staged roles such as on the theatre stage, in religious ceremonies or in psychodramas, 1959: 72-74). So performing a role does not mean possessing a status but enacting and thereby realising it with appropriate behaviour, appearance and articulation.

What a reader of Goffman is presented with is a veritable cornucopia of terms and concepts related to the enactment of a role. But then again, reality is a complex place and the portrayal of it even more so, and therefore many terms are needed to describe the many empirical phenomena related to roles and role play. To sum up: On one hand there is the line of behaviour, which is the performance of a role; on the other there is the face, which is the expressions and resulting impressions of the line of behaviour. The face relies on face-work done by the role playing self during interaction and encounters with others, and this face-work (having face, giving face, losing face and so on) must respect the ritual code of that group. One of the most important parts of this social role, which consists of parts or routines which must be performed, is the front. This front is a combination of the manner and appearance of the performer, which is called the personal front, and the setting. Since not all acts are clear and conspicuous, an important task of role performance is a dramatic realisation of these acts making them visible to the audience. Sometimes a performance even needs to be idealised in accordance with the accepted values of a society. In this way a performance is convincing if it has expressive coherence – even if the performance is actually a (intentional or unintentional) misrepresentation of the status of the performer, or a mystification allowing the performer to create distance between himself and the audience. So, disregarding the level of sincerity, a status only exists as long as it is enacted as a role performance.

In the articles to come, we will take an enactment perspective on roles as we are concerned with the interaction microprocesses of the service encounter. Specifically, as they are the central element of sourcing user ideas for innovation through these encounters, the role behaviour and mindset of the frontline employees will be investigated and analysed. Therefore, the details of how they perform their role, how they feel about this, how they feel about the users and the possibility of sourcing innovation ideas in this way, and what effect these factors have on their behaviour, will be addressed. This is why an enactment perspective, which is concerned with how a person performs and relates to his or her own role, is the most relevant take on the role analysis to come.

## **Other Uses Of Role**

Since Linton's seminal book in 1936, role has become a prevalent concept used in many different ways and traditions in academic literature. First of all, the studies of social role spread in anthropology, sociology and social psychology. Other topics than those referred to above included latent and manifest social roles (Gouldner 1957), the roles and rules of the professions (Moore 1970), and even the fieldworker academic had a methodological role to be studied (Gold 1958); and the study of social role (and social norms) has continued until today (see for example Sunstein 1996).

In many strands of literature, however, the term role has been used in a very different sense. It has appeared as a reduction of the original functionalist conceptualisation and therefore was equalled with function itself. For example, within the field of biology (especially microbiology and cellular studies) the term is frequently used in this sense. Another strand of literature which uses role as a synonym of function is linguistics, in which for example the "role" of attention in semantic priming (Neely 1977) and thematic proto-"roles" (Dowty 1991) are analysed. Furthermore, many fields of business studies have made use of the term in this sense. For example, the "roles" of planning, plans and planners in strategic planning (Mintzberg 1994) have been problematised; the "roles" of trust, satisfaction and commitment in customer relationships (Garbarino 1999) have been discussed; the "role" of justice in workplace retaliation (Skarlicki and Folger 1997) likewise, here in the sense of cause and effect; the "role" of private equity and debt

markets in financial growth (Berger and Udell 1998) is an example from the field of economics; similarly the “role” of motivators and organisational climate in knowledge sharing behaviour (Bock et al. 2005) have been analysed; and finally within the field of service studies, the “role” of emotions and identity in services (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993) also reveal a functional understanding of the term.

However, role as a social concept has also been transferred to more modern fields of study. A salient example has been the field of gender studies, which has avidly discussed the creation, constitution and consequences of gender roles. For example gender stereotypes have been analysed (Basow 1992); sex role adaptability has been discussed (Bem 1975); and sex roles in conversation have been problematised (Zimmerman and West 1975). A notable strand which has used the symbolic interactionist view is found in the discussions of performativity and gender roles by Judith Butler and others (see for example Butler 1990). In this conceptualisation, the enactment-perspective of role has been further elaborated and taken in a direction further away from the fulfilment-perspective, and so it can be seen as a relatively recent further development of the enactment-perspective.

The concept of social role has also been used in various writings concerned with roles in small groups. For example, the functional roles of group members have been analysed (Benne And Sheats 1948, Bales 1958); likewise the various roles in a team (Belbin 1993); as well as participant roles in bullying among children (Salmivalli et al. 1996). Another theme of roles and role playing, which has been elaborated and problematised greatly since the classical authors, is role conflict. This has been discussed both in terms of role conflict and ambiguity (Kahn et al. 1964) and role conflict and multiple roles (Marks 1977). Role conflict has also been analysed in connection with the family role, for example the conflict between the family and social networks (Bott 1971) or the family and work (Greenhaus 1985). Finally, role conflict in organisations has been discussed. For example, building on the field of social psychology (Israel 1963), Pernille Poulsen has problematised the conflicting expectations towards civil servants (Poulsen 2005). She analyses the changing structural expectations for the roles of these employees as New Public Management is implemented in Denmark. This, then, can be seen as a modern further development of the fulfilment perspective (although she leaves more room for personal agency in her role view than some of the functionalist and structural functionalist classical authors). To sum up, the concept of role has been applied to new empirical contexts and in new conceptualisations (sometimes transmuted into a synonym of function) in addition to the authors summarised in detail above.



# **Roles In Organisations**

In addition to the role conflicts in organisations mentioned above, the concept of role has been applied to organisational contexts addressing various other topics. For example, different communication roles have been analysed (Roberts and O'Reilly 1979) and the implications of leader and follower roles have been problematised (Vanderslice 1988). Different roles of students in education and how these relate to educational outcomes have also been discussed (Halbesleben and Wheeler 2009), and role definitions and citizenship behaviour of employees in organisations has been analysed (Morrison 1994), to name a few examples. So there are different roles in organisations, and ways of categorising these. In the articles to come, we are concerned with roles interacting with persons that are external to the organisation, and these types of roles have also been addressed in various literature. For example, the organisational boundary roles (Stacy 1976) and also the boundary-spanning (or boundary crossing) roles (Aldrich and Herker 1977) have been analysed, and what boundary roles mean for the innovation process has also been addressed (Tushman 1977). More specifically, however, we are in this project concerned with services and the important externally interacting role of the frontline employees. In this particular type of role (and especially in the more subservient version of it) one finds role conflict too (Shamir 1980), and therefore topics such as emotion regulation (Totterdell and Holman 2003) and the impact of empowerment (Chebat and Kollias 2000) are research areas that have received some attention. In a still narrower focus, this project is specifically interested in how this frontline service employee role unfolds during service encounters. Below are three examples of relevant texts with a more detailed summary and discussion. They were written in three different time periods, the 1950s, the 1980s and around the change of the millennium, and they also illustrate three different approaches to organisational role analysis.

### The 1950s sociological approach exemplified by Erving Goffman (1959)

Goffman (1959), who is discussed in more detail above, often uses exactly these situations as examples and relates his conceptualisation of role to this setting. For example, he describes how there is a working consensus by which those participating in a service encounter agree on a definition of the situation; the employee shows disinterested involvement in the user's problem, and the latter responds with respect for the competence and integrity of the former (1959: 10). These situations also provide the user with an important first impression and therefore the service employees must seize and hold the initiative in service encounters; something which can be difficult if the employee is of a lower status than the user (1959: 11). Another issue of role performance which comes to the fore in service encounters relates to the belief in the part one is playing: Sometimes otherwise sincere frontline service employees must delude the users because the latter demand such a role performance during the service encounters, for example a doctor seeming to check a patient more thoroughly than necessary (1959: 18). The user demands of service encounters also include recognisability, so (as mentioned above) several different roles often share a similar social front in the service encounters. Goffman describes how, in various service encounters, the users are greeted with the same type of well-lit setting which is strongly signalling clinical hygiene and competence, despite this front covering quite different services such as a dentist or a beauty parlour. In this way all these services are placed in the same stereotypical and recognisable category for the users, thereby reducing the amount of fronts with which they need to be familiar in order to function in everyday life (1959: 26).

During service encounters, the service becomes visible to the user, but the encounters are often only the end of the process of service creation. Therefore role performance in the encounters must make up for the (to the user) invisible parts which have occurred before the encounter by using dramatic realisation. Not only can the users often not see what is actually done for them, so this must be dramatised, but this also means that the service providers must overcharge for the visible elements of their provision to make up for the cost of more invisible elements which, due to being less salient, the user will not pay full price for (1959: 32). The conflict between parts that are visible and parts that are invisible to the users is also seen during service encounters in the idealisation of role performance: As there is a discrepancy between appearance and actual activity, the less visible elements are often sacrificed to uphold the more visible ones. Goffman uses the example of a service judged by the users on speed and quality and claims that the latter will be

slacked before the former as any compromise of speed is very clear to the user, but compromise in quality is perhaps less so (1959: 45). Another aspect of idealisation of the role performance during service encounters relates to audience segregation: The performer must *pretend* that each encounter and relation is unique and personalised (as will be evident, pretending is not at all the same as believing), so what is a routine must appear as spontaneous. For example, a doctor must treat every patient, not as a yet another case, but as a particular individual. This is often exploited by service providers under the term *specialised service*, by which is signalled a customised treatment of the user. The users in their turn often do the same and pretend that they did not in fact consider many other services, even if they did so (1959: 49-50).

Likewise, face has a vital function during service encounters (1967). Face is important for any person performing a role as losing face means a social failure (which can take many forms such as humiliation or loss of trust from others) of either the role or the person performing it. When the role is representative such as in the case of employees with direct customer or user contact, having face becomes even more in focus as the role not only has but *is* the face of the organisation represented. But face is a precarious phenomenon, which must constantly be performed and recreated during service encounters by “normal” and accepted routines, lest the performer risks losing face. Therefore (as will be evident in the articles) in these situations there might be a practical focus such as choosing the right service product or paying for it while other matters such as putting forward ideas for innovation will be restricted and unaccredited. However, keeping face through a service encounter performance is difficult as the user will form an impression based on more than the actions of the performer. For example, when a frontline employee in a service organisation performs certain acts to give off a certain impression to the users – for instance the standardised politeness phrases used at many fast food chains – these might not change the impression the user has of that employee or the overall organisation in the desired way – for instance thinking that they are very polite and well-mannered and friendly.

We now turn to another approach to role behaviour in service encounters. This approach comes from service studies within the business literature and is exemplified by Solomon et al. (1985).

### The 1980s interactive approach exemplified by Solomon et al. (1985)

Since Goffman, other authors have advocated using role theory in the analysis of the behaviour of service employees and users during service encounters. For example, Solomon et al. (1985) have emphasised the dyadic, goal-oriented and interactional aspects of face-to-face service encounters, and they conclude that the “learned and consistent behaviour patterns” or “script” of both provider and user must be congruent for the encounter to be satisfactory (1985:100); in other words, satisfaction is *interdependent* on both the provider and the user. But while the learning of a role by the provider is often explicit, the users’ corresponding process is often implicit and overlooked. So according to these authors, a necessity for a successful interaction – and thereby high service quality – is reciprocal communication and a mutual coordination of behaviour as the service experience is created by both user and provider alike. Therefore, the kind of role theory, that addresses humans as social actors behaving according to their position and following a standardised script, is ideal as a tool for analysing service encounters. The authors define role as “a cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual’s behavior in a given setting” and they more or less equal role with script, so the coordination of the provider and user roles means that they must “read from a common script” (1985:102).

The authors make two important points on role identity. First, the more salient an occupational role is, the stronger commitment will the performer have to that role (*ibid.*). This also means that “radical changes in the service script should encounter greater resistance from experienced role performers” (1985: 108). As will be illustrated in the following articles, certain service employees, who rely heavily on role performance, are committed to their role to such an extent that major changes to this role are inhibited. Secondly, the stronger group cohesion among the performers, the stronger the desire to perform the service role well will be (*ibid.*). Again, as will be illustrated in the following articles, some service employees, who mainly interact in the social space between each other and not the users, are very committed to performing their service role correctly and indeed to their overall occupational role identity.

In order to interact in successful ways during a service encounter, the provider and users must be able to (to a certain extent) predict each others’ behaviour. This ability is based in interdependent or shared role expectations (in terms of privileges and duties), which are multidimensional in terms of provider and user characteristics and perceptions as well as production realities (1985: 103). So the specific expectations for a role performance stem from common

meanings or understanding of the situation (what type of service provider is this, what type of user is this, what type of setting is this, and so on). Of course, actual performance may differ from expectations, which leads the authors to point out two types of role discrepancies. First, lack of intra-role congruence between the service employee's role understanding and the service organisation's understanding of that role can lead to role ambiguity and reduced innovativeness; secondly, lack of inter-role congruence between the service role understanding of the frontline employee and the user can negatively affect efficacy and satisfaction during encounters (1985: 104). In the latter case, there can be disagreement on both the employee and the user role. In any of the cases, expectations of role behaviour are not congruent. In other words: no matter which dimension is applied to role expectations, the vital point is that they are congruent both internally in the organisation and externally with the expectations of the users.

An important aspect of the service role expectations relate to mindlessness. According to the authors, most service use (and, we would add, service provision too) takes place in a routine fashion in which the user is in a state of mindlessness. Only when something unexpected or remarkable happens – a deviation from the script – does the user switch mental states to being mindful and actively observant. Addressing the classic dilemma between standardisation and customisation of services by casting it in the terms *predictability* and *personalisation*, the authors point out that the script disruption of personalisation can result in either a positive or negative user experience depending on what the user's expectations were before the encounter (1985: 105-107). In other words, the script disruptive effect of personalisation tears the user out of the state of mindlessness and into a mindful state. As personalisation of frontline employee role behaviour is at the expense of predictability (which allows the user to remain mindless), such role behaviour should therefore only be used in a specific type of cases, namely where the user is relatively involved in the service. This means that, to create a positive service encounter experience, there should be predictability in low-involvement services and personalisation in high-involvement services. In either case, the frontline employee must conform to the role expectations of the user and be predictable when the user expects it and personal when the user expects it, otherwise a negative user experience may be the result.

To sum up, in the view of these authors, roles in service encounters are interactive, social and dependent on others; and they are ritualised into routines (which are separate from the performing persons). Their aim is to use role theory in a prescriptive way to adjust provider and employee behaviour and maximise user satisfaction; in other words their focus lies on service

(encounter) quality. Relating them to the division of role theory we have created above, the authors are taking a role fulfilment perspective in defining role theory as “the study of the degree to which a particular part is acted appropriately as determined by the reactions of fellow actors and observers” and role performers are “actors who learn behaviors appropriate to the positions they occupy in society” (1985: 102). They take a relatively static and fixed view of role behaviour as prescribed or pre-determined prior to the actual encounter, which differs from Goffman’s more dynamic ad hoc focus of role behaviour as constantly created and adjusted through interaction. Similarly, the perspective of Solomon et al. is of service as a script or standardised set of behaviours. Nevertheless, the authors also point out important realisations, such as the correlation between saliency of occupational role to the self and the difficulty of changing that role; the interdependence of role behaviour in service encounters; and also that users prefer standardised predictability in certain service encounters and customisation in others.

We now turn to a final example of approaches to role behaviour in service encounters. This also comes from the academic area of business studies, but has a rather different take on roles than the one discussed above. It substitutes the descriptive-exploratory perspective with an instrumental-prescriptive one.

#### The millennium prescriptive managerial approach exemplified by Anne Broderick

Another example of the application of role theory to service encounters is found in managerial literature. It often has a prescriptive “self-help” nature and aims at being instrumental in the management of roles. Although the discussions below use one particular author as example, the points of critique are not aimed at this one author or article in particular; rather, we take a critical stance to this stream of literature in general. As it addresses many of the same aspects as we do in the following articles (such as role, exchange and service encounters), we have chosen an example by Anne Broderick (1999). She outlines a number of commonalities between role theory and service marketing, and advocates managing the interactional aspects of service by management of role script and role performance. With the growth in popularity of relationship marketing and concomitant concepts such as relationship intensity, trust, customer retention and loyalty, the “interpersonal dimensions” of service have come into focus and her aim is therefore to outline how “management of role script and role behaviours can have an important influence on service

performance” (1999: 118). Broderick argues that the interdisciplinary approach of role theory can further the understanding of the behavioural and relational aspects of service marketing, and that “social exchange [...] demonstrates certain patterns which are determined, to a large extent, by the role expectation and actual roles” (1999: 119); such deterministic views would seem to belong in the far end of the fulfilment perspective. She points out three commonalities between role theory and service (relationship) marketing, which are an analytical emphasis on continuity of interaction and change in expectations and interdependence; uncertainty and evolution of encounters; and a behavioural-interactional perspective. Furthermore, role theory can enrich the field of marketing with three points: Role behaviour during encounters determines future interaction; role behaviour integrates internal (intra-organisational) and external (user – employee) exchange and matches internal role congruence with external role performance; and role theory allows a focus on less tangible interactive and behavioural processes, visible as well as invisible.

These factors are “enabling service firms to understand and manage role patterns” in five specific ways (1999: 120-121). First, both user and provider have a set of learned behaviours related to encounters called a role script, and this defines the role evolution from the expectations before consumption, the enactment during consumption, and the user judgements after consumption. This means that “*planning and adaptation of role scripts can lead to improved customer retention*” (1999: 123, her italics). Secondly, though quality in people-based services is hard to assess, role theory provides tools to identify appropriate interaction behaviour including personalisation. The users’ quality evaluation is cumulative and therefore Broderick advocates making the often implicit criteria for accepted behaviour explicit. Third, there should be role development in long-term service relationships as role evolution creates relationship intensity. This also means that service modification requires role development. Fourth, role theory is a tool to grasp relational processes. Changes to services require internal role congruence which is dependent on factors such as information flow, preparation and so on. Lack of congruence means there is a risk of different service performance patterns, but “role congruence can provide a focus on role consistency”, so one should for example “monitor the progress of key client relationships” (1999: 127). Fifth, role links internal and external service development. Close relationships with users has high costs in terms of human resources and the need to be more responsive, and such involvement also influences the service to the point where “the cumulative effect may be to reinforce elements of flux in the client relationship with the firm” and therefore “the consistency in interactive behaviour across the boundaries of internal and external exchanges [...] takes on added importance”,

especially if previously internal zones now become visible to the users (1999: 128). In this way, “role preparation, anticipation and development can improve service effectiveness” in dealing with “the human factor” so that “management of role script and proactive preparation of service providers can enhance service encounter performance” (1999: 129).

This is certainly a different view of roles that what is found in the enactment and fulfilment perspectives of classic role theory. Compared with the classic theory, this example of service marketing literature using role theory is quite problematic for a number of reasons. Though it aims to solve the conundrum of how to grasp and control the vital frontline employee behaviour of person-based service encounters, it seems to still struggle with these “interpersonal dimensions”. One problem is the lack of allowance for individuality. Seen from an enactment perspective, the fact that social exchange patterns are determined by role expectations leaves the individual employee (or user) very little room for personal agency in their role performance. Another problem has to do with control. Even seen from a fulfilment perspective, the management of role script and behaviour advocated begs the question whether role behaviour can be managed in this way. Are, or can, roles be scripted? While service provision can be scripted in the narrow sense of an actual script to be read aloud, in the less narrow sense of welcoming phrases or actions to be performed, and in the broader sense of guidelines for manners and appearance, does it make sense to talk about scripting seen from a role perspective? If role theory is to enable service providers to “manage role patterns”, this assumes that these can be managed in the first place (1999: 121).

A third issue concerns predictability. The planning and adaptation of roles is advocated, but to which extent can a role be planned? Seen from an enactment perspective, how it concretely unfolds is entirely dependent on the interaction in which it is involved; seen from a fulfilment perspective it may follow certain expectations, but this is not the same as planning a role script. Likewise, the reader is told that “with adequate role preparation, opportunities for the extension of services with clients and the development of greater client commitment in existing services can be developed” (1999: 124-125). Surely this sounds promising, but is role preparation even a meaningful term from a classic role theoretical perspective? From an enactment perspective, roles are not prepared but spontaneously enacted in the situation. From a fulfilment perspective, this would mean *designing* role expectations to guide and influence the role behaviour. But can role expectations as they concretely unfold in daily interaction be designed to such an extent? Specifically how this is to be done, and what exactly “adequate role preparation” is, remain unspecified.



A fourth problem is related to the problems of standardising human behaviour. While roles can be more or less congruent, a term such as “role consistency” may be more problematic. Given the many elements of – and factors influencing – role, which Goffman has outlined (1959, 1967); and given the many roles which a person plays according to Linton (1964) or even an entire role-set (Merton 1957), is a term such as role consistency then realistic? Or even meaningful? If one takes into account the exigencies of humans and daily life and interaction and relations, it would seem somewhat utopian. Role performance, this “interpersonal dimension” of service provision expressed in the user-employee relations, is notoriously hard to standardise both in terms of various actors and over time. And how could these relations then be monitored without imposing drastically on both the employee and the user? This, too, remains unspecified (and problematic). The issue of control – or lack thereof – reappears in another theme concerning consistency. As quoted above, the reader is warned that engaging closely with users may “reinforce elements of flux in the client relationship with the firm” and therefore “the consistency in interactive behaviour [...] takes on added importance” (1999: 128). Seen from an innovation point of view, this flux in the relationship could also be creative. In fact, one might argue that it is exactly this involvement of and by the users which is desirable seen from a co-creation point of view. As will be illustrated in the café case in the articles, the focus on consistency and standardisation actually discourages user involvement and thereby user based innovation.

The fifth issue, which combines the other four, involves the question of to what extent humans can be managed and the complexity of roles. According to the views expressed above, roles can be prepared, anticipated and developed and Broderick ends by concluding about “the human factor” that “management of role script and proactive preparation of service providers can enhance service encounter performance” (1999: 129). Here, the entire concept of role (and not just behaviour) is addressed. However, this seems not to solve, but rather to further complicate the struggle of the business approach to deal with “the human factor”. Can roles be proactively prepared and real life human interaction anticipated in this way? Can roles be scripted and humans controlled if only the right understanding of which mechanisms to use, which “social buttons” to press, is provided by role theory? And can role theory provide such specifics? The classic role theory discussed above addresses general patterns of roles, not specifics on how to control or manage subjects in this way. Even if such specifics were provided, it is doubtful whether the result would be as intended given the enormous complexity of a concept such as role and the randomness of interaction – especially when dealing directly with a number of different persons every day, like

frontline service employees do. Though certain behaviours may be scripted, the entire concept of role with all the aspects on personality, different expectations, randomness of interaction, conflicting norms and values, and so on, scripting this whole phenomenon and managing it would seem near impossible. It would seem that the comprehension of roles as something to be planned and designed and managed which is expressed in business and service marketing literature such as the above example differs fundamentally from both the fulfilment and the enactment perspectives of classic role theory.

While a critical stance has been taken towards the above text, it nevertheless has many valid points, as summarised above. Both roles and service provision is of an interpersonal nature, and we agree that role theory can help both service managers, service frontline employees and service scholars understand the interactional and relational aspects of service (though not in the advocative manner above). It can also further their understanding of the intangible, processual and invisible aspects of service and contribute to an understanding of change in service provision – and therefore also in roles. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the text has been included in this literature review as it is an illustrative example of a genre of literature combining role theory with service research. In the articles to come, however, a rather different approach to such a combination is taken, namely one reflecting an *empirically* based enactment perspective. The understanding of role and specifically the particular role characteristics of the frontline service employees is born from an anthropological view which emphasises the multiplicity and unpredictability of everyday life based on an analysis of concrete empirical examples as well as conceptual development. We question whether something as complex as roles with the many elements discussed above can be managed at all. Surely, a manager (as well as anyone else) can have expectations to role behaviour and these can be expressed to the role performer, but that is not the same as managing an entire role creation, definition, understanding and ensuing performances and interactions *in toto*. The type of literature represented by the above example is of an instrumental nature and aims to be prescriptive. Hence managerial implications are a recurring feature throughout. However, as the example of “adequate role preparation” (1999: 124) above shows, the solutions offered are often facile and lack elaborations to an extent where the manager is left to fend for him- or herself and implement the advocated solutions in practice somehow. Contrarily, the articles to come are of a descriptive nature and aim to be exploratory. Hence, by using empirical illustrations, they focus on understanding the intangible processes of service encounters. Deeply anchored in concrete examples, they offer no managerial implications since every context, in which solutions must be implemented, is different.

Instead, an understanding of the underlying mechanisms is provided. The manager is still left to fend for him- or herself, but with a further understanding of the processes taking place. So far we have addressed the question of whether roles can be controlled and managed; another equally important question raised by the typical business approach is: If this really is possible, *should* they be controlled to such an extent? Such a debate, however, will go too far from the purpose of this section, which is to describe and discuss role theory.

While exchange aspects have been touched upon in the role theory of service encounters (for example the dyadic aspects discussed by Solomon et al. (1985) and the social exchange of Broderick (1999)), the focus has often been on service quality and customer satisfaction – or, in the case of Goffman (1959, 1967), on role credibility. None of the authors have discussed what effect the role performance of employees during service encounters has on service innovation and the motivation of users to state ideas for innovations. Also, while role theory in general has been applied to service studies, the specific roles of frontline employees have not been subject to the same amount of attention. For example, the professionalisation of certain service employees has not been discussed to any large extent; specifically, what the relatively new expectations of being or appearing professional means for their role as a frontline service provider.

## **Discussion**

Many different perspectives, view points, insights and conceptualisations of role have been presented here. A macro conceptualisation of roles is found in the functionalist and structural-functionalist fulfilment perspective, which has elucidated how the role is born out of a social context as the role performing individual must live up to the expectations of others and follow role-specific norms derived from general values of society. In the other hand, the enactment perspective puts the focus on the *micro* realities of daily life. It is also *dynamic* as it focuses on the everyday processes through which roles really come into existence, which means that its conceptualisation of role is not as static and externally given as in the fulfilment perspective, but rather processual and interactional. These are two major differences from the conceptualisations of role discussed in the fulfilment perspective. In the enactment perspective of the symbolic interactionists, roles are not just pre-written parts to fulfil, but flexible frames to enact, to animate so to speak. This is why

Goffman is so concerned with the many layers, elements and ways in which an individual can perform a role; as roles are at least partially empty shells, the important question becomes how to enact them, how to fill them out, make them come to life and signal them clearly to others. The two perspectives of fulfilment and enactment have here been opposed to clarify in what ways they differ from each other and to make a conceptual distinction. However, in reality they are not necessarily in contradiction; instead they represent two ends of a continuum of perspectives. Theoretically, however, separating them provides prototypes or concepts with which to analyse the empirical realities of daily life. Following this notion, they can be summarised in the following way:

(see table on next page)

**Fulfilment perspective****Enactment perspective**

Level of analysis	Often macro but can also be micro	Micro
Direction of view	Outside in	Inside out
Foundation	Often theoretical	Often empirical
View angle	Externally defined	Internally viewed and understood
Nature of role	Expectations and sanctions; ideal behaviour	Interpretation and agency; real behaviour
Freedom of role playing	The individual must fulfil the social role given to him as best he can	The individual enacts a role in the way he sees fit or correct or appropriate (but not solely free will, there are external demands and expectations)
Origins of role	Role as externally pre-created	The role may be externally created, but it is then learned and expressed by the enacting individual
Role condition	Order; role stable regardless of player	Always mismatch between player and role; mutations of role as player struggles to enact it
Role change	Equilibrium; roles relatively static	Disequilibrium; more dynamic
Diverging roles	Role conflict	Role dilemma
Handling a role	Position in a situation; act accordingly	Process of co-interpretation of guidelines (which do not fit perfectly)
Shaping the roles	Roles are externally shaped through interaction; a person is socialised, told and taught what to do	Roles are internally/individually shaped through interaction and decisions by the performer
Aspects of role emphasised	Positional aspects (functionalism) Social aspects (structural functionalism)	Relational aspects (symbolic interactionism)
Examples of authors	Linton 1964, Merton 1957, 1968, Parsons 1951, 1961, 1965, 1975	Goffman 1959, 1967

Table 1: Role Theory Perspectives.

This table is based on the discussion of the two perspectives above. The level of analysis, direction of view and view angle from which roles are analysed are external in the case of the fulfilment perspective and internal in the case of the enactment perspective, and the former is often more

theoretically based whereas the latter is more empirically based (Poulsen 2005: 28, Harste and Mortensen 1998: 200 and 205). In the former perspective roles are created externally from expectations which the performer must live up to; in the latter perspective roles are expressed and enacted by an individual with room for agency. The former perspective stresses order and equilibrium in roles which (because they are socially given) exist independently of the individual; the latter emphasises the mismatch between role and performer, and the resulting dynamic disequilibrium. In case roles understandings or expectations diverge, the former perspective conceptualises this as a conflict between or inside roles, whereas the latter perspective sees it as a dilemma for the role player. The fulfilment perspective emphasises the social position of the performer and how the performer must fulfil and live up to this, whereas the enactment perspective stresses how the performer interprets and thereby shapes the role through interaction and relations with others.

Besides the struggle between the two perspectives of who defines a role, there is another duality in the role concept. A role is both an introvert self-understanding and an extrovert social “face” which expresses itself and therefore leaves impressions of itself in the mind of whoever it interacts with. In this way, a role performer looks both inwards and outwards. The introvert and extrovert aspects are closely linked as social interaction influences a person’s self-view, which in turn influences further interaction. As either the performer’s view of his or her own role changes or the social definition of the role changes, this means that the role (performance) itself changes. In other words, the behaviour of the individual and the effects of it change as the role definition changes. This may seem obvious, but is often overlooked. For example, in relation to services and specifically service encounters, a role change means a change in the service provision; and a change in service provision also means a role change for the employees. If a service provider changes how it provides a service, it is therefore important to not only acknowledge the role change of the frontline employees, but also to actively inform the employees of this and work with them to understand and shape their new role. As will be evident in the articles to come, not doing so can leave the employees with no other alternative than a mock-adoption of this new role. Because of their complexity, roles can only be controlled and managed to a limited extent, they are an expression of free will, social norms and values, and depend in their concrete expression on the exigencies of everyday life; however, it is possible to at least clearly communicate new role expectations and work with the performers to understand these. In other words: Service change means role change and role change means service change. Therefore the employee roles must be

regularly addressed as an organisation changes, and especially in the case of a service provider with personal encounters must the changes to frontline employee roles not be overlooked.

### **Concluding Role View**

So where do roles come from? Can a person create a role? Is this common or an exception? How do roles change? We will now describe the role view concluded from the discussions above. This is the role view applied in the articles to come. Roles are a combination of two different aspects. On one hand, there is the prescribed role which is externally given. It is rooted in how others feel the role player should behave, which appears to the role player in the expectational form of incentives and demands at the beginning of a role performance, and in the consequential form of rewards or sanctions during and after the performance. These are the expectations and sanctions which Merton and Parsons address (see above). On the other hand there is the subjective role as the role player perceives it. This is a complex combination of identity, personality, the role player's understanding of the role, and so on. The concept and empirical phenomenon of role has a number of properties, which will now be briefly described. Overall, roles are *dynamic*, *contextual* and *complex*. Following these three main properties, the following outlines the role view taken in the articles.

#### **Dynamic**

- Roles *change*. On one hand there are shifting external demands and expectations, on the other hand there are also shifting moods and evolving personalities of the person playing the role. Through time, the performer ends up with pieces of expressions, rehearsed reactions and so on as part of the repertoire with which he or she can improvise as social life unfolds and situations spontaneously appear.
- Roles are *manoeuvrable*. Since they consist of many harmonised or conflicting elements, there is room for interpretation of a role both by the role playing individual, and externally by those with whom he or she interacts and society. So there is often a multiplicity of

potential options available for the individual, which leaves room for personal agency, as pointed out in the enactment perspective.

- Roles are *ambiguous*. They are not coherent homogeneous patterns of behaviour but contain internal as well as external fractures and conflicts. Furthermore, roles are both created individually and socially in a multiplicity of contexts and relating to many different other persons, so interpretation by the individual is made necessary because of this ambiguity.
- Roles are *never fully accepted*. They are always under review by the performers and those with which the performer interacts, as well as society at large which accounts for why values and norms change. Therefore, roles not only change but there is often (consciously and intentionally or not) a critical distance to them, they never perfectly fit the performer (cf. Goffman)

### Contextual

- Roles are *context-dependent*. They acquire their meaning both from the player and the context. They must therefore be seen in the social and contextualised view for which the fulfilment perspective has argued.
- Roles are *scalable*. As evident from Linton's role in the single and plural sense and from Merton's role-set, roles can be conceptualised and performed on many different levels. Whether the formal definition or the actual execution of a role is addressed, and whether it is internally or externally created, it can be seen as existing on many different levels. This could be anything from the role of the Western world as a transnational cultural community, over the role of society as a country or nation, to the role of various groups such as an economic class or a region, the role of an institution such as a school or organisation, or an individual role corresponding to Linton's role in the general sense, or even roles narrowed to relations to others corresponding to Merton's role-sets. In principle this list could be expanded and extended in both end of the scale. For every level there is a definition of the role, with concomitant expectations and sanctions. In this way there is a continuum of defining levels, and the levels are often combined in the concrete enactment of a role. For example, Poulsen describes how the formal national role of a civil servant, the ministry's institutional view of that role, and the individual interpretation of it are all combined into the



concrete roles she found (2005: 9). So a role can be any combination of formal, informal and cultural aspects, which also explains and adds to the ambiguity mentioned above.

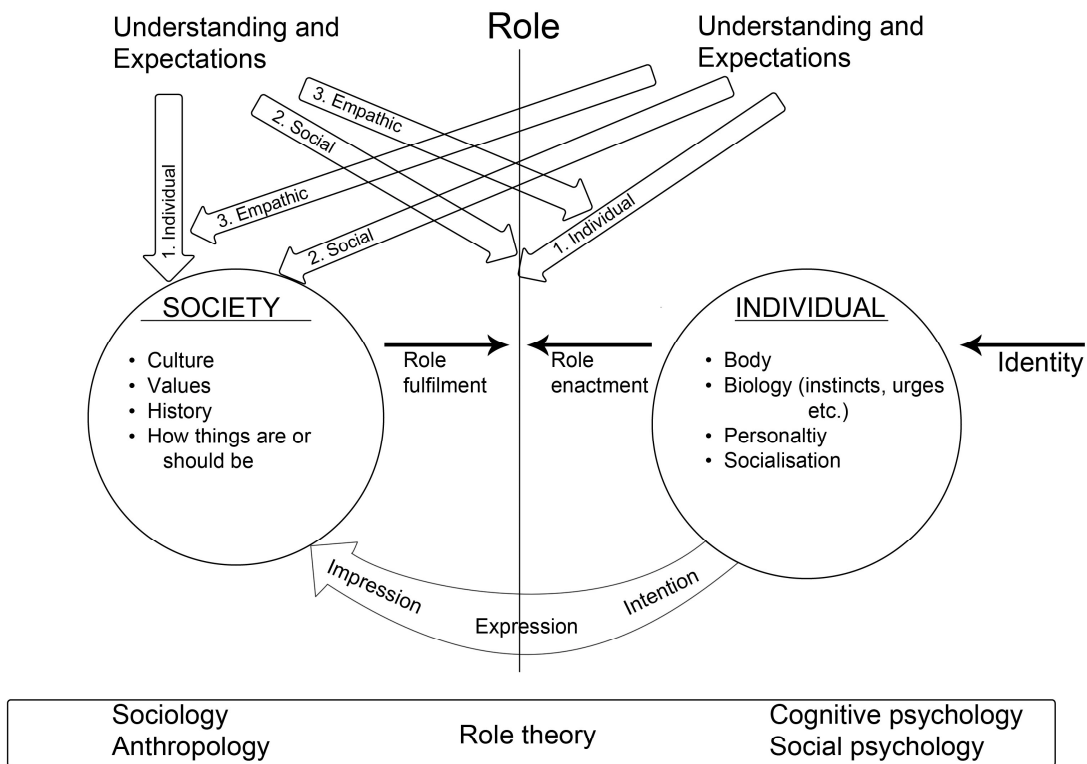
- Role *expectations vary*. Linton (1964) conceptualised role as the enactment of a status or position, but as Merton has added, these are not singular entities but composites (1957, 1968). Hence, a role becomes a role-set and a position becomes multiple positions depending on relations with others. In practice, this means that expectations of persons having the same position (for example in an organisation) vary for each individual, just like the role players' own attitudes and view of their own role may vary. In other words, both behaviour and expectations vary individually; for example "father" is a category with many interpretations both by fathers and by others.

### Complex

- Role *definitions are always unclear*. No matter how tightly defined roles may be formally, in the execution of a role the definition is always flexible and unclear; otherwise humans would be reduced to acting as robots and unable to cope with the randomness of life and interaction. In other words, there is a limit to how tightly roles can be defined in practice. As Goffman (1959, 1967) has shown, on one hand this leaves the individual room for agency (as mentioned above), on the other hand this can also lead to dilemmas such as doubt of how a role is defined or how it should be successfully enacted, or even role conflicts. This is a basic condition of role performance.
- Different *levels of role understanding and expectations*. Roles are defined by the expectations of others and understood and interpreted by the role performer him- or herself. This means that there are different levels of role expectations and understandings. On the first level we find the self-understanding of person A and his expectations to himself; and the self-understanding of person B and his expectations to himself. On the next level we find the understanding and expectations by A of person B, and B's understanding and expectations of A. We now have both an individual and a social level. The third level could be called the empathic level. Expectation wise, here one finds A's views and expectations of B's expectations of him, for example a new employee's anticipation of the demands of him

which his manager might have. Understanding wise, this level contains A's understanding of B's self-view, for example when someone thinks of another person as having poor self-confidence or being infatuated with himself. In principle these levels go on, but it is rare that researchers need to go beyond these three levels, the individual, the social and the empathic.

- Roles are *complex*. They consist of more than just expectations to be fulfilled or just behaviour to be enacted. Not only do both these perspectives need to be taken into consideration, one also needs to go beyond them. Below is a model illustrating some important elements of role and role performance. On the right side is the role performing individual and his identity which is his view of himself and how he is. On the left side is his context in the form of society and those with whom he interacts (for the sake of simplicity these have been merged into the contextual notion of "society"). In between is the role performance which acts as an "interface" through which interaction and communication takes place, and as a membrane through which role definition, understanding and expectations permeates through osmosis. Based on body, other biological factors such as instincts and urges, personality and the way the individual has been socialised, the role performer has an intention to act in a certain way. This is then expressed through his role enactment and leaves an impression on the surrounding society, which in turn is the result of culture, values, history and views on how things are or should be. The role enactment perspective focuses on how he enacts this role, the distance from himself to his role actions so to speak; the role fulfilment perspective focuses on how his role actions correspond to the external expectations, the distance between the context and his role actions so to speak. The three levels of role understanding and expectations have also been included. Finally the interdisciplinarity of role theory has been illustrated by adding some academic disciplines that take part of this model as their subject. This model would have to be repeated for each role playing individual, which shows the cornucopia of complexity of which an empirical field consists.



**Figure 1: Role Performance**

Based on the figure above, role performance should not be defined as fulfilment or enactment alone. The values, norms, expectations, incentives, demands, rewards and sanctions given to the individual by society and those with whom he interacts in that role all make up a frame for his behaviour. The role player makes this frame come to life by enacting it and constantly interpreting it based on both his understanding of the externally given factors and on the internally given factors such as his own role view and expectations of himself and others. Role can then be defined as the animation of a frame of behaviour.

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# **CHAPTER 4**

## **METHOD**





# Method

The purpose of this section is to introduce and discuss the methods chosen in the following articles. As the specific methods and the use of these will be described in each article, no such details of implementation will be discussed here. Rather, this section aims to provide insights, deliberations and discussion of the methods in terms of why they were chosen, what kinds of data they can and cannot provide, and which fundamental understanding of the data studied one reaches by using these methods. In the articles, most of the data analysed have been empirical, although many theoretical insights and concepts have been used in order to obtain such analysis and fundamental understanding.

The purpose of having a method is to obtain data in a more or less systematic and thorough manner which is scientifically sound and valid (the meaning of which can be debated almost endlessly but this falls outside the purpose of this section). This is done in order to produce and communicate new insights in a clear and succinct manner, often in the written form of books, articles and so on. However, there is a fundamental mismatch here – especially in the case of empirical data collection. Reality is a very messy place; it is neither clear nor succinct, but rather a chaotic and extremely complex network of understandings, views and meanings. Therefore any portrayal of reality in the orderly way of articles belies the true nature of it. Nevertheless, such a structured account significantly aids the reader in understanding the insights which are intended to get across, and so the representation of reality must be fundamentally different from the experience of reality. Furthermore, whatever data are extracted from this network, whatever analysis applied to these, and whatever understanding and insights are thus produced; these are only the researcher's and are but one of many. Therefore, the following articles and conclusion cannot be, and is not claimed to be, objective. Rather, it is highly subjective as it represents but one of a cornucopia of comprehensions of the world in which we live. Even so, it holds merit as it *does* represent one such comprehension, and a well thought-through one at that. It is the result of uninformed interest, stumbling in the dark and frustrating lack of knowledge, but also of a passionate search for this knowledge, careful deliberation, testing of findings, and comparison with similar findings by other authors.

A method always consists of three parts or phases. First comes the research design, in which an overall methodology and specific methods are chosen and the data collection is planned. Then comes the actual execution which consists of two main parts: the data collection and the data analysis. Last comes the presentation of the findings to a wider audience. In addition there should always be a retrospective and more general discussion of the implications of the methods used including the limitations of the specific application of the methods in the project. It is in these parts that the following section will fall.

## **Research design**

The research used in the following articles was planned as being primarily empirical from the inception. Based on existing knowledge about user innovation and service encounters, some gaps in the literature were identified. These included lack of knowledge on how ideas for innovation which the users have could be voiced and thereby transferred to the frontline employees during service encounters, what the incentives for this could be, what the barriers could be, and the overall question of which kinds of microprocesses actually take place during these encounters. As a result, some overall preliminary research topics were chosen: How can a service provider source ideas and wishes for innovation which the users have during the service encounters? Which factors play an important role in such a process? From these more general topics, some further topics of investigation were chosen, such as: What concretely goes on in service encounters? What are the obstacles for such a process? If sourcing ideas for innovation during encounters is possible, then this would seem like an ideal process to engage in for service providers who wish to be innovative. So why is this not more widespread? As these questions were all explorative, investigative or descriptive, a qualitative approach would seem most fitting. The focus was less on frequency of phenomena, but rather on the “inner mechanics” of human processes. To answer these initial and more general questions, it would be necessary to study service encounters empirically. Alternative methods could have been to conduct a series of interviews with managers or send out a survey to a group of selected managers and/or employees as well as customers. But such methods would elicit opinions on the processes; the aim in this project was to study the processes themselves directly to identify patterns and factors which play an important role in furthering or hindering the idea transfer. This also means that the innovation ideas themselves and the further development and

implementation of them falls outside the scope of this study; the aim is on the *preconditions* for such a process, not the actual process itself or its consequences. Therefore the conditions of the service encounters were studied directly through ethnographic fieldwork, which lead to a focus on certain salient factors such as the reciprocal processes of service encounters, the professionalisation of the frontline employee role, and the professionalised employees' view on the users and their abilities. This lead to the following three specific research questions as presented in the articles:

1. During service encounters, which kinds of reciprocity take place and how do they affect whether ideas for innovation are stated by the users?
2. What consequences does professionalisation of frontline employees have for user innovation through service encounters?
3. What effects do the professionalised staff roles have on staff views of guests, and what consequences does this have for the possibility of sourcing innovation ideas from users during service encounters?

As a result, methods were chosen which could be able to provide some answers to these questions. As mentioned, the primary methodology was an ethnographic fieldwork, and this consisted primarily of participant observation, conversations and interviews. The empirical material for the articles was gathered during two fieldworks. The first was undertaken at a café in central Copenhagen and formed the empirical basis for the article 2 and 3; the second was done at a tour operator and two travel agencies, also in Copenhagen, and formed the empirical basis for article 1.

Ethnographic fieldwork has been a classic methodology of anthropology, which is generally interested in describing, exploring and investigating empirical fields. In anthropology there has been a tradition of seeking patterns in everyday details of behaviour and attempting to uncover underlying personal and social assumptions and meaning. A stringent methodology of data analysis such as the rigid comparative classification of grounded theory (e.g. Glaser and Strauss 1967) or mathematical analyses of statistics would not serve this purpose as the former might not allow for enough flexibility in the interpretation of empirical material and the latter might miss the detailed micro-level details with which ethnography works. This, however, does not mean that anthropologists do not use systematic data analysis (which will be discussed in more detail below in

the sections about analysis and evidence). As the findings and any concepts and theory derive from them are based primarily on the empirical fieldwork, this is clearly a very inductive approach, building theory from empirical material. This means that any resulting inferences and interpretations of the empirical material and all theory built therefrom as well as any faults and misinterpretations are the researchers' responsibility. Such potential error was part of the research design from the inception.

As the anthropologists embark on the daunting quest for answers, the research questions are usually not yet existing, as they must grow out of the empirical material. And so it was in this current study too. It starts with wide open questions for anthropologists as "they attempt to make their research theoretically meaningful, but they assume that they do not know enough about the organization *a priori* to identify relevant problems and hypotheses and that they must discover these in the course of the research" (Becker 1958: 653). In other words, the empirical fields and which processes and situations to focus on in the fields were selected beforehand, but with an open mind towards other situations and phenomena which might prove relevant to the topic addressed. Therefore the specific problems and phenomena of interest are only identified in the field. For example, the existence of the very professional (what in the article is termed hyperprofessional) attitudes, which the staff members at the café displayed, were unknown and unanticipated, and only after they had presented themselves did they become an object of focus. Likewise, the reciprocal patterns of the employees at the tour operator – and indeed the vast reciprocal networks of which they formed part – did only appear to the researcher's surprise and as a result of the researcher's pursuance of these phenomena. It is for this reason that fieldwork is often so fundamentally unstructured; a pre-planned and pre-structured fieldwork would either not detect these phenomena, or if it did, it would have fallen outside its scope to study them.

## **Research execution**

Having surveyed through literature and designed the empirical research in this manner, we must now turn to the execution of it. This falls in two main parts, the data collection and the data analysis.

## **Data collection**

Data collection consists of two dimensions. One is the scope or sample of the data, the other is how findings were retrieved from the sample. In this study the former consisted of two cases and the latter was done in the form of ethnographic fieldwork, a methodology which in itself consists of a number of methods such as participant observation, interviews and ethnographic conversations. These two dimensions will now be discussed.

## **Case Study**

The samples used in this study are case-based. Yin has written about case study research that “the method is appropriate when investigators either desire or are forced by circumstances (a) to define research topics broadly and not narrowly, (b) to cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and (c) to rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence” (2003: xi). Following the broad research topics, the more narrow but still relatively open research questions, and the overall research design all mentioned above, the aim of this study is to be broad, contextual, look at complex processes and relying on multiple sources of evidence (many informants) as well as multiple kinds of evidence (see below in this section). Using Yin’s criteria stated above, case study would therefore be an adequate approach.

While the empirical material used in this study is drawn from two cases, the investigations are nevertheless to be seen as a single-case study, or rather two single case studies. The two single cases were explored and analysed individually. And no systematic cross-comparison was undertaken as it is not the aim of the project to investigate prevalence of phenomena or construct a model of oppositions between the two empirical contexts (though differences and even oppositions were naturally found as these were two different contexts). Rather, the aim was to investigate the research topics in an explorative manner. The reasons for having two cases were both theoretical and practical as findings on employee role behaviour lead to further questions on the basic processes of service encounters which could not be investigated with the scope of access which the café case would allow. Specifically, there was not sufficient ethnographic conversation (see below) and user contact. The fieldworks were therefore not put in opposition, but rather seen as a continuation of the exploration of service encounters.

An important advantage of case studies is that they can provide in-depth insight into empirical phenomena as they unfold in their natural environment. This also points to another important advantage, which is that phenomena can be viewed in a contextualised and meaningful manner (although one can never exhaust the entire range of meanings and context of a phenomenon). Unlike quantitative models and qualitative collection techniques such as analysis of archives or qualitative surveys, which are adequate when gathering information on outcomes, case studies are especially well suited for studying the processes leading to such outcomes (Yin 2003: xi), and it is these processes with which we are concerned. The former type of methods generally provide an *extensive* overview of phenomena, whereas a case study are perhaps more narrow in scope but on the other hand it is *intensive* and can therefore provide more deep and contextualised findings. For the investigative purposes of this study, using cases is therefore appropriate. So far the scope of sample or text and context has been addressed. We now turn to the other dimension of data collection, the methods of studying and gathering empirical findings.

## Ethnographic fieldwork

The data collection in this project has been done through ethnographic fieldwork. This classic method of anthropology consists of entering the empirical field for an amount of time to investigate the topics of concern. In classical ethnographic approaches this can last up to several years (e.g. Malinowski 1922) or become an engagement of a lifetime (Keesing 1992). Such involvement falls far outside the frame of this study. Nevertheless, relatively speaking the fieldworks undertaken here were still long-term, as the findings was not based on visiting the field once to conduct interviews or distribute a survey. Rather, the fields were visited for a number of times during periods lasting a few months (see the articles for more details). The fieldwork was conducted in an ethnographic manner, which means that there was a special and critical attention to details of behaviour and statements. As a comprehension of these formed in the researcher's mind, they were then contextualised and set in relation to other such phenomena with which they were connected in the field. In other words, ethnographic fieldwork is detail-oriented and therefore micro-level, but also contextualised in a macro-level fashion. It is this duality which is the primary strength of ethnographic fieldwork. But being ethnographic also means that certain specific methods were used. Specifically three methods were used: participant observation, interviews and ethnographic conversation. These will now be discussed.

## Participant observation

Participant observation consists of two equal parts, observation of the empirical environment and participation in this environment. This has several advantages when trying to discern everyday practices. The combination of participation and observation generates a fruitful synergy. On one hand, the researcher is actively participating, and therefore it is possible to get a deep “inside” perspective through first-hand experience. This is not to say that a true and complete impression of what it means to be one of the informants is necessarily gained in this way; for example the experience of working temporarily as a staff member at a café would not be identical to being permanently employed there for a living. However, certain insights can be gained through this method. On the other hand, the researcher is also an observer who is able to subsequently analyse situations and impressions and synthesise the views of various participants obtained through the fieldwork. Although such synthesis is done from an outsider’s perspective, this approach takes the researcher beyond “mere” observation as this level of analysis combines the inside perspectives of various informants and lifts them to a higher more general theoretical level. This also allows the researcher to identify practices and patterns which informants might struggle to see exactly because they are participants immersed in and part of the environment and thus unable to escape it or gain an overview of it.

In this sense, participant observation is perhaps more a strategy than a method as suggested by Bernard (1988: 150). However, this approach provides the researcher with an intuitive understanding of the empirical environment and therefore also of the meaning of the findings – thereby increasing the validity of these (ibid. p. 151). In a sense, participant observation is not a very concrete and detailed method. However, this is suitable as the empirical environments it is used to study are complex and ever changing, and therefore such detailed planning might miss many interesting processes and phenomena taking place in the field. Instead of being one specific approach, then, the term participant observation covers a veritable cornucopia of different techniques and approaches to the field (Junker 1952, Gold 1958, Becker 1958). One of the main distinctions between these, however, and one which is relevant to the following articles, is that between obvious and unobtrusive participant observation (Bernard 1988). Bernard makes a distinction between an obvious, direct and reactive approach to the field, and an unobtrusive,

(mostly) nonreactive approach (ibid.). In the two case studies on which this project is based, the former approach was used in the case of the tour operator whereas the latter approach was used at Café Classy, but it was supplemented with direct, obvious reactive interviews.

The obvious observation approach consists of the researcher being very saliently part of the field as a researcher. The researcher engages quite directly with the informants in this role, by interviewing them or asking for clarifications and explanations of activities and actions. This also means that the informants may change their behaviour and “play to their audience” as Bernard terms it (1988: 271). On one hand there is no doubt that the mere presence of the researcher influences the researched, which is why this methodology does not claim to be objective but subjective. On the other hand, however, this method is longitudinal which provides the researcher with some counter-measures. For example, in the case of the tour operator, the field was visited repeatedly and so, over time, the “play to the audience” by the informants broke down and normal life resumed. Few informants can uphold a polite but fake front over time. Furthermore, as conversation with one informant took place, life continued to unfold all around. This means that findings relating to one informant could be tested against the observed behaviour of others which were not directly observed at the moment. In these ways, one can see if and how behaviour of those directly observed is changed (to an extent, to another extent one will never know). Nevertheless, this is a way to test observations

The unobtrusive observation approach was used in the case of the café. The staff members were mainly observed by the researcher taking on the role as a guest. In its pure form, what Bernard has termed “disguised field observation” of informants “is the ultimate in participant observation – in which the participation is so complete that informants do not know that the ethnographer is watching them. This presumes, of course, that the ethnographer can blend in physically and linguistically to the group he or she is studying” (1988: 300). This approach can be ethically problematic if it takes on the nature of undercover journalism during which informants in private settings do not know they are studied (as in the studies of homosexual behaviour in public toilets by Humphreys 1975, who was criticised by e.g. Koocher 1977). However, this needs not be the case as there are “grades of deception” (Bernard 1988: 303). Building on Sechrest and Phillips (1979), Bernard outlines how unobtrusive observation can be ethically defensible if public behaviour is observed by a researcher who forms a natural part of the environment, which is termed “casual observation” (Bernard 1988: 303). In the café case, it was precisely casual observation which was used as data collection technique. In this regard the following points must be mentioned.



Firstly, the researcher formed a natural part of the environment as a dining guest at the establishment. Secondly, while informants might not be aware of being observed in the moment, they knew research was taking place as both formal introductions of the project as well as interviews were taking place during that same period. In the early phases, this was a multiple-researcher case study, and it happened during participant observation sessions that one researcher was recognised by the staff members who then talked to the researcher before proceeding to perform more work tasks. Third, informants were not observed in private but only in the public spheres of daily performance of work tasks. This was a semi-public place to which virtually anyone had access and so cannot be considered a private sphere. Even interactions and conversations by staff members intended only for other staff members (in article 2 and 3 termed *space of living*) was enacted in full public view, otherwise it would not have been observable. No observation took place inside the kitchen, staff rooms or any other such secluded and private physical spaces limited to the staff members only. Fourth, all observations which were later included in writing by the researcher was anonymised (no names). Fifth, no experiments took place and the natural environment was not intentionally manipulated like in some other studies (e.g. Middlemist 1976). The participant observation technique in the café case must therefore fall under the category termed “passive deception” by Bernard (1988: 305). Of course, like in the tour operator case, there is a chance that informants who are aware of being observed might have altered their behaviour and the attitudes displayed, but as the majority of observation sessions did not involve such recognition, this altered behaviour only plays a minor role on the amount of observations made. The participant observation at the café was therefore clearly a passive deception, which we agree with Bernard is “ethically aseptic” (1988: 306).

As for the sampling patterns in both cases, the technique used was somewhere between continuous monitoring and spot sampling (Bernard 1988). The former consists of continuously monitoring informants for a period of time and registering behaviour; the latter is a more or less structured technique in which the researcher appears at randomly selected places and times to note activities. In both the case studies conducted, there were visits to the field but no continuous monitoring of the employees (or users). For example, the researcher did not follow them outside work and did not follow their whole workday day after day continuously. There were, however, lengthy spot samples consisting of anything from a few hours up to a whole work day of observation. In this sense, the participant observation was not done following a pattern of brief spot samples. So the sampling technique was a middle form of the two techniques. This also means that

the study did not follow the pattern of a traditional ethnographic fieldwork in which the anthropologist goes to live with the natives for a year or several years. Nevertheless, there were still observations and insights elicited from the field to be analysed. Sampling was further subject to limitations in terms of time allocated to the study which was set by length of a PhD project and the various activities which form part of a such, and limitations of access to the field; for example, users were not interviewed and no ethnographic conversations were conducted with them in the café case (see the limitations section below for further elaboration on limitations of the project).

### Interviews (employees, users)

In addition to the technique of participant observation, interviews were also conducted with the frontline employees of the café. Likewise, such interviews were also conducted with frontline employees of the tour operator, as well as other employees (almost all employees had direct user contact, so it is hard to make a distinction between frontline and non-frontline employees in this case). Interviews were also conducted with managers of the tour operator as well as with users from two client companies which were both travel agencies.

The nature of the interviews was both semi-structured and unstructured, but in both cases were they formal in the sense that informants were taken out of their daily tasks to a separate place and a recording device (to which they had agreed) was placed visibly in front of them and turned on (Bernard 1988). The interviews were semi-structured in the case of the café and the users of the tour operator; but often they were unstructured, as in the case of the managers and employees of the tour operator. There was a deliberate choice to avoid structured interviews in order to allow informants to go off topic during the interviews if something was important to them or they wanted to elaborate further. This is compatible with the overall research strategy which was of an exploratory nature aiming to understand and describe issues which were important to informants and were influencing the service encounter and the possibility for users to suggest ideas for innovations or the employees to proactively obtain such ideas from the users. Furthermore, as many of the factors found relevant were in the form of underlying assumptions of which the informants were not necessarily conscious themselves, speaking directly of these during interviews was not an option, and therefore more concrete factors connected to these assumptions were used as topics instead. The interviews sometimes took place in the beginning of the fieldwork to establish some

basic knowledge of the field, and sometimes they took place later in the fieldwork, building on previous findings and exploring and testing these. The interviews involved no ethical dilemma for the researcher as informants were fully aware of being interviewed.

Interviews are often combined with participant observation during ethnographic fieldworks. This is because the two methods complement each other, thereby creating a fruitful synergy. Participant observation can provide the researcher with both the vital first-hand experiences and an overview of the social interaction overall. On the other hand, interviews allows the researcher to go beyond the first-hand experiences and observations of interactions of just one person (the researcher him- or herself). More than that, interviews bring forward descriptions of many first-hand experiences, as well as the personal reactions to these, and general attitudes towards various matters. The researcher can then build on such insights in further exploration of the field. In this way the two methods supplement each other.

### Ethnographic conversation

A third method of data collection must be mentioned. This is what we term ethnographic conversation. The ethnographic conversation between the researcher and informant takes place as part of the observation of daily life and is a naturally occurring conversation about ongoing phenomena. However, it is purposeful and directed towards one or more particular topics in which the researcher is interested at that point in time. In this way, it corresponds with what Bernard calls “informal interviews” (1988: 204) and what Agar calls level 1 strips, which “are part of the informants’ routine accomplishment of daily life” (1983: 34). As Burgess remarks, “conversation is a crucial element of field research” (1982: 107), and in ethnographic fieldwork, such focused conversations inspired by current events is a primary method of further exploring as well as testing findings as they occur and in the context in which they occur. In the words of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, “for the greater part of his information the investigator must find his own witnesses, induce them to talk, and embody the gist of this oral testimony on his sheets of notes. This is the Method of the Interview, or ‘conversation with a purpose’, a unique instrument of the social investigator.” (Webb and Webb 1932: 130, in Burgess 1982: 107). It is exactly this ‘conversation with a purpose’ which is the ethnographic conversation. They also call it an

interview; however we would not call it an interview but rather a conversation for the following reasons.

There are a number of differences between interviews and ethnographic conversation. First there is the location. Like interviews, ethnographic conversation can be used to either test and further explore the researcher's understanding of the field or a particular phenomenon therein; however, unlike interviews, the informant is not taken out of his or her daily environment. The agenda of the conversation arises out of, is explored in, and is understood through the processes of everyday life. Interviews, whether structured or unstructured, are in a sense marginal to daily life. Whether they take place in another location from daily life or not, it is made clear to the informant that this is now a formal interview addressing a particular topic. It has clear boundaries of beginning and end, often signalled by the turning on and off of the recorder. In contrast, an ethnographic conversation is a casual conversation between the ethnographer and the informant in much the same way as humans have casual conversations with each other all the time in daily life. It can start as chit-chat and small talk about nothing in particular, and then turn into being more topical, addressing something going on at the moment of conversation or having taken place previously. But it happens as a natural part of the daily life studied rather than as a disruptive special phenomenon set apart in either space or time and therefore marginalised to the normal enfolded of life.

Secondly, even during unstructured interviews, probes are often used to keep the informant staying on the general topic and not go completely off topic for too long. In contrast, in ethnographic conversation probes are not necessary as focus on the topic comes naturally from the setting and situational context; they are also not desirable as this would steer the conversation and so it would no longer be naturally springing from the everyday life, but controlled to a much larger degree by the researcher. A third difference is that in interviews the situation and topic are both predefined, there is a reason for setting up the interview. In ethnographic conversations, the situation arises spontaneously out of the context and the topic is improvised as necessary for furthering the researcher's understanding. In other words, there is no pre-defined topic, it is determined by the reality studied and not by the researcher. On one hand, interviews have shock value by putting the informants in the spotlight and asking them to elaborate on a certain topic. This may force them to think carefully about the topic and their answers, and thereby the researcher can perhaps get more ample answers. On the other hand, the ethnographic interview explores topics without disconnecting them from the setting in which they occur. They are not clearly marked as "answer time" and therefore do not force informants to think carefully about a topic. This is exactly

one of the important points of the ethnographic interview. They are a quite suitable method for investigating the level of thought and how conscious of a process or assumption informants really are.

There are no clear dividing lines between ethnographic conversations and unstructured interviews besides the fact that the informant is not removed from the context of daily life during ethnographic interviews and that they are not pre-planned; but there are also not always clear dividing lines between unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews. Nevertheless, ethnographic interviews are a suitable supplement to participant observation as they allow the researcher to explore certain fractures in his or her understanding and test findings further than mere participant observation. Ethnographic conversation is also a good supplement to interviews as it allows a phenomenon to be further investigated as it happens and in the context in which it happens.

### **Data analysis**

Having thus gathered empirical findings, they must now be analysed. In the words of Bernard, “qualitative analysis – in fact, all analysis, is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain the existence of those patterns” (Bernard 1988: 319). In other words, analysis consists of adding adjectives to findings and ordering them according to these adjectives until patterns and categories appear, against which new findings can be tested to confirm, modify or reject these categories, all with the purpose of identifying underlying themes. While this may seem like a straight forward and simple step-by-step process in most cases of qualitative social research, this is not so in the case of anthropology. In ethnographic fieldwork, analysis of the field starts even before the researchers enters into it and virtually never ends. Becker has pointed out that in participant observation, the analysis is *sequential* with “analysis being made while the researcher is still gathering his data”; however a final comprehensive analysis may only be possible after completion of the field work (1958: 653, see the section on evidence below for a short discussion of his sequential model).

This means that in ethnography, analysis is simultaneous with the data collection; it is *cyclical*. This is perhaps best expressed in James Spradley’s model of the ethnographic research cycle (1980: 29). Whereas most social science research follows the linear pattern outlined above, according to this model ethnography follows a cyclical pattern which goes through certain stages.

The beginning stage is selecting an ethnographic project which includes considerations of scope and mode of enquiry, of which there are three according to Hymes (1978); a comprehensive which aims to describe an entire way of life, a topic-oriented which is focused on particular aspects of life, and a hypothesis-oriented in which certain hypotheses influence the selection. Having made a selection, the research cycle can now begin. The first stage is asking ethnographic questions which can be either descriptive, structural or contrast questions. Here, again, ethnography differs from other social research. Other approaches tend to view questions and answers as separate, and the researcher can therefore come from outside the reality studied, ask a set of questions and make observations, and then repeat the process. In ethnography, the duality of participant observation means such separation is not possible; every observation implies a choice of what is observed and noted down to the point where “the question-answer sequence is a single element [...]. In doing participant observation for ethnographic purposes, as far as possible, *both questions and answers must be discovered in the social situation being studied*” (Spradley 1980: 32, his italics). The second stage in the research cycle is collecting ethnographic data via progressively narrowing questions starting with descriptive observations, over focused observations, to selective observations. The third stage is making an ethnographic record by the use of field notes, pictures, documents, and so on. The fourth stage is analysing ethnographic data, which is done already after the first data are gathered and involves identifying the question-answer elements mentioned above. This forms the basis of further enquiry as new questions are identified, and so the first stage of asking ethnographic questions starts again; this cycle is then repeated until the fieldwork ends (although it could in principle go on *ad infinitum* as ethnography involves open-ended enquiry). The final stage of the cycle is writing an ethnography, a process which can in itself lead to new questions and an intensive analysis as well as deliberations on conceptualisation, reflexivity, ethics and evidence (see the section on research presentation below). This cyclical approach means that it is quite limited what the researcher can plan in advance; the simultaneous process of data collection and analysis depends on the situations studied.

An important consideration in this analytical approach is that of validity. The fact that it is a subjective or intersubjective approach does not mean that anyone can claim anything. The researcher must look for consistency but also inconsistency in the field as well as in his or her own findings, these must be checked against other statements and observations and, if available, any “external evidence” such as documents or statements from informants not directly involved with the field studied, and the researcher must test explanations and conclusions against any comments

informants make to them. It is important to note that informants may disagree with the findings and conclusions made, which does not necessarily mean that the researcher is wrong. Often an informant is limited to the perspectives of their own position and does not have an overview of the field, or the informant could even have a strong interest in arguing for a certain agenda or perspective. In such situations, the advantages of participant observation become clear; the combination of the emic perspective of the insider-participant and the etic perspective of the outsider-observer allows the researcher to go beyond what Bernard has termed “folk analysis” (1988: 320), a type of empirical finding towards which the researcher should be critical but also open minded (see below for a discussion of the synergies of these two perspectives). In the analysis, there is also the vital, but for ethnographers somewhat problematic question of evidence; this will be discussed in detail in the section on research presentation.

In the articles, the cyclical approach outlined above was used. The selection of the ethnographic project was topic-oriented (Hymes 1978) as it was focused on the processes of transferring ideas for innovation from users to frontline employees during service encounters. The simultaneous data collection and analysis was context-dependent both in the sense that further questions depended on which findings the field yielded, and in the sense that phenomena were seen in a contextualised way as part of the field from which they drew their meaning. As the fieldwork progressed, the research cycle moved from being purely descriptive to looking for patterns and eventually becoming a search for basic underlying assumptions. Records were primarily made in the form of field notes and (in the case of interviews) tape recordings transcribed by the researcher, but other records such as maps and figures created by the informants were also part of the records. As the data collecting narrowed, specific findings were selected for further enquiry and underlying patterns were identified which were then explored. Supplementary to this simultaneous data collection and analysis, there was a final analysis after the fieldwork has ended. This took place as part of the write-up process and findings during earlier stages of the fieldwork were then reviewed in the light of subsequent findings and conclusions. This was a comprehensive analysis which was only possible at the end of the process. In some cases it was somewhat structured as categories had formed during the fieldwork and the findings were then coded as belonging to these categories and in this way the categories were elaborated and the data structured; in other cases, however, this was a less structured process which instead loosely followed and made revisions to the conclusions made in the field. This is an important step as, in the words of Howard Becker, “The amount and kind of provisional analysis carried on is limited by the exigencies of the field work situation, so

that final comprehensive analyses may not be possible until the field work is completed” (Becker 1958: 653). Finally, a third layer of analysis was used as existing relevant theory on the phenomena studied and the findings made was included to analyse and compare findings. This three-layer model must really be supplemented with a fourth element, which is an important supplement to the analysis: Interpretation of the data by the researcher is necessarily part and parcel of such a subjective data collection and analysis model. The interpretation aspects are described in more detail in the section on building theory below.

## **Research Presentation**

The final phase of doing research is communicating the findings and conclusions. This is usually done by writing it up in some form, in this case in the form of three articles. Writing up an ethnography can be done using different writing styles. John Van Maanen has divided these into three types. The first is the realist tale in which “a single author typically narrates the realist tale in a dispassionate, third-person voice” (1988: 45). The second kind is the confessionalist tale which “contrasts sharply in a number of ways to the realist tale. The distinguishing characteristics of confessional tales are their highly personalized styles and their self-absorbed mandates” (1988: 73). And the third kind is the impressionist tale inspired by impressionist painters whose work is “figurative, although it conveys a highly personalized perspective. What the painter sees, given an apparent position in time and space, is what the viewer sees” (1988: 101). Often social science – and, certainly, business literature – is of the first kind. The approach taken in the three articles to follow is a combination of a realist tale trying to convey findings in a dispassionate voice, and an impressionist tale conveying a personalised perspective of a particular position; they are perhaps more realist in form and more impressionist in nature (as explained above in the section on data collection and analysis).

During the writing-up process of the articles, and the ensuing presentation of the research, some new theory was built. When working with methods that involve the researcher to such an extent as ethnographic fieldwork does, an important factor in this process is reflexivity by which is meant that since the researcher has been placed in the landscape when the data was gathered, this must be cause for careful deliberation both during the fieldwork and as the findings



are presented. Another important factor which can cause problems if not given special consideration is that of evidence for findings. It is to these three aspects of presentation that we now turn.

### **Building Theory**

The processing of the raw data often consists of several elements. In the case of participant observation as a data collection method, the processing often includes at least two elements. These are the analysis as described above, and a further interpretation by the researcher. In addition, the process can also include or result in the formation of new concepts or redefinition of existing ones.

### Analysis

Unlike above, in this process we are concerned with the theory-building aspects of the analysis more than the processing of empirical findings by trying to make sense of them, although the two are of course interlinked. More specifically this pertains to the third layer of analysis described above. This is done by using existing theories in the field and comparing the empirical findings with these. This can result in new theory which means either elaboration of, or changes to, the existing theories, but applying existing theory to the data can also change the findings as a new comprehension of them is obtained. In other words, either the theories can be confirmed and elaborated or the data can contradict the theory in which case the theory may need some adjustment. Likewise, the findings themselves will gain new or further meaning when compared to and elaborated by the theory. Working in an inductive manner as ethnographic fieldwork implies, means that this application of theory is only done after the data has been collected.

### Interpretation

A second element of data processing, which is supplemental to analysis, is the *interpretation*. As the researcher uses his or her intuitive knowledge gained in the field to make

sense of the data, personal interpretation based on this intuition is a vital part of the simultaneous and post-fieldwork analysis described above. But interpretation is by no means merely a statement of personal opinion. Rather, it is a manoeuvre of reorientation or rethinking which we take to be a two step process. The first step is to *defamiliarise* the seemingly banal everyday life data by distancing ourselves from the taken-for-granted level and questioning it critically (Thomas 1993: 43). Thereby the mundane is reframed into something extraordinary and new by a process of looking for the nonliteral meanings of statements and observations. The second step is then to revise and *refamiliarise* the data into this new frame of understanding. This process was repeated during both case studies in a continuous cycle in the same way as the ethnographic research cycle described above. Both these steps are done by the researcher according to his or her perception of the data and context studied during the fieldwork. Perhaps this is the feature which distinguishes ethnography the most and sets it apart from other methods of qualitative social enquiry; the researcher strives towards gaining a cultural intuition in and of the field. It can never be the same as that of the informants, but nevertheless such endeavour is a hallmark of the methodology. This, however, also means that the interpretation is made from the personal and cultural viewpoint of the researcher and therefore is not objective. In fact, to be perfectly true, ethnography “is about how one culture is portrayed in terms of another” (Van Maanen 1988: ix). Informants are then confronted with the interpretations made during the fieldwork and academic colleagues have the opportunity to comment on interpretations made after the end of the fieldwork. Therefore the interpretation is intersubjective (as indeed all conclusions upon which an academic community generally agree are – until the next paradigm shift or breakthrough in understanding of that which is studied, whether social relations or the nature of the universe).

### Conceptualisation

There is a third element of theory building which is included in the articles to follow (although this element is far from always part of ethnographic research). This element is the *conceptualising process*. As described above, interesting and important topics are identified, and these are investigated empirically in the field. And the analysis of the findings by applying existing theory on the topics to them can entail further theory building. As a result, this can form changes or make additions or elaborations to the existing theory. This process can lead to new editions of

existing concepts or new ones can be evolved. In other words, existing concepts can be *reconceptualised* or findings can be *conceptualised*. The result is not only a new understanding but also new tools which other researchers can apply to other contexts (and, in their turn, reconceptualise as fitting that context). This means that concepts must be of a general nature.

In the articles, several new concepts, such as a “space of living” in the case of the staff members of the café, were created to account for what was observed. Likewise, existing concepts were reconceptualised, such as the general human “reciprocity” of classic anthropology which was reconceptualised into a specific understanding of interchange processes during service encounters.

### **Self-reflexivity**

Another important factor in the research presentation, in addition to the theory building, is the reflexivity. As should be clear by now, the empirical findings have been both analysed and interpreted by the researcher, and therefore the researcher is present in and part of the field studied as well as the findings themselves, since the method used was participant observation. This means that the findings reflect the researcher as well as the researched. It is therefore necessary to reflect on certain matters in connection with the execution, analysis and presentation of the field work. These matters include the researcher’s own role in the field during research execution, a post-reflexivity during the last analysis and interpretation phase, and some ethical considerations concerning the informants during the write-up.

### **The Researcher’s Role In The Field**

The first and foremost aspect of reflexivity is the self-reflexivity of the researcher, also known simply as reflection. We agree with Thomas that “ethnographic researchers are active creators rather than passive recorders of narratives or events” (Thomas 1993: 46) since even passive observation involves choosing which data to include in observations. In participant observation, the researcher is far more involved as he or she is participating and therefore to an extent becomes part of that which is studied. There is a long scale of different researcher roles from adverse roles such as cynical or outright hostile, over more critical roles such as being disillusioned or maintaining a

role distance, as well as more sympathetic or actively engaging roles, to more involved roles such as becoming a natural part of the environment which is studied, or “going native” or even “going over to the other side” (Thomas 1993: 48). Each of these holds its own advantages and problems. For example one may lose more subtle or private nuances by maintaining a role distance, or, inversely, going native means becoming acculturated with the risk of losing certain scientific perspectives. Furthermore, none of these roles are neutral, they all involve a role which is part of the context which is studied and so, like the data obtained, they are subjective or at best intersubjective. Therefore the researcher must place him- or herself in the landscape so to speak, and critically reflect on how their presence, statements and behaviour influence those of others. This self-awareness, though not necessarily discussed at length in the final writings resulting from the fieldwork, nevertheless should be a vital part of the data processing in terms of analysis and (especially) interpretation.

In the café case, there was an outsider role readily available to the researcher, which was that of a user. It allowed the researcher to become a seemingly natural part of the environment, yet due to the critically analytical perspective necessary for academic empirical investigations, the role was a combination of active engagement and maintenance of role distance. In the case of the tour operator, no such role was available and the presence of the researcher therefore had more salience. This means that the researcher had a more disruptive role, but this also allowed for more active engagement, though not as a natural participant but as a researcher asking questions and seeking elaborations. The café role was more of an insider role, which gives an excellent first-hand experience of that role, but also limits the research perspectives to that particular position. The tour operator role was more of an outsider role, but this also allowed the researcher more manoeuvrability in terms of who to talk to and how much as well as which topics to address and to what extent elaboration could be sought. No doubt the informants were influenced to a much greater extent in the latter role than in the former.

### Post-reflexivity

A field worker may sometimes attempt to choose the role with which to approach reality before engaging in the field work. However, since reality has its own course of events, there is an extremely probable chance that the approach which the researcher has envisioned beforehand

is not that which is taking place when actually in the field for various research theoretical, methodological, personal and practical reasons. Perhaps the field does not allow for the role at all or the researcher does not fit the category of that role due to physical characteristics such as gender, age, skin colour, and so on. Therefore, in the fieldwork on which the following articles are built, no such specific approach was envisioned before entering into the field as this would largely be dependent on the field itself and the persons participating in it. This also means that the self-reflexivity often becomes a *post-reflexivity* taking place towards or after the end of the fieldwork. Which role did one end up having? Which approach was allowed and viable? What does that mean for the nature of the data collected? Some deliberations on this were made in the section on the researcher's role above.

Furthermore, a very close and friendly role might yield intimate data which can create ethical dilemmas in terms of what to reveal in the presentation of the data, and in which form. For example, how anonymised should statements and observations be? Due to the role distance maintenance, no friend role aspects were involved in the two cases. As for anonymisation, in the articles to follow no names have been mentioned, identification of informant is generally limited to gender and in some cases other markers such as age or length of work experience or employment.

### Ethical Considerations

As Jim Thomas points out, there are two basic questions to ask when concerned with self-reflexivity (1993: 47). The first concerns the researcher's stance in the field in terms of how *subjectivity*, such as values, ideology and research focus, is shaping the data collection and portrayal of the field. The second concerns the effect of the field work in terms of the *implications* of the findings, how they are presented, and what the consequences of the presentation are. For example, if field work is done among prisoners or mentally ill, there are likely some severe ethical considerations to take into account when presenting the statements and actions of these. As mentioned, during some fieldworks the researcher can also become quite close friends with some informants and what is stated to them in private may have been said in confidence. Repeating such things in research is then potentially problematic and demands a good intuition on whether things are confident or not by the researcher.

Returning to the two basic questions by Jim Thomas, these must be posed to the research done in the articles. That the research is (inter)subjective has been acknowledged throughout the project both in the research design, the fieldwork, the analysis and the research presentation. Likewise, many deliberations have been made on the implications of the presentation. Such implications are, however, difficult to control as future effects are to an extent unpredictable. In the case of the fieldwork at the café, this was done in a semi-public place and so all behaviour, whether directed at the general public or taking place within the staff social circle or “space of living”, was publically displayed. In the case of the tour operator and their client companies, everyone observed or interviewed was well aware of this and no attempts to hide the identity of the researcher or the nature of the work were made. Even so, certain informant statements presented in the articles may still be problematic, as for example statements by the café staff that asking the users for ideas was not constructive, or statements by employees at the tour operator that no feedback was generally given to ideas for innovation from the users. However, they were a central part of the findings and as such vital to the conclusions of the articles. Moreover, as such actions did take place and such statements did occur, they cannot and should not be ignored but must be presented. Even so, doing this risks portraying these informants as ignorant, disinterested, contrary or obstinate – none of which they were of course! They were simply stating things as how they saw them according to their position, experiences and general world view. But this is a risk which the researcher must take in order to bring forth the interesting and original information which the empirical field yields.

## **Evidence**

Having done deliberations on self-reflexivity, the presentation of the findings now provides the next challenge, one which has been especially problematic for researchers doing ethnographic fieldwork, namely that of the *evidence* of findings and conclusions. In the words of the sociologist Howard S. Becker, who was concerned with participant observation from a sociological perspective, having completed the data collecting phase “the researcher faces the problem of how to analyze it systematically and then to present his conclusions so as to convince other scientists of their validity. Participant observation (indeed, qualitative analysis generally) has not done well with this problem, and the full weight of evidence for conclusions and the processes

by which they were reached are usually not presented, so that the reader finds it difficult to make his own assessment of them and must rely on his faith in the researcher” (Becker 1958: 653). This is a problem which still persists to haunt most researchers using this method, and therefore some points on the evidence given in the findings presentation become necessary. In general, the scope and nature of the articles has not allowed for elaborate evidence in the form of large amounts of empirical material; nor has the article form allowed the “natural history of our conclusions” to appear (Becker 1985: 660). More specifically, we are concerned with how precise the evidence is or needs to be, the reliability or evidential value of the findings, and the ethnographic adequacy of the evidence and inferences. In addition we must also acknowledge the role of ethnographic intuition in making inferences. These points on accuracy, value, adequacy and intuition will now be addressed.

### Accuracy Of Evidence

When doing qualitative fieldwork, the interesting and important findings are rarely there in plain sight but must often be synthesised and inferred from a number of allusions, hints and signs in the findings. At times the researcher will be lucky and get responses or observations which clearly state the point which is explored, but such occurrences are rare, and even when they do occur such instances might not be representative (see the below section on evidential value). Often, then, conclusions must be inferred from a series of more vague signs and implications; and this is especially so when looking for patterns of underlying values, processes and assumptions of which the informants themselves are often unaware as they reside on an unconscious or instinctive level. Therefore, accuracy of evidence in this type of qualitative research functions differently than in quantitative research. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not rest on indisputable facts proving once and for all the conceptual category formed therefrom (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 23). Rather, it must rely on “observational and reporting rigor” as well as careful analysis, and on triangulation by using “different data sources and gathering techniques”, colleague comments on drafts, and self-reflexivity (Thomas 1993: 39).

In the articles of this project, the background stories of the organisations; the observations and statements collected through participant observation and ethnographic conversation; the interviews conducted; the comments which have been made on various drafts of the articles by colleagues; and the continuous self-reflexivity throughout the process have all served

as such triangulation. In short, the evidence for the conclusions of the articles might not always be found in a clear, direct and simple statement (though such instances do occur), but such accuracy is not necessary either. Instead conclusions often had to be inferred from a series of signs scattered throughout the findings. This does not make them less valid or prevalent, just deeper buried in the data. In other words, while the evidence may at times be less precise in form, the content and implications of the muddy evidence nevertheless exists as elicited.

### Evidential value

Another evidential factor is the value of the evidence, which has been addressed by for example Howard S. Becker. In his article “Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation” (Becker 1958) he has posed a four stage model for conducting data collection and analysis using participant observation. The first stage involves selection and definition of problems and concepts; the second is concerned with the frequency and distribution of phenomena; the third aims to integrate all findings into a model of the organisation as a social system; and the fourth stage addresses the final post-fieldwork analysis and presentation of results. This model was designed as an attempt to cope with the problems of the evidential value of findings and inferences when presenting the results of participant observation. Each stage involves analysis necessary for the next stage (see also the ethnographic research cycle above as outlined by Spradley 1980) and different criteria for assessing evidence, both leading to different kinds of conclusions in the four stages.

The model is clearly designed for sociological participant observation which means it differs from the anthropological approach taken in this project on several important points. Notably, it is quantitatively oriented in its efforts to measure frequency of phenomena, it aims to build social models and in this way create fixed schematics of reality, and it is a clear expression of the structural-functional traditions which were prevalent at the time in which it was written in “explaining particular social facts by explicit reference to their involvement in a complex of interconnected variables” (1958:657). In our qualitative approach we are less concerned with frequency measurements, variables, and the “involvement” or function of social facts in the overall social system (in fact the concept of a social *fact* is debatable when taking an intersubjective approach). And rather than building static models, we are concerned with fluid processes.



Nevertheless, Becker's model still holds great value as it outlines certain criteria of evidential value, which can also be applied to a more anthropologically oriented take on participant observation.

In the first stage of his model, problems and concepts are selected and defined according to what is interesting and relevant for the overall research problem. Furthermore, some phenomena are less observable, but can be related to more observable phenomena which can then be used as indicators of these, so such indicators are also identified during this stage. This stage involves three evidence tests. The first concerns the *credibility* of the informants and their statements about events. Even if inaccurate from an objective viewpoint, statements by informants still hold valuable information about personal perspectives. This was found to be true in the fieldwork presented in the articles; more than once did informants make statements which were either factually untrue or not based on actual knowledge. For example, several employees of the tour operator stated that the users felt very close to the tour operator, while employees at the travel agencies, when interviewed, expressed a felt distance to the tour operator. Nevertheless, such statements revealed a lot about personal perspectives and assumptions. The second evidence test addresses whether a statement is *volunteered* spontaneously (independently) or is *directed* by the researcher's questions or conversation. Volunteered statements might reflect the context and situation well, but contribute to the narrow focus of the research agenda to a lesser degree, and vice versa with directed statements. This test also links to (the saliency and impact of) the role of the researcher discussed above. During the fieldworks it was found that such a distinction is difficult to uphold in practice as many statements are part of an ethnographic conversation, interview, or observation of situations in which the researcher participates, and therefore these statements are both volunteered and directed to varying degrees. The theoretical separation of these two, however, still provides an important foundation for the self-reflexivity discussed above. The third test relates to the *observer-informant-group equation* which concerns the impact of the presence of others. When alone with the researcher, an informant might reveal things which he or she would not reveal in the presence of peers; however, the presence of others also provides an opportunity for interaction which the researcher can observe. In the words of Becker, "an alternative to judging one or the other of these situations as more reliable is to view each datum as valuable in itself" (1958:655). This was certainly found to be true during the fieldworks conducted, but the negative aspects of either must also be pointed out. When alone with the researcher, the conversation with an informant could sometimes take on a confessional nature revealing view points which otherwise might not have been revealed, but it could also take on the nature of a "sales speech" or polite face

or front to use the Goffmanian terms (1959, 1967). Inversely, while the behaviour and statements of an informant in the presence of many might be more naturalistic, these could also reflect a display of group norms rather than honest personal sentiments. For example, more than once during the fieldwork did interview situations happen where the informant went to great lengths to point out all the terrific features of the company in a rehearsed manner; and often there was clear agreement on certain matters between employees at meetings, while in more private settings they would express slight digression or even disagreement with the official discourse.

The second stage of Becker's model, the frequency and distribution of phenomena, is of less interest to an anthropological version of participant observation as it is quite quantitatively oriented. However, it does hold some relevant points. Importantly, as findings on which conclusions are based can be more or less widespread, a conclusion is not necessarily totally true or false but can be more or less likely. This depends on how widespread findings are, an assessment modified by such factors as whether all or only some informants have confirmed it, whether all or some were asked, if the answer was directed or volunteered (see above) and whether it was stated directly or inferred from observation. It also depends on how many kinds of evidence were found (for example interview responses, observations and statements in conversations), and complicating forms of evidence such as counter-evidence and para-evidence (which does not contradict or prove but rather adds more dimensions to the finding) must also be taken into account. During the fieldworks conducted, there was great variance in how often certain matters were spontaneously mentioned or voluntarily discussed, but this did not necessarily reflect how important they were to the informants. Therefore, frequency was only one of many factors which together made up the evidential value of findings. Furthermore, systematic statistics on frequency and distribution are not often produced in anthropological fieldwork due to the nature of it, specifically how the researcher must adapt to the interruptions and exigencies of the field (and in this manner it differs greatly from for example surveys).

The third stage of Becker's model involves constructing models of parts of the organisation which are then integrated into one generalised model. Such static maps go against the fluid and dynamic nature of anthropological fieldwork which is typically rather preoccupied with identifying, describing and explaining processes and underlying assumptions. However, like the model envisioned by Becker, the findings of the case studies conducted in this project did lead to "statements that some phenomenon is an "important" or "basic" element in the organization" (1958:

657). The professional attitudes of employees in the café case, and the patterns of interchange in the case of the tour operator, were examples of findings of such basic elements

The fourth stage, the post-fieldwork revision and analysis of findings, is important to anthropological participant observation and the evidence distilled from it (as outlined in the discussion of theory building analysis above). At this point, an overview and more holistic understanding of the field and specific findings can be achieved and the connections between phenomena (rather than the models to which Becker refers) can be rechecked. Earlier conclusions made when the researcher's conceptualisation of the problem and findings were different or less developed might need some revision in light of subsequent conclusions. And observations seemingly unimportant at the time they were made might now seem important. In the fieldwork conducted in this project, the meaning of findings was revised repeatedly as understanding of the field grew. Such revisions, though rarely portrayed in the presentation of the findings, are nevertheless testament to the increasing evidential value of the findings as the simultaneous data collection and analysis progresses. The evidential value of the findings of participant observation, then, depends on the credibility of the informants, under which circumstances statements and observations are made, how prevalent they are and how many different kinds of evidence was found, as well as how the meaning of the findings has been revised according to subsequent understandings and conclusions by the researcher. In the words of Becker himself: "the technique consists of something more than merely immersing oneself in data and "having insights"" (1958: 660). It is a thorough approach, which nevertheless is difficult to portray in the final research presentation.

### Ethnographic Adequacy

Having discussed the accuracy and value of evidence, we now turn to the issue of ethnographic adequacy which reflects ethnography as a process and perspective. There are certain demands and criteria which must be applied to ethnographic evidence. According to Agar, the ethnographic processes begins with a breakdown which "occurs when there is a problem in understanding; expectations are violated; something dopes not make sense" (1983: 32). These breakdowns can either happen naturally or be created analytically, and the resolution is to construct new knowledge by inferences, which are then integrated into schemas, so "the goal of resolution is

coherence, the understanding of the act that initially elicited the breakdown” (1983: 33). This, then is the ethnographic process, a series of breakdowns, resolutions and resulting coherence. The emphasis on inferences integrated into larger order schemas resonates Becker’s models which are integrated into a generalised model (1958, see above). So, according to Agar, ethnography consists of modification to such schemas, and the discussion of evidence centres around the motivation and choice of these modifications. As with Becker’s model, Agar’s model is of a generalised nature and progresses in a specific way, which may not necessarily fit any empirical context. However, it provides some useful tools to determinate the ethnographic adequacy of evidence.

The first is the concept of strips which Agar defines as “any bounded phenomenon against which ethnographers test their understanding” (1983: 33). In other words, it is a piece of empirical evidence such as an observation or a statement. There are different important dimensions which apply to strips. The first is whether a strip is produced under the researcher’s control or under the informants’ control; ethnography tends to emphasise the latter. This dimension corresponds to Becker’s second evidence test in the first stage, the one concerning whether a statement is volunteered or directed (1958). Another dimension of strips is how permanently they are recorded, whether an ethnographer is participating in activities without recording them “just to get a feel of things” or whether these are graphically recorded through photography and filming (Agar 1983:34). A third dimension is the level of strips, level 1 being routines that are part of everyday life, level 2 being conversation of these events, level 3 being conversation about these conversations and so on; though in practice an ethnographer rarely goes beyond level 3.

To sum up, ethnography adequacy is characterised by an emphasis on informant controlled strips, allowing unrecorded strips to still form part of analysis, and a focus on level 1 strips, though the other levels can be included too. In the fieldwork conducted for this study, the observations and statements made were informant controlled during participant observation, although they were researcher controlled to an extent during ethnographic conversation and interviews. The unstructured nature of the interviews allowed ample amounts of informant control and intentionally limited the researcher control. No photographs or filming was done; however, field notes were taken during participant observation and tape recorders were used during interviews. A large part of the findings were level 1 strips, although the elaborations made during for example ethnographic conversation constitute level 2 strips. An example of level 3 strips could be statements made during ethnographic conversation being referred to during interviews; however, there were few (if any) examples of such incidents.

The second tool of ethnographic adequacy concerns which types of resolutions that are ethnographically acceptable as evidence. These must be informant-based and contextualised. Agar advocates a general attitude of “anticoherence”, implying a critical stance towards comprehension which includes testing preliminary conclusions against subsequent findings (1983: 37). Subdividing strips into segments, three coherence questions can be asked. The first addresses the coherence of two adjacent segments within a strip, why they follow each other. The second pertains to overall strip coherence, how a segment is related to the schemas previously constructed to understand the strip. The third focuses on thematic coherence, how a segment might be related to other segments in other strips through a common theme. A segment must then be tested against these three (segmental coherence, strip coherence and thematic coherence) and it may be coherent in one way but not another, or not coherent at all. These coherence questions are the tools with which can be applied to the different levels of strips in order to analytically generate a breakdown. Inferences then have to be added, deleted or rearranged until the coherence questions no longer cause a breakdown. This creates a modification to the schema and “limits the possible resolutions that are ethnographically adequate” (1983: 41). In the fieldwork conducted in this study, these coherence questions were not applied systematically, but the general principles behind them were. Any inference made in the field was constantly added, elaborated, changed, adjusted, or discarded throughout and after the fieldwork both as their validity was tested against other findings and in the search for underlying patterns. Here, we use the word pattern corresponding to what Agar calls schemas.

The third tool is the comprehension display. The primary utility of a schema (or pattern) is that “it suggests expectations about what else is going on [...] “comprehending” additional strips” (1983: 42). Critical of the classic comprehension test consisting of being able to follow the cultural rules of informants (something with which we must strongly agree), Agar suggests two other ways of validating schema comprehension. The first is to apply it to the everyday life studied by naming it as activities take place and see whether an informant agrees or disagrees. This application test was used frequently during both case studies; as the researcher found patterns and made sense of events, such preliminary conclusions were then mentioned as relevant events took place and the informants’ reactions and comments were then carefully taken into account (which does not mean that disagreement necessarily renders the conclusion wrong, the informant could have other reasons for disagreeing which then had to be discerned). The second test, according to Agar, is the inference test. A schema provides many inferences, and any inference

can then be a source of questions to test this schema. Importantly, if a strip does not follow the schema this does not necessarily mean that the schema must be adjusted, it could also be that informants are puzzled as well, something has been overlooked, the wrong schema has been applied, or of course it could be a breakdown in which case coherence questions must then be asked. In the fieldwork conducted for this study, the patterns found (or schemas to use Agar's terminology) were regularly tested by this inference test. As various possible patterns were beginning to build up in the researcher's mind, it was important to discover which were the correct one to account for events, and the most frequently applied ones would then seem to be the most relevant. Not only did this determine which patterns were chosen to be explored and further elaborate these patterns, the inference test also helped the researcher understand the observations and statements made. For example, more than once had aspects of a situation been overlooked meaning that the wrong pattern was applied, and a combination of the application and inference tests allowed for correction and the right pattern to be applied.

These are the criteria rendering evidence ethnographically adequate according to Agar; the control, recording and level dimensions of strips; the anticoherence attitude involving questions on segmental coherence, strip coherence and thematic coherence; and the comprehension display consisting of application tests and inference tests. As these tests are applied, the informants can have a number of reactions which may or may not show a right or wrong understanding of the underlying pattern by the researcher. The agreement or disagreement of an informant that this is indeed the relevant pattern can show just as much about the personality and position of the informant as about the situation studied, all of which are relevant and valid ethnographic data. Furthermore, internal disagreement between informants can also happen. This happened frequently during the fieldwork conducted, for example one staff member at the café could be open to the possibility of asking users for ideas but quite unsure of how such a thing would be done, whereas others would outright reject this. In such situations of disagreement, the researcher must rely on another element, which will now be discussed.

### Ethnographic intuition

One more factor of evidential analysis must be mentioned. This is one which at times makes elucidation of evidence difficult, but also one which is used more often than what most

anthropologists care to admit. We will here term it ethnographic intuition. As the researcher spends time in the field, he or she is immersed in the cultural context which is studied and as such gains what Agar referred to above as “a feel of things” (1983: 34). This means that the observant researcher starts to understand certain phenomena, statements and connections on an intuitive level and therefore can contextualise them immediately and has a good general idea of their meaning in this context. This is not necessarily a result of unreflection but rather of pre-reflection as certain phenomena, patterns and connections have already been identified and analysed during the fieldwork and this knowledge serves as basis for the immediate contextualisation of newly encountered statements and behaviour. As such, this factor belongs in the same category as general logic and common sense, but to the researcher it is a newly required such, which springs from and follows the inherent logic of the field. However, it often makes clear display of evidence in the presentation difficult, and therefore this has to be constructed afterwards rather than flowing from the natural history of the discovery or realisation. It cannot always be relied on alone as it sometimes needs further support from one of the above mentioned evidence factors. Nevertheless, it plays a significant role in the field analysis and therefore also as evidence factor, so it must be mentioned as the various evidential factors are discussed.

Either way, accuracy of evidence, the principles of evidential value outlined by Becker (1958), ethnographic adequacy (Agar 1983) and ethnographic intuition help the researcher determine which resolutions or conclusions are competing and which are complementary – and, in the former case, which is the most relevant. Importantly, ethnography is still left with a problem. Though evidence may be derived in a satisfactory manner, explaining and presenting the “natural history” of conclusions in the research presentation is near impossible, especially when in the form of articles. As Agar expresses it, comprehension display is “noted to show a key frustration in developing ethnographic methods. Much evidence is accumulated in unscheduled, informal ways in the manner described above. Such evidence is powerful and appropriate to the goals of the research, but difficult to document” (1983: 44-45). More specifically concerning the research presentation, he writes that “it is not clear what the discussion of evidence implies for the preparation of an ethnographic report [...] reports may often be best presented in informal prose that relies more on literary than on scientific techniques. The issue is an interesting but unsolved one” (1983: 47).

## **Discussion**

Having addressed the research design, execution and presentation, we end with a retrospective discussion of the overall methodology in general. What can this methodology do? What can it not do? What have the results been in this specific instance of research? First of all, it is an empirical method; while theory is included in both the design and analysis, it is primarily used for bringing forth empirical findings. Also, in the previous discussions it has been shown how the methodology and the results it produces are qualitative. This means it can provide descriptive and critical exploration of empirical phenomena, but not for example statistics. Another important point is that it is intensive, which means that it is well suited for studying a limited scope of empirical material thoroughly; however this can be at the expense of certain overviews and inclusion of external factors – for example the financial performance of the organisations studied, or their social impact on society in general, was not taken into consideration. In the other hand, it can provide in in-depth understanding of the field, the informants, and the phenomena observed.

One of the most crucial features of the methodology is that it is process-oriented. As the study is made over a period of time, it takes on a durative nature which is well suited for capturing the processual aspects of the field; and as it is critically investigative it can also discern the underlying processes which have produced the phenomena observed – in fact, this is one of the most important functions of this methodology. Linked to the intensive nature of the methodology is another aspect, its attention to details. What may seem like banal everyday details of the field to other researchers using different approaches to the field and different methods of analysis is valuable information when using this method, and as subsequent comprehension and conclusions change the researcher's views and foci, it is far from always possible to determine in a situation what will be an important observation later on. To the ethnographer, the devil is truly in the detail.

But these detailed observations hold no meaning if taken out of context. They must be noted and analysed in a contextualised form, set in relation to the frame in which they occur. The decontextualised comparing of empirical phenomena torn from their context which have motivated their existence is too often seen in other strands of social and especially in business research. This point is closely linked to another, which is that the observations are context-dependent. Only in its context can the meaning which an act or statement has be discerned. The problem with decontextualised comparisons is not only that the motivation of the phenomena is absent, but also that the meaning which they hold to those involved is lacking. This is why this methodology



emphasises constantly asking informant for their opinions and feelings on what is observed to elicit the meaning which it holds. Using this method, then, the researcher strives to find the basics of the field so to speak, the underlying process which create a phenomenon and the underlying assumptions and views of the informants, of which they are sometimes not even aware themselves. Finally the methodology of participant observation entails a fruitful tension, which is discussed below. To summarise, this method is empirical, qualitative, intensive, in-depth, processual, relatively long-term, investigative, detail-oriented, contextualised, context-dependent, focusing on the basic, searching for underlying assumptions, and makes constructive use of the inside versus outside perspectives.

So what kind of basic comprehension of the field does one get with an anthropological perspective? The comprehension strives be both comprehensive, and to encompass the deep taken-for-granted level which is often quite difficult to access and discern. Here the anthropologist finds the basic and foundational, the often un-reflected or un-conscious, and the seemingly banal but actually quite important. Unlike much business literature, this is not (and is not intended to be) particularly instrumental; writing in order to tell informants, researchers or others (such as employees in similar positions as the informants) what to do or how to do it goes against the nature of the anthropological perspective, which aims to describe reality in the most pristine form possible (though, much to our dismay, it is heavily influenced by our own presence in both the field, the analysis and the interpretations). Instead, findings are presented which others are free to draw their own conclusions and plans-of-action from. This, however, is not the aim or purpose of the anthropologist. Rather, the anthropologist aims to be descriptive. Here one must remark that there are two kinds of description which is often found in social research; the “naked” factual objective kind often found in sociology, and the detailed subjective kind – of which anthropology is the latter. As the anthropologist searches for underlying assumptions and the basics, he or she is explorative in addition to being descriptive. The research process of this project, and the resulting articles, reflect these descriptive and explorative aspects, but they also include analytical and interpretive aspects both during the fieldwork and in the write-up process, as discussed above. To a lesser extent, the articles are also explanatory as the causal processes leading to the findings are explored. This combination of descriptive, explorative, analytical and explanatory aspects results in the basic comprehension, which one gets when taking an anthropological perspective.

Participant observation is a core (but far from the only) method of this methodology. It may seem like a contradiction to be both a participant and an observer, an insider and an outsider,

and it is. This, however, is not a problem to the ethnographer, but in fact quite the opposite. As the researcher oscillates between the two perspectives, this creates a fruitful synergy which is essential to the method of study. One starts out as an outsider who knows next to nothing about the field, but quickly turns into an insider who has read about the field and the phenomena which are to be studied. As the field study commences, however, the researcher again finds him- or herself to be an outsider as he or she enters the field. As the fieldwork progresses and the researcher is assigned a role, he or she again becomes an insider who becomes familiar with the field. All too soon, however, one quickly turns into an outsider who is ignorant of certain areas of the field, which necessitates further enquiry in the form of ethnographic conversations and perhaps even formal interviews. Such interviews consist of asking relevant and meaningful questions, which means that one is yet again an insider who knows about these areas and topics which are to be explored in further detail. As mentioned above, a disadvantage of having a role or position in the field is that one is limited to exactly this, so after a while it becomes necessary to again become an outsider who can step back from the field and see the greater picture (or at least more of it than possible from the position). As this oscillation continues, the researcher begins to suspect or even gauge the taken-for-granted assumptions. In the shape of an insider, the researcher is then writing it up, but in the form of an outsider the researcher is conceptualising findings into more general terms. This process continues as one takes on the role of an insider in explaining, elaborating and justifying such categories to colleagues, and so this process of oscillation or constant combination of the two perspectives continues. This is the method by which the ethnographer can start out with a broad field, with the analytical focus narrowed as the study progresses, this leading to more limited and precise areas of study (Spradley 1980, Thomas 1993: 42).

### **Limitations**

The methodology, as discussed above, is a fruitful one, but there are some limitations (besides the ones already mentioned). For example, despite the processually oriented method and perspective, the research presentation cannot reflect this. This paradox parallels what in the field of quantum mechanics has been called *Heisenberg's uncertainty principle*. According to this principle, one cannot measure both the position and the motion of a particle. Describing how the physicist Niels Bohr attempted to respond to "Einstein, who repeatedly tried to think out methods of

measurement by means of which position and motion could be measured simultaneously and accurately”, Born concludes that “it is seen that no arrangement is possible that will fulfil both requirements simultaneously” (Born 1954: 265-266). So it is with social science which takes the processes of social life as its subject matter. The more accurately and detailed a picture is painted of a momentary situation in the research presentation (position), the less accurately it can also depict the processes and layers of meaning unfolding through time (motion). Only when the still picture is given up can the processes through time be conveyed – but at the cost of accuracy in the description and analysis as a point in time. It is impossible to have both a precise situation and ongoing processes; one must always be given up for the other. Ethnography, then, is a middle ground in which the need for situational description and the struggle to convey the processes taking place must battle it out in the final presentation, one always at the expense of the other.

Another limitation, which has already been discussed, is that the findings and conclusions are a result of the researcher’s own inferences and interpretations. Such conclusions are not necessarily objectively correct – or incorrect – but then, the method is not objective but intersubjective. The matter is further complicated by the presentation of the findings to an audience. The impression which a reader will gain from reading the articles is the result of a meeting between three cultures: that of the informants, that of the researcher and that of the reader. This cannot be anything but intersubjective. Even so, as has been discussed, there are methods and criteria to test whether analysis and interpretation of the material is satisfactory. Perhaps the most important of these is: Did this further the understanding of the problems? In other words, was the reader enlightened with new knowledge?

Turning to the limitations of the specific implementation of methodology in this project in terms of the design, execution and presentation of research, there are some points which must be mentioned. Despite relying on participant observation it cannot be said to be a classic ethnographic study involving a longitudinal fieldwork lasting half a year or a year during which the researcher is constantly immersed in and taking part a social context. Instead this fieldwork consisted of a series of visits to this social context lasting only a few hours each. There is, however, some debate within the ethnographic field as to the extent of length of study required (Marcus 2007a, 2007b, Okely 2007a, 2007b). This means that the findings in this project do perhaps not reflect as deep an understanding as in more longitudinal fieldworks. For example there could be additional factors not taken into account, but as the time was limited, such factors were beyond the scope of this project to discover. Also, there might be more aspects to or meanings of the findings

made, but again, it has not been within the scope of this project to explore. Likewise, the particular role positions of the researcher in the field will have limited the findings available. The fact that the “picture” is incomplete means that other researchers with other agendas would have made different findings. This does not, however, mean that the findings are not valid. In the words of Michael Agar: “The best stance for ethnography is the old metaphor of the blind men and the elephant. Each gets a sense of part of the animal. It would be a mistake to insist that only one of them can be correct” (Agar 1983: 47).

There is a further limitation in terms of scope, or rather access to the field. In the café case, the scope of access did not permit that guests at the café were interviewed, partly because this was not agreed with the management, and partly because this would interrupt the natural social life unfolding and risk irritate some guests. Even though some staff members of the café were interviewed, all staff members were not subjected to this process. The interviews with the staff members were not done by the researcher writing the articles, but by the two other researchers involved in the case study. The subsequent analysis, however, was done by the author of the articles. In the case of the tour operator, not all employees were engaged in ethnographic conversation either due to not being present in the offices most of the time or due to being busy. There were also certain days at which access to the field was prohibited by the manager for various reasons. Thus, both case studies involved a limitation of access to the field. These are the conditions with which the researcher must work when doing fieldwork in companies to which the management has granted the researcher access.

Similar to the difference between reality and the theory which is an abstract ideal or prototype of reality, so there is a difference between the method models described by for example Howard Becker (1958) and Michael Agar (1983) and the practical implementation of data collection and analysis. The approach taken in the fieldwork of this project was not rigidly systematic in the way described by Becker or Agar; neither model was followed stringently. This was both due to the exigencies of the fieldwork and the relatively short duration compared to the type of fieldwork for which the models were designed. However, the general principles of the models were applied. In the case of Becker (1958), these include the evidence tests, consideration of general prevalence and multiple kinds of evidence, a search for basic elements, and a later revision of inferences and conclusions in the light of new and more holistic understandings; and in the case of Agar (1983) the coherence tests as well as the application and inference tests as described above.

Some final words on the normative contribution of method. Compared to much innovation and service literature (and indeed much business literature in general), the research conducted and presented in the project is different in that it is primarily concerned with the social aspects. This means that the focus is on human relations rather than mere business optimisation. We believe this to be a fitting focus because service really is about human relations, how one person relates to, services or gets serviced by another. What is presented in this study, then, is a different and perhaps larger perspective. What is described is how people orientate in their landscape or environment, how they think and behave, and the obstacles (as well as incentives) this creates for the possibility of transferring ideas for innovation from the users to the frontline service employees during service encounters. So really, this study is about their normative orientation in the service relations. What takes place in the service encounter? And how do the informants perceive and make sense of this? It is to these grand questions we will turn in the three articles.

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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ARTICLE 1**

# **RECIPROCITY IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS**





# Reciprocity in Service Encounters

## **- A Precondition for Innovation**

### Introduction

Services make up the bulk of the economy in most Western countries. Also, many thousands of people work in, or depend on, services every day. The effects of service therefore have both large economic and great social and personal consequences for both providers, users and society. It is therefore important to understand how services function and can be improved. As services are performed they often involve a relation between the provider and the users. This relation is created by the interaction and communication between these, predominantly during the service encounters of which a service delivery consists. Encounters are an important part of a service as this is when the service is performed and the value offering is turned into actual value in cooperation between the user and the provider. In order to understand services and service relations, it is therefore important to study these encounters to identify and understand what happens during them. This includes the question of how users and providers relate through service encounters. The parties engage in a series of interchanges. Apart from the obvious swapping of money for a service, they can also consist of other elements such as objects, actions, words, gestures and signals. The service encounter is when interchange takes place and thereby the service is actualised.

Furthermore, in the current economic crisis, there is increased pressure to innovate in services as conditions get tougher for service provision. Not only does this provide a challenge for the continued existence of service providers, but those which do persevere are faced with tough competition. In addition, general standards and the specific expectations of service users seem to be ever higher. It is therefore vital that service organisations are able to change in order to be able to meet the shifting demands of the market and society at large. In other words, to stay in the game they must innovate. Though decisions are usually made at a managerial level, the direction of

innovation and the concrete ideas should ideally be sourced from those for whom the service is performed – the users. One option is to attempt to source these ideas during the service encounters. These occasions are not only a vital point of contact between user and provider but also when the service is delivered, or in a sense becomes real, and therefore this is an ideal situation in which to ask the users for ideas for innovation on the specific service that is being performed.

But then the users must be motivated to participate in such an endeavour. This motivation should then happen through the service relations and specifically through the interchanges that create these relations. These interchanges have been conceptualised as exchange and relationships in the service marketing literature. In addition, economic anthropology has dealt with this same topic. However, within this strand of literature the interchanges have been conceptualised as reciprocity, which equals the marketing concepts of exchange and relationships with an added dimension, which is the obligation to reciprocate, to return the favour so to speak. All these concepts will be useful in an analysis of the interchanges taking place. In general, then, the service product and delivery are important for a service to be of good quality; but when it comes to service innovation, one must go beyond this formal level and include all the kinds of reciprocity taking place during the service encounters. In other words, service processes do not only consist of the professional level of exchanging money for a service, they also consist of social relations in a broad sense, and this may have important consequences for sourcing ideas for innovations during the encounters. Therefore we pose the following question: During service encounters, which kinds of reciprocity take place and how do they affect whether ideas for innovation are stated by the users?

In this article, reciprocity is taken to be a combination of the concrete interchanges taking place and the socio-cultural and ethical aspects relating to these interchanges, notably the obligation to give something in return when receiving something and the expectations that the counterpart will live up to this obligation when someone is giving something. The processes of reciprocity are where the relationship is created, maintained and changed. Although the ultimate aim of the analysis is how to improve user-based innovation in services, we are here not primarily concerned with the innovations themselves or even the actual statements of ideas for innovation, but rather the preconditions for users stating such ideas. So we are concerned with the reciprocity taking place in service encounters between users and providers, which kinds of reciprocity there are, what they mean to those engaged in these processes, and how they affect users stating ideas for innovation during these encounters.

The structure of the article will be as follows. After this introduction there will be a theory section. It will first briefly outline some theory on services and innovation, then it will describe and critically discuss the service marketing concepts of exchange and relationships and the anthropological concept of reciprocity, ending with a discussion of different kinds of reciprocity and how the different concepts relate to each other. Then a method section will follow, outlining the methods used in collecting and analysing the empirical data. This is followed by the analytical sections which will first analyse two patterns of reciprocity as found in the case, then identify, define and analyse the three kinds of reciprocity found, and lastly two further themes of reciprocity will be analysed, which are the conscious use of reciprocity by the employees at Travel Tours and how the different kinds of reciprocity are combined. A final analytical section on the consequences of this for innovation, including the importance of input from – and feedback to – users and how this process can fail, will then follow. Then a discussion of the empirical results and how they relate to the theory outlined will lead to a brief conclusion.

## **Theory**

### **Service innovation**

Although the realisation that innovation is important is now widespread, the views on what it means to innovate, how this is done, and who service organisations should ask for new ideas have changed a lot. Since the Schumpeterian metamorphoses of the concept of innovation itself, it has continued to evolve and change with the times. It has not only gone through many transformations but has also been defined and conceptualised in numerous different ways simultaneously. However, there are two elements, which seem to be fairly constant. The first is that innovation is based on an idea which contains some originality in one way or another. The second is that this idea must be implemented into a market; it must somehow make a change for a group of people. In reality, though, sourcing and implementing ideas is not only important, it is also difficult (Tidd et al. 2001, Gallouj 1997). Recent discourses on innovation concentrate around the idea that

users should be involved in the innovation process in various ways since they are the end consumers and therefore they have the best knowledge of what they want (von Hippel 2005). One conceptualisation of this idea is co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000), advocating that rather than giving users a simple binary option of buying or not buying, users should be involved in the creation process of a product or service. Another conceptualisation is user-based innovation (von Hippel 2005) building on the fact that some users called lead users are ahead of their time in creating solutions to their needs and so companies can learn from them and implement their solutions into greater markets. One thing all the innovation concepts involving users have in common, however, is that they are intrinsically relational as they involve both users and providers. This also complicates matters and makes innovation more difficult as there can be many diverging opinions and needs at stake in the development process.

The relational aspect becomes further emphasised when what is innovated is not a product but a service, as services are performed and so are inherently relational (Grönroos 2007). Like innovation, what services are and how they should be defined and characterised has also gone through multiple transformations. In fact, service marketing (Shostack 1977) was quickly renamed relationship marketing (Berry 1983) and many scholars have since analysed various aspects of service relations such as e.g. trust (Macintosh 2009), loyalty (Gremler and Brown 1996) and rapport (Gremler and Gwinner 2000). Basically, then, services are about human relations, specifically humans helping other humans. This leads to the question of where the general relations between provider and user come from, when and how these relations are created.

In general they are created through the interaction and communication between those involved (Grönroos 2007). More specifically, as mentioned, most services consist of encounters (Czepiel et al 1985, Corvellec and Lindquist 2005), which become the focal point for creation and execution of this service. There are many conceptualisations and definitions of what a service encounter is, in principle it can be any point of contact between provider and user regardless of duration, location, whether this is unilaterally communicated, brief, automated etc. Thus a potential user seeing an advertisement on television could be considered a service encounter. Here, however, we will follow the definition by Shostack of a service encounter as “a period of time during which a consumer directly interacts with a service” (1985:243). In the analysis we will therefore take a more narrow scope and focus on encounters that are either face-to-face or ICT-mediated via phone, email or messages in a software system since these are the main encounters taking place in the case studied. The service relation is then constantly created, changed and re-created through the

interaction and communication in these encounters. This means that services consist of human actions; they are somehow performed, so services are not only relational but also processual.

This in itself creates a challenge of managing services. And when it comes to innovating these services, the difficulty is exacerbated due to their fluent processual nature and impalpable results (Gallouj 1997). The process is further complicated if the service innovation involves users, thus adding more perspectives and wishes to the process. It has been shown, however, that users have the most original and valuable ideas compared to intra-organisational research and development (Kristensson et al. 2004). The challenge therefore becomes to concretise this fluent nature of services and service relations so that innovation ideas can be identified and implemented. As the service (relation) is created through encounters, during which it is concretised as interaction and communication (Grönroos 2007), it becomes necessary to analyse the specific interaction and communication taking place during the encounters. This not only concretises the service, it is also where the service relation is created. Specifically the interaction and communication can be an exchange of objects, words, signals, symbols and so on between the provider and user (though all these elements are not necessarily involved in every encounter). In other words, it is necessary to move the focus of analysis from the general service relation between the provider and user to the specific exchanges taking place during the service encounters, in order to understand how a service as it appears to the user is both created and innovated.

### **Exchange and reciprocity**

Trade, of which commercial services form part, is in its basic form an interchange, something is swapped for something else. But as stated, services also imply social and personal relations in addition to the basic interchange. Furthermore, there are several conceptualisations of this interchange. Here we will focus on three different ones. The first is exchange stemming from the economic and marketing traditions of academic literature. The second is relationship marketing which is a relatively newly developed concept from the aforementioned field. The third is reciprocity as it has been conceptualised within the field of anthropology. The first concept is concerned with “what” and “how much” a person interchanges; the second concept adds “how” and “with whom” to the analysis; and the third concept adds a further dimension to exchange, which not only makes it suited to express the relation aspect of service, but also explains the durability of

service relations by adding a fundamental human mechanism to the analysis. Also, it encompasses the first two concepts which have been counterposed in some literature (see below). There is thus not an opposition between the two conceptualisations, rather they supplement each other.

### Exchange and Relationship Marketing

Exchange in its basic form is the principle of quid pro quo, something for something else, and is as old as civilisation. There are, however, different forms and patterns of exchange. Bagozzi (1975) divided the exchange patterns into three types. The first type is restricted exchange which takes place as a direct exchange between two parties. It attempts to maintain equality so that none of the parties feels at a loss, and it usually takes place simultaneously. The second type is generalised exchange involving more than two parties. It is indirect in the sense that a person gives to one person but receives from another; it is therefore not simultaneous but rather relies on a coherent group of exchange parties. The third type is called complex exchange and is defined as “a system of mutual relationships between at least three parties. Each social actor is involved in at least one direct exchange, while the entire system is organised by an interconnecting web of relationships” (1975:33). So it is a system, a chain or circle of direct exchanges, existing within a web of interpersonal relationships. The latter two types can both be consciously designed strategies (e.g. a marketing strategy) or unconscious systems appearing from socio-economic interaction.

Christian Grönroos devotes an entire chapter in his book *Service Management And Marketing* (2007) to the matter of exchange and relations. He is concerned with explaining the differences between the older exchange perspective in marketing and the newer relationship perspective. The latter not only consists of single direct exchanges or of mere bonds of convenience, low price etc. tying the user to the provider. Instead it implies a real relationship as a mindset and attitude of commitment and trust, “a mutual way of thinking” between partners (2007:36). As for the specific instances of interchange, he makes a corresponding distinction between transactions is singular exchanges and interaction which is a series of exchanges in an ongoing relation. The exchange perspective and its transactions is the most effective strategy in growing markets, but relationships and interactions are more effective in mature markets such as the Western world. Furthermore, the exchange perspective is better for mass-production markets where the producer has little to no contact with the consumer, whereas the relationship perspective is

better for business-to-business trade and in service contexts where there is more contact between the provider and the user. When it comes to value creation for the customer, there is a corresponding difference between value-in-exchange and value-in-use. The former, which is prevalent in the exchange perspective, is seen as produced in the back office and then distributed, whereas the latter, which is associated with the relationship perspective, is seen as being co-created with the user, meaning that provider and user work together to create end value for the user. Another point important point is that within the relationship perspective, it is necessary that the service provider offers various other supportive services in addition to their core service as part of the total, ongoing service offering.

Whether consciously designed or not, Bagozzi's notion of complex exchange is taking place within a network of meaningful relations. But each of these relations is created by a restricted exchange between two parties. In services, this could typically be the direct exchanges between user and provider during the service encounter which in turn creates the complex exchange network which Grönroos calls the relationship. Grönroos is writing from a marketing perspective about general relations between provider and user, whereas we are here concerned with specific processes taking place in the service encounter and how they affect the possibility of gathering ideas for innovation. Nevertheless, he shows how services consist of exchanges between user and provider, and how there can be a relationship between the two. However, there is one important point on which we must depart. In accounting for changes within the field of (service) marketing, Grönroos counterposes exchange and relationship as two oppositional perspectives on the interaction and communication between service provider and user. As the analysis will show, there is not necessarily an opposition between the two perspectives. Rather, they are different aspects of the processes taking place during service encounters. Another conceptualisation of the interchanges going on between user and provider may illustrate this further. We shall therefore now turn to the notion of reciprocity.

### Reciprocity

As conceptualised within the field of anthropology, the concept of reciprocity implies that something is given from one person to another or performed by one person for another. However, what is given or performed comes with an obligation on the receiver to give or perform in

return. If exchange can be expressed as *quid pro quo*, then the principle of reciprocity should rather be expressed as *do ut des*, I give so that you shall give. Relationship is then implied as an integral part of this concept. In one sense, a relationship is the mere knowledge or awareness of another person, but an active relationship is an ongoing exchange between two or more parties. Reciprocity as an academic concept was established by Marcel Mauss (1925) building on the writings of Bronislaw Malinowski (1922). To understand the theoretical concept and the empirical context from which it grew, we must therefore now turn to these two authors.

In his classic book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), Malinowski analyses a phenomenon called Kula trade on the Trobriand Islands. He describes in great detail how necklaces made from red shells are traded for bracelets made from white shells in a constant circuit between the various islands, the two kinds travelling in opposite directions so that a necklace is always traded for a bracelet and vice versa. This fixed system of transactions involves various rules, customs and ceremonies. The shells are not meant to be kept, but to be traded equally, that is their purpose. Only certain males participate in this pattern, and they in turn gain trade partners on the other islands “the rule being “once in the Kula, always in the Kula,”” (1922:83), in other words the transaction creates a lasting bond. This is exactly the purpose of this seemingly futile exercise of eternally wandering shells; the institutionalisation and upholding of magic rites, cultural contact and general trade (in addition to the Kula). It is the formation and constant maintenance of a community based on reciprocity. The Kula is an interesting empirical example of reciprocity as it lies “on the borderland between the commercial and the ceremonial and expressing a complex and interesting attitude of mind” (1922:513). In other words, it contains both a commercial and a socio-cultural dimension that cannot be separated. Because of the total complexity, participants in this pattern do not necessarily perceive it; rather their focus is on individual transactions. It was essential for Malinowski that his empirical finding should have a universal theoretical value: “What we can expect to find in other parts of the world are the fundamental ideas of the Kula, and its social arrangements in their main outline” (1922:515).

It was exactly this universality which Mauss has pointed out (1925). He has analysed reciprocity and gift giving customs in places such as France and Polynesia. The relatively vague “price” of gifts and favours leaves a certain doubt on how much is owed to whom. Over time it becomes virtually impossible to “settle the score” and the result is that this creates a complex system of debts and interobligations which weaves the participants together into a coherent society. He has also shown how a relationship is part of even the simplest exchange or transaction; a gift –



and, we would add, even more so a service – is part of the person giving it, and it also becomes part of the receiver thereby creating a lasting bond. In this way reciprocity is contractual and can even be legally binding, for example in the case of dowry and dowers in many cultures. Reciprocity involves three obligations which are the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to reciprocate, and if one of these obligations is not fulfilled by either of the partners, it will be considered a failure to reciprocate and so the relationship is broken. “Giving” a product or performing a service in return for money can therefore have many implications because they are what Mauss calls total prestations. They have meaning and effects on multiple levels; not only economic, but also moral, religious, legal, social, interpersonal and otherwise. Turning specifically to the context of modern service organisations, the implications of Mauss’ conceptualisation of reciprocity can also be seen here. In the case of industrial mass production, objects can be separated from their creator and giver, but in the case of service there is always a relationship between provider and user as services are performed and the service performance is inseparable from the service in the service encounter. In fact, part of the service product is the relationship created.

Various other authors within the field of anthropology have further analysed the phenomenon of reciprocity. For example, Polanyi (1944) distinguished between three economic systems. The first, reciprocity, is primarily dominant in small-scale decentralised gift economies with a high degree of socio-economic integration; the second, redistribution, is more predominant in small and middle sized (often feudal) societies which are centralised through a leader such as a chief or head of the family; and the third, market exchange, is more dominant in decentralised, anonymous markets based on impersonal contracts, for example modern Western economies. However, all three systems are present in most societies to varying degrees. Another anthropologist who has analysed reciprocity is Marshall Sahlins (1972), in whose writings one finds parallels to Bagozzi’s exchange theory (1975). Sahlins distinguishes between three kinds of reciprocity. The first, generalised reciprocity building on the principle of solidarity, corresponds to Bagozzi’s generalised exchange, except in a reciprocity version which includes the obligation to reciprocate. The second, balanced reciprocity, similarly forms a reciprocal version of Bagozzi’s restricted exchange, and it also corresponds to Polanyi’s market exchange in the sense that it denotes an equal, immediate, and primarily economic exchange. The final form, negative reciprocity, denotes a lack of solidarity such as in the cases of cheating or stealing; it is an antisocial, destructive reciprocity, which is usually criminalised or at least considered immoral in most societies. Sahlins

also describes how reciprocity not only causes integration on a systemic level; it also creates friendships (1972:186).

In service contexts, marketing theorists such as Grönroos and others have conceptualised an opposition between on one hand exchange or transaction marketing and on the other hand relationship marketing. But as the concept of reciprocity shows, there needs not be an opposition between the two. In fact, if the two perspectives are conflated into one, the result would be a marketing equivalent of reciprocity encompassing both the interchange elements and the relationship elements. There is therefore not an opposition between the concepts of exchange and reciprocity either. Rather, the oppositions of exchange and relationship – and of transaction and interaction – by marketing theorists has allowed for a clearer view of the various components of reciprocity. The latter has in turn added an extra dimension to exchange, which is the obligation to return the favour so to speak, to give, receive and recompensate. If an act of exchange is re-cast as reciprocity then there can be relations even in a single transaction, which means that even service providers with only a brief contact to their users have relationships which can be used to gather ideas for innovation for example. The concept of reciprocity also has consequences for the two kinds of value, value-in-exchange and value-in-use, discussed above. It conflates the two kinds of value into a single value-in-reciprocity which simultaneously denotes an exchange and a relation through that exchange.

Here we are concerned with services and the specific exchange and reciprocity taking place during service encounters. It is therefore important to analyse which types of reciprocity that take place between service providers and users.

### Different types of reciprocity

There have been several different ways of dividing and categorising the reciprocity taking place between (in the case of commodity production) producer and consumer or (in the case of services) provider and user. For example, Bagozzi (1975) made a distinction between utilitarian and symbolic exchange based on the reasons behind engaging in an exchange. The motivation for the former “lies in the anticipated use or tangible characteristics commonly associated with the objects in the exchange” (1975:36) and thus relates to the notion of a rational and ever maximising homo economicus. Contrarily, “symbolic exchange refers to the mutual transfer of psychological,

social or other intangible entities” (ibid.), so rather than a pragmatic use value, the focus is on attaining an experience or status mediated through symbols. There is a third type of exchange called mixed exchange which is a combination of the two former; in fact they are at times hard to separate.

Here we would supplement with a notion that all exchange is mixed. If we take mixed exchange to mean that there are symbolic aspects in utilitarian exchange and utilitarian aspects of symbolic exchange, we would extend the idea of mixed exchange further; in fact humans would not engage in utilitarian exchange beyond survival level if they did not get something social (e.g. status) and even personal (the feeling of satisfaction) out of it; likewise do they also engage in symbolic exchange to increase or maximise their emotional well-being in a utilitarian way. However, although they are always combined in practice, there is a clear conceptual distinction between utilitarian and symbolic exchange which can enlighten an analysis of the reciprocity taking place during service encounters.

The utilitarian and symbolic division is one simple distinction between different types of reciprocity. A much more elaborate and detailed system is found in Paul et al. (2009). Their aim was to make a metatheoretical overall classification system to identify and interrelate so-called repeat purchase drivers in services. Dissatisfied with the fragmented state of service research in this area, their aim was to develop a coherent model of these drivers. Using means-end theory (Gutman 1982), they divided the repeat purchase drivers into service attributes, which lead to benefits for the users, and finally some general values serving as overall motivation for using a service. Each of these three categories, which are linked by cognitive association in the mind of the user, consists in turn of a hierarchical framework of lower (specific, concrete) and higher (general, abstract) order drivers. The result is a vast and complex system of attributes, benefits and values. Considering benefits the most important, they placed their focus on how these interrelate and how they relate to the other two categories. They found 12 lower order drivers which they organised into three higher order driver categories of functional benefits “of a utilitarian nature”, psychological benefits “that satisfy important intrinsic, self-oriented goals of the customer”, and social benefits which “make people feel closer to one another or portray a desired image to others” (2009:225). In other words, users use services for a vast number of reasons, which is reflected in the complexity of their model, and the benefits users expect to obtain are either of a practical nature, contributing to individual goals, or social belonging and favourable impressions.

## Overview And Summary

Below is a table outlining some aspects of the concepts of exchange, reciprocity and relationship and how they relate to each other. It is based on the previous discussions in this section. This is not meant to be an exhaustive table but rather to provide an illustrative overview. Reciprocity has been placed in the middle column to emphasise the point of how this concept has the ability to conflate and add to the two other concepts.

	<b><u>Exchange</u></b>	<b><u>Reciprocity</u></b>	<b><u>Relationship</u></b>
Concerned with	Concrete acts of trading one thing for another	Underlying principles of interchange	General social bonds
Interchanges	Single exchanges	Any	Often repeated exchanges
Bonds	Bonds of convenience	Bonds of obligation	Relationships
Coherence	Transaction	Pact	Interaction
Relation	Detachment from user	Social and moral bond, expectations of counterpart living up to obligation	Mindset and attitude of commitment and trust
Nature of contact with user	Direct, mediated	Direct, indirect (generalised, redistribution)	Direct
Markets	Growing markets	Any	Mature saturated markets
Typical business type	Mass production	Any (often more salient in business-to-business and services)	Business-to-business, services
Value design	Value added in back office	Both	Value added by user (“value proposition”)
Value type	Value-in-exchange	Both	Value-in-use
Price orientation	Market price (market-oriented)	Agreement (both-oriented)	User-oriented
Interchange flexibility	Standardised	Favours	Customisation
Integration	Fragmental	Integrational, systemic and (inter)personal level	Integrational, personal level
Purpose of concept	Both	Descriptive	Normative
Authors	Bagozzi, Grönroos	Malinowski, Mauss, Polanyi, Sahlins	Grönroos, Paul et al.

Table 1. Comparison of the three main theoretical concepts as used in this article.

There are several aspects covered in this figure. The first is what each concept is concerned with, the next is which kinds of interchanges it primarily focuses on, and then which type of bonds between the parties it creates or is related to. This is followed by the coherence mechanisms involved in the interchanges, how the parties relate to each other and the nature of contact with the users. Then follows to which markets the concepts apply or are presumed to be successful, which business types typically (should) engage in this process, and the aspects of when and where the value is designed or added and how this value comes to be expressed or effectuated. Finally it covers the aspects of how flexible the interchange processes are, how and on what levels they may be integrating the parties into a socially coherent group, and whether the concepts are a result of describing or prescribing interchanges. The main authors discussed in this section have also been added according to which model they describe. In addition, here are three figures illustrating how the service provider is positioned in relation to the parties with whom the interchange takes place:

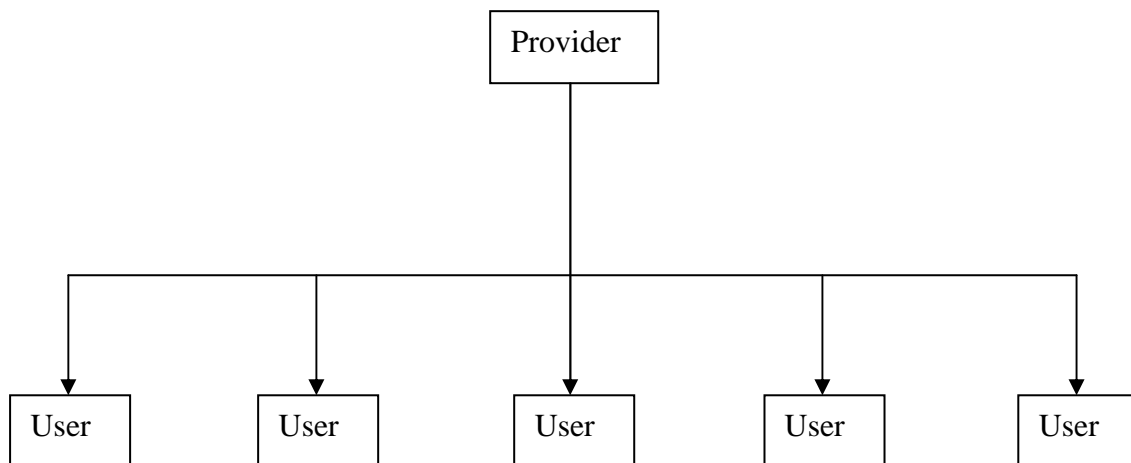


Figure 1: Exchange

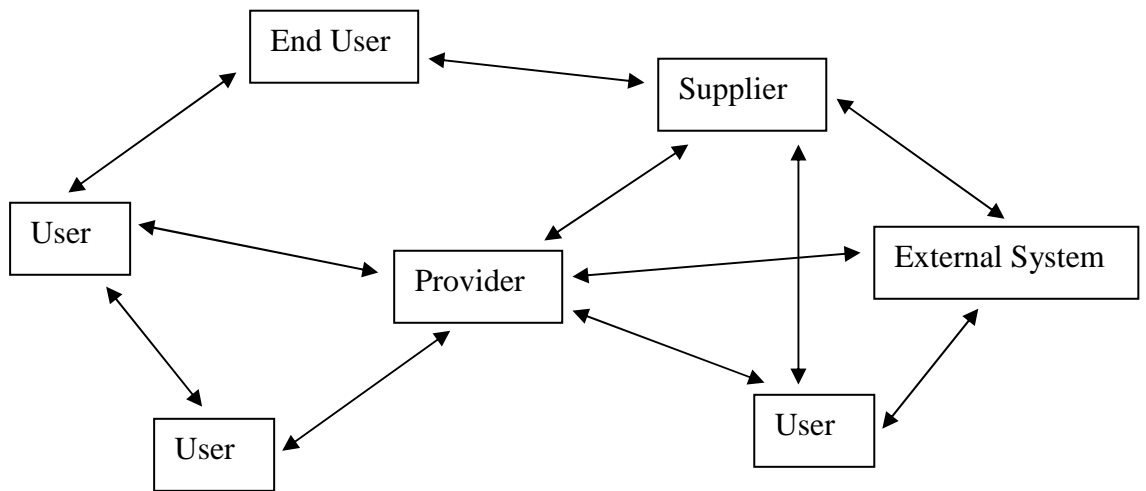


Figure 2: Reciprocity

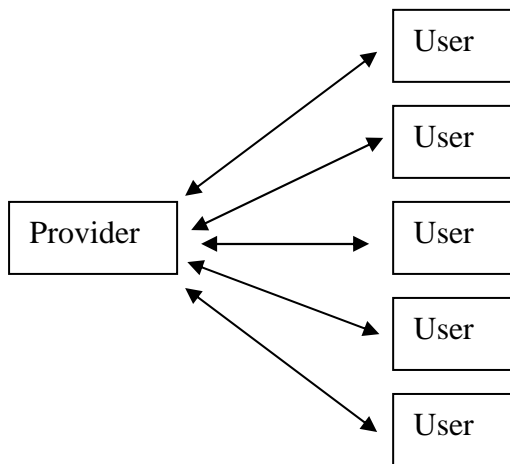


Figure 3: Relationship Marketing

Exchange often involves mass-provision of identical standard products to many users or buyers; in contrast, relationship marketing prescribes a unique relation between the provider and every single user; and reciprocity places the provider as part of a complex wider network of mutual obligations and expectations which both includes and circumvents the provider. These figures are not absolute truths but rather serve as archetypal metaphors for the patterns of relations.

The figure portrays reciprocity as different from exchange and relationship marketing, which is accurate to the extent that exchange is confined to being only the interchange of something for something else and to the extent that relationship marketing prescribes building a general social relation with the users. Rather than being prescriptive, reciprocity is a description of the processes of the service encounter. However, from another perspective reciprocity can also be seen as not being different from exchange and relationships, but rather encompass both (as discussed above) and also include some further elements of moral obligation and cultural expectation. Used in this way, it makes sense to analyse both exchange and relationships as elements of reciprocity. In short, reciprocity involves (among other things) exchange and reciprocity often results in a relationship (just like a relationship often results in reciprocity). Reciprocity thereby becomes a collective category of the other concepts. It is in this sense that reciprocity is used in this study.

To sum up, services involve relations between users and the provider, the latter personified by the frontline employees. These relations are complex and consist of a number of elements which have been conceptualised in the literature in many different ways, such as loyalty, trust, rapport and so on. They are (at least largely) created through the service encounters, which should be a vital point of focus for the service provider. Furthermore, in order to provide adequate and satisfactory service to their users, service providers must innovate over time. Therefore they should ask their users for ideas for innovations, ideally through the service encounter. It is during these occasions that an interchange takes place between the user and the provider. This has in the service marketing literature been conceptualised as either transaction/exchange or interaction/relationship and different patterns of these have been identified, which have implications for when and to whom ideas for innovation may be communicated. Anthropology has shown that there are processes of reciprocity going on and so add the obligation to reciprocate to the equation, which has implications for how and why the reciprocated, such as ideas for innovation, may be stated (or not). This can be considered a conflation of the exchange and relationship of marketing. Finally, not only the drivers for service use – and thereby reciprocation, but also what is reciprocated is multifarious and can be divided into several types or kinds in different ways. Based on an empirical case study, we will now identify which kinds of reciprocity take place during the service encounters studied and make a division into three main categories. First, however, we will describe the methodology used in this study.

# Method

This article builds on both theoretical material as discussed in the theory section and empirical data. Although an inductive approach was taken, gathering empirical data and concluding from these, there were nevertheless some theoretical deliberations prior to entering the empirical field; these consisted of reasonings for the choice of background theory, some preliminary concepts, and a clear unit of analysis. The reason for our choice of theories was both that they are concerned with interchanges as human economic activity, and that the concepts of these theories were helpful in analysing the processes taking place during service encounters. The purpose of this article is to describe and analyse what goes on during the service encounters, how relations are created and what this means for users stating ideas for innovation, so therefore we have chosen some background theory on services, innovation and service innovation in particular. But primarily we have used some service marketing theory on exchange and service relationships, and some anthropological theory on reciprocity. Both are concerned with the interchanges of encounters albeit from different focuses and with different purposes. The marketing literature has an instrumental focus, analysing the conditions for exchange and the creation of service relations with the ultimate purpose of maximising profits, whereas economic anthropology is concerned with basic human economic processes connecting individuals into a society or group with the purpose of understanding these processes. Thus the theories are very different but supplement each other as one can be used to focus on the instrumental aspects and the other on the social aspects of service encounters. They also provide some preliminary concepts with which to analyse the empirical data. These include service encounters, ideas for innovation, exchange and reciprocity as described in the theory section. Our unit of analysis in this enquiry is the reciprocity going on in service encounters, which can take the concrete form of a face-to-face meeting, phone call, string of emails, message in the software system and reactions to it, and so on.

The empirical data are derived from a case study done at a tour operator in this article called Travel Tours (which is not their real name) over the course of 3 months, as well as interviews done with employees at two of their client companies. It was therefore a semi-longitudinal study. A case study is the right method “when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context” (Yin 2003:4). The reciprocity taking place in service encounters is an integrated part of these, one might even say they constitute the service encounter, therefore a descriptive



single-case study was conducted in order to present a description of reciprocity “within its context” of service encounters (Yin 2003:5). The case study was qualitative as it aimed to identify, describe and analyse the different kinds of reciprocity and how they affect user motivation for stating ideas for innovation, rather than for example measure how often each type of reciprocity took place (in which case a quantitative study should have been made). The case of a tour operator and some of its client companies was chosen as it could provide both service provider and user perspectives on the service encounters and the reasons for participating in the reciprocity as well as thoughts on the reciprocity that had taken place. Also, it was a business-to-business service in a relatively small service sector with a high degree of interaction; therefore it was assumed that there would be many service encounters of different types which should provide examples of different kinds of reciprocity.

Consistent with the recommendations of Yin, this study relies on several data collection methods (2003:4). The first was an ethnographic fieldwork consisting of participant observation (Spradley 1980). This method is characterised by being flexible, open-ended and unstructured, which is adequate when the details of what is to be described and understood in the case study are to an extent unknown (Burgess 1982, Johnstone 2007). It is flexible as it consists of the researcher being immersed into the environment studied, therefore the format must correspond to that of the environment and as work days of the informants can be unpredictable, then so must the method be. Participant observation consists of both observation of and participation with the informants, “methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting” (Brewer 2000:6). The participation allowed the researcher to gain an insider understanding of the meaning that the different instances of reciprocity had to the informants while the observation allowed the researcher to gain an outsider overview of the different kinds of reciprocity taking place. The researcher would spend on average 4-5 hours following an employee. This could consist of making general observations on the physical environment, watching informants as they worked, having conversations with them during which they would explain their work as if the researcher was to learn it like a trainee, listening in to phone calls, having conversations about how they saw their job functions and the organisation and how they would like to see their job evolve in the future, observing some staff meetings, talking about past events and the history of departments and the overall organisation, and so on. During this the researcher would make brief field notes as a condensed account that was later expanded (Spradley 1980).

Participant observation is not just flexible but also open-ended to allow for whatever data is found to emerge. It is unpredictable when, how and in what form statements or actions showing what meaning a specific instance of reciprocity holds to an informant will appear. The aim of the method is to gain an understanding of the phenomena studied from “the native’s point of view” (Malinowski 1922); it is not possible to predict when this level of understanding is reached, in fact it is in a sense never reached as the researcher was not a full-time employee. Therefore the method and the results must always be open-ended. When to stop and conclude depends on what one aims to gain. In this case this was a comprehension of the reciprocity and its effect on users stating ideas for innovation, but the field work could have stopped sooner or continued longer and with other foci if the aim had been to answer different questions. Scope and focus therefore is both flexible and open-ended depending entirely on the aim. Finally, participant observation is unstructured. It is only pre-planned to a very small extent, and the research process is not at all linear. Rather the researcher took a cyclical approach (Spradley 1980), observing and asking questions, making field notes, making some preliminary analysis and interpretation, which in turn lead to further observing and asking questions. The researcher was not present in the field every day during the field work, rather the days were scattered out. This was because some days were spent elaborating, analysing and interpreting data as well as other work obligations of the researcher, but it also had to do with the scope and nature of access to the field. The field was a functioning work place with ever changing conditions. On some days access would be rejected with the message that it was “not a good day today” for various reasons such as important sudden meetings or the general atmosphere after some employees were let go. On other days there would be important events in which the researcher should participate, so the pattern of attendance was unstructured and not coherent timewise. Nevertheless, the needed data were produced.

Another method used was unstructured interviews with the employees and managers. These conversations have already been mentioned. Some were scheduled for a specific time as the informant had a busy schedule, while other conversations happened spontaneously inspired by the situation. Common to all was that they were unstructured as the questions posed depended entirely of what empirical data was found in the previous answers. As the purpose was to elicit the meaning which the service relations and the reciprocity had to those involved, their responses could not be predicted and so neither could the structure. Finally, two lengthy unstructured interviews were conducted with two client companies, one lasting 1 hour 13 minutes the other lasting 1 hour 38 minutes. Both client companies were travel agencies and the interview was conducted primarily

with one employee in each of the two, though other employees also gave comments during the interviews. Some general topics and questions has been prepared beforehand but were only very loosely followed during the interviewing processes to allow the respondents room to answer as they saw fit. During these interviews, they had the opportunity to talk about both the general service relations between them and Travel Tours, as well as about some specific service encounters and different types of service encounters, what they meant to them and how they felt about them. They also had the opportunity to give explanations for stating ideas for innovation – or not stating them – and what they thought of the reactions and responses they received.

Finally the empirical data was analysed. As this is not a linear method, neither is the data analysis. Already from the inception of the field work, data are analysed and interpreted by the researcher. This is necessary in order to move forward and pose more questions as stated above in the description of the cyclical method (Spradley 1980). In this way, "the data is analysed by attributing meanings to the human actions described and explained" (Hammersley 1990:2). Both description and analysis constantly leads to further questions, so the resulting interpretation reflects the researcher as well as the informants and situations. This means that the barrier between objectivity and subjectivity is necessarily broken down. As the researcher is a participant observer, any analysis and conclusions are both seen from the inside and the outside, subjective and objective simultaneously. This is an integrated part of the method and its results (Johnstone 2007, Spradley 1980). When a response puzzled the researcher, more questions would be asked regarding the topic; other informants would be asked about the same topic; answers would be compared with each other and with the overall observations of the researcher. Some core themes were chosen based on relevance to theory and research question. From the empirical data certain categories would emerge in the mind of the researcher, and these would be discussed with the informants. Further results would be compared to and placed in the categories, which were in this way further defined. Ultimately, the researcher ended up with three categories which will be described, analysed and discussed in detail below, and with several statements on how reciprocity and the failure to reciprocate would affect the informants' motivation for stating, processing, responding to (and so on) ideas for innovation during service encounters. It should be noted that the three categories are thus etic rather than emic; the informants did not categorise the different kinds of reciprocity in this way, in fact in some cases they did not categorise the processes as reciprocity at all. This is to be expected and reflects the different perspectives of researcher and informant.

# Analysis

There are a myriad reasons to engage in use of a service, and these reasons can be classified into different types. When focus is put on the reciprocity taking place during service encounters, we would therefore expect to find many different specific types of reciprocity which could be grouped into certain basic kinds. And that these different kinds of reciprocity have an effect on whether and how ideas for innovation can be elicited from users, communicated to frontline employees at the service provider, and understood by them. Furthermore, some kinds of reciprocity are officially institutionalised and often of an economic nature; they make up the core service offering or livelihood of the service organisation. Other kinds have traditionally been considered mere bi-products of contact; they tend to be of a more informal kind. Some of these can still be semi-official and take place within the public sphere of social communication and interaction; others are of a more private nature and only pertain to two interacting persons. In the analysis below we have tried to follow this division into three kinds of reciprocity, which we accordingly have termed formal reciprocity, social reciprocity and personal reciprocity. First, however, we will provide a brief introduction of Travel Tours, our case organisation.

## Travel Tours

The travelling business in Denmark is characterised by many small to medium sized travel agencies. They mainly serve Danish users; but in booking tickets, handling price systems and managing various rules and regulations as well as living up to the requirements set by national and international law, they are dealing with a thoroughly international environment. For example, in order to be able to issue airline tickets, they need an IATA (International Air Transport Association) license. They also need to provide a substantial amount of money as security, something which is quite difficult for these small to medium sized organisations (some of which consist of only one or a very few employees). Therefore several travel agencies engaged in a joint venture to set up Travel Tours as a tour operator, which would be able to provide security and issue tickets. There are some

larger travel agencies which are able to issue their own tickets independently and also a few competitors to Travel Tours, but many small to medium sized travel agencies (in addition to the ones that started the organisation) use the services of Travel Tours. Though still owned by certain travel agencies, Travel Tours functions very much as an independent company in everyday life.

Travel Tours occupies two levels of open landscape offices and glass walled meeting rooms, places at the upper levels of an office building just outside the central part of town. The number of employees varied during the period of fieldwork but was around 50-60. Many employees were relatively young, in their twenties, but there were also quite a few employees in their thirties, forties and fifties and so on. They were both males and females although there was a preponderance of females answering phone calls and emails in the helpdesk section and the majority of department heads were male. The atmosphere was busy but very social, there was a lot of talking between employees and during lunch breaks they would go out in smaller groups and eat together (it would be impossible for everyone to go at once since, for example, the phones had to be manned all day). The service encounters, which constantly took place all day, were mainly by phone or email; it was rare that they took place face-to-face; that only happened during prescheduled meetings with the users which were employees and owners of the travel agencies. There was also a large lunch room where Thursday morning meetings were held, and a large roof terrace with barbecues overlooking part of town. In their spare time, the employees would also sometimes get together, and several of them mentioned not only that they themselves had travelled a lot, but that this was quite common when one was “in the business”. This, then, formed the setting in which the fieldwork took place, and where the practices of the service encounters were observed and talked about. As mentioned, the service encounters consisted of communication, actions and interaction, which specifically means certain phenomena going back and forth such as spoken words, written words, changes made and information added in various software systems, money transfers, and so on. In other words, processes of exchange and (as will be evident) reciprocity took place, and these were of three different kinds. We will now describe these, beginning with the patterns of reciprocity found in this case, then the three kinds of reciprocity identified, and lastly some further themes of reciprocity.

# **Patterns Of Reciprocity**

Reciprocity can happen between only two parties, but often several parties are involved, which creates a pattern of reciprocity. In this section, two patterns relating to reciprocity as it was found in the case of Travel Tours which will be analysed. Firstly, the networks of reciprocity on which Travel Tours relied in order to provide their services will be addressed. And secondly it will be analysed how Travel Tours functioned as a hub for some of these networks, having a collecting and redistributing role. We will start with the networks of reciprocity.

## **Reciprocity Networks**

TT relied on a large network of reciprocity processes in order to be able to deliver the services that they provided, services which are part of the formal reciprocity taking place between them and the travel agencies. To illustrate we will start with some empirical observations.

### **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: NETWORKS OF RECIPROCITY**

One call observed at the helpdesk was from a travel agency employee. A couple is on holiday in Mexico and the wife will celebrate her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday during the vacation. Some friends want to send her some champagne, so they have asked the travel agency employee how much it would cost to send her a bottle and how much swimming with dolphins would cost. The travel agency employee has contacted Travel Tours about this earlier and is now calling helpdesk to get an update on the matter. The female Travel Tours employee receiving the call looks up the matter in the software system where she can see that another (male) Travel Tours employee has written the price of swimming with dolphins in the software system and that the price of champagne will follow. She tells the travel agency employee this and then calls her male colleague to establish where he got the information from and whether he can provide the price of champagne now as the wife's birthday is only two days away. He replies that he has already contacted a supplier regarding this but will soon give an update on the matter. The female Travel Tours employee then re-sends the information to the travel agency and calls the travel agency employee back to let her know that she has re-sent her the information regarding the dolphins and that the champagne price is also on its way very soon. The travel agency employee replies that she will tell the friends of the couple this.

There are also several parallel networks in which Travel Tours do not have a direct role, but nevertheless rely on to be able to do provide their services. An employee who worked with changing and updating ticket prices in the software stated that all basic price entry into the system was made by a company in a neighbouring country as simple data entry work. And an employee in the helpdesk section explained that Travel Tours did not handle money transfers for tickets and handling fees themselves. Instead an international organisation called BSP (Bank Settlement Plan) dealt with all money transfers between airlines and travel agencies across all currencies in the entire world. It had branches in many different countries. In case of a ticket refund, this process went via BSP and from there the money would be returned to Travel Tours. In either case, Travel Tours has a responsibility in the reciprocal relations it has; as a helpdesk employee remarked about hotel room bookings in far away destinations: “we are that guaranteed control, so the agents can trust it when rooms are booked”.

## ANALYSIS

The example of the phone call for the helpdesk department shows how complex the networks on which Travel Tours relies are. There were many elements involved in this case: The couple on holiday, their friends, the travel agency, several employees at Travel Tours, the provider of champagne, and the provider of the swimming with dolphins experience. And many more elements could have been involved in this one single request. For every particular process of reciprocity, there are a myriad other processes on which its successful transaction rests. These processes are tied together in networks, and in some networks, the reciprocity between Travel Tours and the travel agencies plays an active role. This is the case in the networks of for example the airlines, the local agents and the hotels. As the helpdesk employee stated, the reciprocal relations of these networks must be tended to regularly so that a certain degree of trust is ensured. Other networks, such as the data entry company and BSP, run parallel to Travel Tours, but are no less vital to their successful functioning. At Travel Tours, they were conscious about the importance of such networks, which is why they spent money on creating them (as will be evident below in the case of the courses offered to trainees). In Malinowski’s conceptualisation (1922), reciprocity was described as an extensive and complex system of interchanges between many partners which were spread far apart and belonged to different groups. As the above example from a phone call to the helpdesk illustrates, this was the case at Travel Tours as well. And these networks correspond to what Bagozzi (1975) termed complex exchange in that they consist of a circle or chain of exchanges

on which they depend; something which is true for both the case of enquiry about champagne and swimming with dolphins described above, but also the parallel networks. In this way, the reciprocity not only depended on these networks; it consisted of them, it *was* them. Furthermore, the networks merged into a pattern of generalised reciprocity (Sahlins 1972) as the exchanges often took the form of delayed “favours”. For example, there were several providers of champagne (and almost anything else); in such a situation, choosing to do business with one provider could be considered a “favour” and as various business ties of varying regularity formed, they merged into a network of generalised reciprocity. However, Travel Tours played a particular role in several of these networks, and this role will now be addressed.

### **Redistribution**

Several of the reciprocity networks followed a special pattern evolving around a hub. In several of these networks, it was Travel Tours which functioned as the central hub.

### **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: SUPPLY CHAINS AND SKILL/KNOWLEDGE HUB**

As mentioned, the head of sales explained that the travel business was very fragmented; there were 300-450 travel agencies, many of which were relatively small. As most airlines couldn't reach these, many airlines used Travel Tours to get in contact with the travel agencies. Likewise, a helpdesk employee explained that for hotel rooms, Travel Tours had roughly 50 suppliers of varying size. Furthermore many smaller hotels were not online so Travel Tours was in contact with them via email and telephone and then passed information on to the travel agencies; so Travel Tours was the contact point between these hotels and the travel agencies. The supply chains for flights were therefore airline – Travel Tours – travel agency – end user; and for hotel bookings they were hotel – local agent – Travel Tours – travel agency – end user. In other words, every travel sale to an end user depended on airlines or local contacts in many destinations via a number of links and reciprocity processes in between.

The central role which Travel Tours played in these networks meant employees had certain skills and knowledge which was not readily available to other participants. An employee in the IT department mentioned that they had an agreement with the travel agencies that they could get help with using Amadeus and Worldspan (the airlines' global ticket systems) if they bought the access through Travel Tours, and the IT department at Travel Tours got around 20 calls in a month from



various travel agencies. Likewise, the employee updating the pricelists in the Travel Tours software explained that she also sent out news mails. A lot of the news came from the airlines and she would then assess whether to send it out to the travel agencies, internally in Travel Tours, or not at all. Helpdesk had a similar function in general with the knowledge they provided. For example, a helpdesk employee received a phone call from a travel agency employee who needed a price on how much it would cost for her customers to go on a ferry cruise to three islands off the coast of Thailand. The helpdesk employee told her that there was a special code which could be entered instead of the name of the destination city, and that code would automatically show the price in the system.

## ANALYSIS

The networks here described followed the pattern of redistribution as phenomena such as services, information, money, skills and knowledge were either actively collected or naturally amassed at Travel Tours. In other words, Travel Tours functioned as the central hub of these networks. Polanyi (1944) classified reciprocity into three main patterns. The first was reciprocity, which was a direct interpersonal exchange; the second was market exchange, which denoted the de-personalised anonymous general exchange of the (especially modern Western economic) markets. The third was redistribution, which has been practiced in small scale in many tribes where the chief would gather all food, wealth, and so on, of the tribe and redistribute it so that no one would go hungry; it has also been attempted practiced on a larger scale in countries with a communist state system. Redistributive networks are characterised by having one central agent which gathers and redistributes, and in the supply chains of Travel Tours, it played this central role; in fact this was its main livelihood. Common for both supply chains was that there were multiple players in every link except for Travel Tours which therefore became the central hub. This was both formally as in the supply chain example, but the redistributive pattern of reciprocity also existed on a more informal level in terms of the skills and knowledge which Travel Tours gained and possessed as a central hub. Some of this was institutionalised as in the case of the IT assistance and the news mails, and some was more based on general experience as in the example of the phone call about a ferry cruise. Either way, the Travel Tours employees often had an expert knowledge on both travelling and tickets, but also in the more unofficial areas of formal reciprocity such as the software systems. These skills and knowledge was something which the travel agency employees either did not have access to (the airline news), did not have the man power to handle themselves as it was a specialised

area (IT systems), or used so rarely that it was likely to be forgotten when it was needed (special software codes). And so, Travel Tours had a central position as the distributor and redistributor in many of these networks which gave them a corresponding status. What was reciprocated was of three different kinds, and these will now be analysed starting with formal reciprocity.

## **Three Kinds Of Reciprocity**

What is reciprocated in service encounters is of many different kinds, including objects and products, verbal and non-verbal communication, signals and symbols, and so on. As these enter into a process of reciprocity they take on a specific value and meaning. Based on the empirical data, we have divided the reciprocity taking place at Travel Tours into three different kinds as stated in the beginning of this analysis section. We will start with formal reciprocity of both the official and unofficial kind, progressing through social reciprocity, and ending with personal reciprocity.

### **Formal reciprocity**

In its basic form, formal reciprocity provides the *raison d'être* of a service organisation and consists of a service being performed in exchange for the user providing something else, usually money. This is the kind of reciprocity which has been addressed in most service literature and with which most service managers concern themselves as it provides the core livelihood of the organisation. It can be subdivided into two kinds, both of which were found in the case of Travel Tours. The first is the official formal reciprocity, which in most service organisations consists of one or a very few types of processes, it is “what they do”. In addition there is the second kind, the unofficial formal reciprocity, which is not part of the core service but is rather supportive service processes. Nevertheless they are also formal as they consist of concrete actions performed or information provided either in exchange for money or similar, or with the expectation that they have a direct and important effect on the core service offering. Formal reciprocity can therefore be summarised as the official and unofficial services provided in exchange for money or some other similar kind of reward. We will now give some empirical examples of these.

## Official Formal Reciprocity

One of the main services that Travel Tours offers is issuing airline tickets. All airlines offer available tickets and prices via a few software systems such as Amadeus and Worldspan, and the travel agencies can then make a reservation in these systems.

### EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: TICKET BOOKING

An employee in the ticket issuing department of Travel Tours showed how a ticket then entered an online queue in the Travel Tours ticket issuing software. He then built the ticket up by adding the airline price and various fees including a handling fee which is charged by Travel Tours. The individual amounts of the handling fees are decided in special agreements with the travel agencies. After checking the ticket a final time, it was sent off to the travel agency via the system. He explained that the CEO and the head of sales negotiate special price agreements with the airlines; these are written down in contracts which are scanned and put into an additional system. He showed various examples of these contracts. He also showed how, in addition to the dynamic ticket booking parts, there was a static system which encompassed the price lists providing the travel agencies with an overview of tickets and prices. Furthermore, hotel reservations are also provided by Travel Tours in a hotel section of this system. An employee in the helpdesk department (which handles most phone calls and emails from users) explained how Travel Tours is in contact with a network of independent local agents at the various destinations, which in turn have a number of hotels to choose from. She showed how these hotels could be booked through the system. Finally, bookings of other services at the destinations can also be provided by Travel Tours. For example, a phone call to the helpdesk department was observed, during which a travel agency employee contacted Travel Tours because she needed a price for a cruise to three islands in Thailand. The helpdesk employee then helped her find it in the system. In general, if there are any problems, changes, additions or questions about the tickets, the travel agencies can contact Travel Tours' helpdesk which can provide further assistance. They also provide advice and guidance to the travel agencies.

### ANALYSIS

The formal value creation for the travel agencies consists in three things: issuing tickets, negotiating cheaper prices with the airlines than are otherwise available in the global

market, and offering advice and guidance as they amass a lot of experience due to their central position. When Travel Tours issue a ticket for a travel agency, they expect a handling fee in return. This is a restricted exchange as Bagozzi (1975) describes it, in that there is equality, one ticket for one fee which is negotiated as a reasonable price; and it is largely simultaneous as the fee is added on top of the ticket price before it is sent off to the travel agency. Taking Grönroos' systematics, the ticket issuing processes are transactions as each ticket issued constitutes a direct single exchange (2007). Furthermore, although airline agreements and ticket fees are individually negotiated, there is nevertheless an aspect of mass production about these exchanges as many tickets are issued with a fee on top almost automatically without any further contact. As Grönroos has stated, exchange (versus relationships) often takes place in such settings where little interaction is demanded to provide the service (2007: 24). The above is then a typical example of value-in-exchange as the service product and the economic value it provides is designed in the back office through negotiating contracts with airlines and making special deals to give the travel agencies an economic incentive. Or to take the conceptualisations of Paul et al. (2009), the benefits for the travel agencies are functional as the exchanges are motivated by utilitarian drivers; in the example above it is the cheapest price for the tickets. In other words, this is what Polanyi (1944) calls market exchange as most reservations only go through the software system and the ticket issuing department and therefore are relatively anonymous. There is, however, an added element to even this seemingly simple process of ticket issuing. As the travel agency books the ticket there is an expectation that Travel Tours will issue it; as Travel Tours issues the ticket there is an expectation that the travel agencies will pay a fee for this; and as the travel agencies pay that fee there is an expectation that this will settle the matter and that they are now "even". More than expectations, both parties are under the obligation to perform these actions if they want to continue doing business with each other. It is this chain or series of mutual expectations and obligations which constitutes reciprocity. Thus reciprocity is more than just exchange; it includes these expectations and obligations tying the parties together in a bond. So in the ticket issuing process there is a reciprocity going on, an exchange-cum-obligation, in this case what Sahlins calls a balanced reciprocity (1972). Therefore, the examples above show how reciprocity encompasses what has been described in the service marketing literature as exchange.

## Unofficial Formal Reciprocity

Had the above examples been the only exchanges taking place between Travel Tours and the travel agencies, then the only phenomena tying the latter to the former would be bonds of convenience (Grönroos 2007: 35), and the travel agencies would only have the economic incentive to continue using the services of Travel Tours. However, in addition to the official and formal processes of reciprocity, there are also a number of unofficial processes, which are not part of the core service offering as described above, but rather function as support for the core service offering and for the travel agencies. Nevertheless they are still formal as these are part of the total service offering provided by Travel Tours. We will now describe one such additional service in more detail.

## EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: CATALOGUES

TT makes travel catalogues for their users, the travel agencies, to hand out to the end users, the people or organisations booking a travel. Some catalogues are regularly issued annually or every second year, other catalogues are only made once or a few times. The department producing the catalogues was simply known by the employees at Travel Tours as “the production” in daily mention. The head of the department stated that it was started “informally” by two employees who had knowledge of the destinations. At the time of the fieldwork, however, it had been formalised with regular issues and a systematic contact with the travel agencies. He mentioned that for every catalogue issued, Travel Tours have a meeting with the interested travel agencies and afterwards Travel Tours asks the 3 – 5 travel agencies which mostly sell the tickets to that destination to state what should be included in their view.

The process of making a catalogue was described by the department head as follows. It could begin with the tourist office of a destination approaching Travel Tours. In this concrete case, however, a major airline had opened up a new route to Dubai. They then approached Travel Tours and asked them to make a catalogue and offered to pay for it. In the department head’s words, the airline “begs for it”, to which he commented: “if we help them, then they will probably also help us”. He explained that the decision to make a catalogue could also be made on the grounds of a market analysis or an employee at Travel Tours, who had travelled to that destination. Further knowledge about the destination was then sourced at travelling business fairs or from local agents. He mentioned that when deciding to make a catalogue, other factors such as accessibility and price are also included. Afterwards Travel Tours had a meeting with the travel agencies that sell most of the tickets for that destination, after which these were included in the creation process. Then specific ideas were selected and the catalogue was created. “We are known for expertise” as the department

head stated, “not for standard items”. He also explained that in addition to this, travel agencies are welcome to make use of Travel Tours’ contacts and knowledge if they wish to make their own arrangements. Furthermore, a helpdesk employee stated that Travel Tours offers various extra services in addition to the airline tickets and hotel reservations. These can be anything from car rental to experiences and about 10% of these were included in the catalogues, the rest could be found in the system.

## ANALYSIS

With a process such as the above we are moving towards relationship marketing. There is no clear-cut line between official and unofficial formal reciprocity. For example, the advice given to the travel agencies by the helpdesk department could be considered unofficial reciprocity and not part of the core product of issuing tickets. Like the advice given, the above is a pattern of complex exchange (Bagozzi 1975). There are elements of direct exchange between the social actors involved, in the example the department head explained these were the airline that had opened a new route and Travel Tours. But these elements were part of a much more complex system of interconnecting reciprocities and relationships including local agents, tourist offices and the travel agencies. Even travel agencies that only sold a few tickets to Dubai and therefore were not included in the catalogue design process would be able to benefit from this if they were regular users of Travel Tours. Grönroos has stated that it is important for a relationship marketing based service to have value-adding processes based on the long-term needs of the users in addition to the technical solutions offered as the main service product (2007: 30). The catalogue process is just this as it adds value to the travel agencies by helping them sell both travels and extra experiences, and these catalogues therefore also cater to their long-term needs. And the catalogues, which have a high degree of customisation, are offered in addition to the technical solution provided by the software systems. Furthermore, as the origins of a catalogue are a mixture between interest and request, this is another example of a reciprocity process in which one part asks for something expecting something else in return, in this case a catalogue for which the expected response is loyalty and the aim of selling more tickets, which in turn is expected to bring in more income from handling fees and closer relations and so on. In fact, the motivation of Travel Tours for agreeing to the deal is made clear by the department head in the quote that “if we help them, then they will probably also help us”, implying not just the loyalty expected, but also hopes for concrete help (which could for

instance be if tickets need to be changed after the official deadline, in such cases, special concessions often happened). Two important elements of reciprocity as analysed by Mauss (1925) can be seen here; firstly, the expectation that the counterpart will fulfil their obligation to reciprocate. Secondly, Travel Tours are doing both the airline and the travel agencies a favour by choosing to make this catalogue, but the price of that decision is vague. After a while it becomes impossible for the reciprocating parties to settle the score so to speak, and a lasting network of mutual indebtedness is created fuelling further reciprocity. And so, in this case there is reciprocity both between Travel Tours and the airlines and between Travel Tours and the travel agencies. The value created is also moving towards a value-in-use. This is still a case of value-in-exchange in the sense that the value of the service product is designed in a back office and then put on the market, but as the product is also co-created with users and the value of a catalogue comes into effect when it is used by the travel agencies and shown to end users, there are also elements of value-in-use.

At Travel Tours they valued the unofficial reciprocity and were looking to increase it. In some cases it would lead to direct profits; for example they were looking into selling transportation from the destination airport to the hotel. In other cases it had a supportive function of the core service product; for example the online flight price lists in the software system. The employee creating these entered, changed and erased prices based on mails from the airlines, but also based on reactions coming either via the helpdesk or from the travel agencies directly in the form of emails or telephone calls, stating either that something was wrong or asking questions; in other words, based on reciprocity of information given and actions expected in return. Lastly, there were also cases, like the catalogue creation process described above, where the extra reciprocity process was assumed to give them a competitive advantage. The observations also show how certain instances of reciprocity were dependent on or even instigated by other processes of reciprocity. In that case, the investment was often already paid for. The following observations of the educational institution provided by Travel Tours will show how important it was to Travel Tours to play an active and central part in the streams of unofficial reciprocity even when these were made a deficit rather than a profit.

## EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: EDUCATION

One of the many side activities of Travel Tours was providing an education the employees in the travel agencies. For this purpose, Travel Tours has a training school which offers courses in

IATA certification, Amadeus and Worldspan (the airline ticket software systems) and other courses. The topics included price calculation, geography, marketing and so on. The CEO stated that as this is the only certified education of this type in the sector, there is a demand for this. He recounted that the travel agency association originally provided these courses, but as they stopped, a private school was started; but this was also discontinued. After this Travel Tours hired someone to teach the courses and bought the school. The employee responsible for the school explained that they now ran it in a reduced form which only offers courses (rather than being a full administrative unit in its own right). She also had other functions at Travel Tours, so the course education primarily took place as evening classes. The course catered to different users. The CEO explained that normally, apprentices in travel agencies had to pass another education from a school of commerce, but that in his view the education offered there was of poor quality. Therefore Travel Tours and some travel agencies only hired trainees as they were not acquired to get that education, but instead they were required to pass the course on the Travel Tours trainee school. The courses offered by the latter were also directed at those who wished to start up a travel agency. The CEO admitted that the school was not making any profits, and the employee running the courses also noted that the attendance numbers were decreasing. She explained that they had advertised the courses, but then sighingly remarked that “the need is huge, but the interest is not there”.

## ANALYSIS

As the school is not making profits and the person employed to run it also has other job functions in Travel Tours, these are not the main reasons for Travel Tours to run it. Rather there are two other reasons having to do with generalised exchange (Bagozzi 1975) and the total ongoing service offering (Grönroos 2007). As the participants of the courses pay for these, this might resemble a simple direct exchange in Bagozzi’s sense (1975); but since the school is not generating a profit, the reasons of Travel Tours for running it rather have to do with generalised exchange (Bagozzi 1975) or generalised reciprocity (Sahlins 1972). The motivations of such a pattern are less altruistic than they might appear. Although providing the courses is assumed to help the entire travel business community (which in itself is also to Travel Tours’ advantage), teaching them also provides Travel Tours with ties to both their own users and other travel agencies which are potential users. In other words, although generalised this is still reciprocity as Travel Tours expect something in return, in this case social relations and a central position of knowledge, as well as the prestige of being the only organisation providing the courses. There is also another reason for running the school. Grönroos has stated that a service organisation wishing to engage in relationship marketing



must offer other supportive services to their main core service (2007: 30). Running the school does exactly that, it provides Travel Tours with another bond of unofficial reciprocity with their users and thereby they expand their total ongoing service offering. And so, regarding the division of Grönroos (2007, and also service marketing literature in general) between exchange and relation, the empirical data have shown both exchange and relationships, yet still within the spectrum of reciprocity. The dwindling attendance numbers and interest also show that there are limits to the different kinds of formal reciprocity which can be initiated by a service organisation; apparently the school courses did not generate enough interest in the users. So in addition to the official reciprocity there are a number of unofficial but related kinds of reciprocity, but there is always the risk that one kind fails. This does not threaten the existence of the organisation as the unofficial reciprocity is not part of the core service offering or “reciprocity offering”.

It does, however, show an important difference between official and unofficial formal reciprocity. Official reciprocity is the livelihood of the organisation, its core service or “reciprocity offering”; unofficial reciprocity is also a formal activity and part of the total ongoing service offering (Grönroos 2007), but in a supportive role. As mentioned above, the unofficial reciprocity can have the aim of generating profits (for example transportation from the airport to the hotel), can be an important support of the main service offered (updating lists of flight prices), or can benefit the organisation in other ways thereby giving it a competitive advantage (making catalogues, providing courses). Furthermore, the interchanges taking place through the service encounters were both exchange in Bagozzi’s (1975) and Grönroos’ (2007) sense of singular equal and relatively simultaneous transactions, but there were also interactions and relationships in a formal economic sense. The services may be exchanged for money, but they were also performed in a way so that a positive ongoing relationship could be built up and maintained. In other words, there was an expectation of continued exchange and an obligation to continue these processes; in essence there was reciprocity (Malinowski 1922, Mauss 1925). In this way, reciprocity encompasses both exchange as a single service performed obligating the user to reciprocate, and relationships as more complex ongoing service offerings engaging the user in more long-term series of interchanges and a “mutual way of thinking” between user and provider (Grönroos 2007: 36). Therefore there are many different types of reciprocity in which Travel Tours engages besides the series of transactions in their core areas such as issuing tickets and putting a handling fee on top of price. The multitude of different kinds of formal reciprocity going on in the service encounters of Travel Tours shows the many elements of which the “total, ongoing service offering” (Grönroos 2007: 31) consists. It

also shows how complex service encounters are, and how many different elements of reciprocity are involved over the course of time.

Nevertheless, both the official and unofficial varieties are formal reciprocity, they provide a concrete service with the expectation that the counterpart will live up to their obligation of reciprocating something else in return. But there are also other kinds of reciprocity going on through the service encounters. These are not formal in the sense that they offer a service in return for money or something similar; rather, they are informal and take place on different levels or layers which can be more symbolic and even less tangible than the formal (but are not necessarily so). One such layer is the interpersonal level; here processes of social reciprocity take place, and they will now be addressed.

### **Social Reciprocity**

Social reciprocity takes place on a collective level. It is an exchange of informal phenomena through interaction and communication. It often takes the form of interpersonal statements and social interaction. It can express group belonging, a particular status of a person (for example being powerful or accepted), or any social relation; as well as convey a social image of oneself or someone else. This kind of reciprocity is often either overlooked in service theory, or it is conceptualised as employee attitude or the like; but more than this it involves processes of reciprocity between the service provider and the users. It could be described as chit-chat or small talk and spare time activities which serve to create social bonds between those involved. Below is observation data of two cases of social reciprocity.

### **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: HELPDESK AND THE AIRLINES**

During the period of observation, there was one metaphor which kept reappearing in the statements of both Travel Tours employees and employees in the travel agencies. It was the metaphor of family. The CEO explained that because of the limited number and size of the travel agencies and the extremely limited number of tour operators like themselves, everyone knew everyone else and it was "like one big family". Employees in other departments used the same metaphor, and so did employees in the travel agencies which were interviewed. Likewise, an

employee in the hotel section of the helpdesk department stated that out of all the travel agencies that used them, there were 20-30 which the hotel section was mostly in contact with. She explained that the employees in Travel Tours felt they knew those better and that she thought Travel Tours had a “familiar and friendly relation” to most of the employees in those travel agencies. In fact, they also met up outside working hours during the summer for barbecues or around Christmas for a traditional Christmas lunch. She confided that “that also helps creating those bonds that we have”. During many of the phone calls observed between helpdesk and such travel agencies, the first minute or two consisted of a concrete reciprocation of phrases of politeness, apologies, questions, comments and so on; for example “how are you doing, is everything well?” or “I’m sorry, it’s been so busy over here today, have you guys been busy too?” and so on.

The travel agency business is divided into business travel agencies of which there are very few, only 5-10 and leisure travel agencies of which there are 300-450 according to the head of sales. He explained that due to the fragmented structure of the business and numerous travel agencies, the airlines, which are mostly large international companies, do not have the means of reaching such a vast number. Especially the many small travel agencies are difficult for the airlines to reach, but many of these small ones use tour operators such as BK. Therefore, the airlines used the tour operators to get connected with the travel agencies. The head of sales described that the airlines used social gatherings to which many travel agencies were invited. As Travel Tours had the contacts to the travel agencies, they offered to host and organise it, and the airlines would then pay the expenses. Such events could take place in the large modern lunch room and on the roof terrace and would usually feature both food and social mingling as well as a presentation by the airline which could vary from someone saying a few sentences to a more extensive presentation.

## ANALYSIS

Social reciprocity often takes place in a more intangible and indefinable form than formal reciprocity, although it can also have a very concrete form such as when the social interaction is organised as above. The motivation for participating in social reciprocity is linked to the perceived social benefits which “make people feel closer to one another or portray a desired image to others” (Paul et al. 2009). This is what the family-metaphor expresses, it is not just social relations but a group belonging. Those included gain a special status as one of the family, and so the travel agencies are cast in a positive image, which also reflects positively on the sender of that image, Travel Tours. In this way, relationships are enacted through social reciprocity as seen in the small talk of the helpdesk employees. As this setting is in a saturated and mature market of business-to-business relations in the service sector, it completely fulfils all the criteria set by

Grönroos (2007) on when to engage in relationship marketing. The phrases and comments are more than polite, they express an attitude of trust and caring, a “mutual way of thinking” (2007: 36), and thereby reflect a mindset of mutual commitment on both a formal and a social level. However, it should be emphasised that this was not relationship marketing in an instrumental sense, but social reciprocity in a natural organic sense. The small talk was not strategically designed deliberately as a relationship marketing strategy, but rather it was social reciprocity which grew organically from the setting because of the right conditions as expressed in the family metaphor; it was not forced but sincere. As Malinowski has remarked, participants in reciprocity often only know the processes with which they are directly involved, they do not see the larger pattern of reciprocity (1922: 83). The helpdesk employees engaged in the small talk not because they intentionally wished to take part in some elaborate scheme of social reciprocity, but because this was simply how they related to many of the users. Another characteristic of the relationship model is value-in-use of a service, rather than a value-in-exchange designed in the back office, and the social reciprocity taking place during the daily service encounters of the helpdesk implemented and increased this value-in-use both by helping the users and thereby making it easier for the users to use the service, and by making it pleasant to ask for and receive such help.

On the social level the reciprocity aspects become quite clear. As politeness and care is expressed by metaphors and phrases, the receiver is obliged to reciprocate or he or she will appear impolite and uncaring. Social reciprocity is also the motivation for Travel Tours to host the social gatherings for the airlines. Using the practical excuse that they have the necessary connections to the travel agencies, Travel Tours creates a forum for social exchange between both themselves and their suppliers, and between themselves and their users. In this way, both will feel obligated to use Travel Tours’ services. Malinowski (1922) has described in detail how reciprocity involves not only certain rules, but also special customs and ceremonies during which to take place; the promotion parties were one such type of ceremony which provided an occasion for the creation and maintenance of social reciprocity. From the empirical data, it was impossible to say which created or caused which, the reciprocity or the relations, they went inseparably together like the proverbial chicken and egg. But often the social reciprocity was not an activity in its own right, but rather an aspect of interaction and communication. Using a series of empirical examples, we will now convey how this functioned as an aspect of these.

## EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: VARIOUS CASES OF SOCIAL RECIPROCITY AS AN ASPECT

Some examples of the social reciprocity as an integrated aspect of other kinds of reciprocity have already been touched upon. When asked why Travel Tours ran the courses mentioned in the formal reciprocity section, the CEO stated that “it’s a marketing thing” implying the social motivation of it. Similarly, in choosing to create one catalogue over another, Travel Tours helped out certain airlines and travel agencies and in a sense did them a favour. Another example was the general advice and guidance provided by the helpdesk which had social aspects to it. In fact, a helpdesk employee explained that in situations where a travel agency needed to change a ticket booking after a deadline had been passed, helpdesk employees would sometimes step in on behalf of the travel agency and negotiate this with the airline because they wanted to help them.

But more than this, social interaction can also help the communication of more formal phenomena. For example, an employee in the IT department recounted that he had been called out to a travel agency which had an urgent problem. During the three days he spent with the users solving the problem, many other issues were raised and questions posed, which on his opinion would not have come to the fore otherwise. Similarly, the head of sales explained how ideas for innovation often came from users and suppliers through the salesmen who had direct face-to-face contact with these and therefore could interact in a more informal way. The ideas typically came in an oral form. Several helpdesk employees also stated that ideas for innovation could come when they were talking with the users on the phone or writing emails back and forth. Finally, the catalogue production department had direct personal contact with both suppliers and users and the head of the department reported a similar impression; that ideas were often stated during informal meetings as well as during conversation before and after these meetings. Even the CEO acknowledged the social nature of the entire business. He stated that the “users sponsor us with [several] millions per year” by using Travel Tours and not a competitor. Looking back at the history of the organisation he also remarked that “one of the most important things for us is that we have had the suppliers as our ambassadors”.

## ANALYSIS

The “marketing thing” statement by the CEO was a way of expressing that the courses gave Travel Tours social connections with the users, the travel agencies. Both in the sense that they had a central social standing in the business as they were the only ones offering the courses, but also in a more specific sense as those educated went on to either work in travel agencies or start one up.

In either case, it induced social relations with users and potential users. Likewise, the advice and help of the helpdesk could be considered social reciprocity or at least there were social aspects to that reciprocity as there was no direct price for it, it was given willingly free of charge both to help ease the use of the formal services offered, but also as a favour, to bond travel agencies closer to them. When helpdesk employees negotiate on behalf of the travel agencies there is both a formal aspect as this helps a ticket sale (and thereby Travel Tours get their handling fee) and a social aspect of helping the travel agencies and keeping good social relations. These are processes of reciprocity and mutual obligation (Mauss 1925). As the travel agency approaches the helpdesk, they expect or at least hope for some assistance in making their service function properly, and when the helpdesk provides this, they might expect other things such as loyalty, good social relations and future sales in return. And as the examples of the IT employee and the statements of the head of sales show, social reciprocity also changes the nature and extent of formal reciprocity as the informal interaction induces a more rich communication through which the user may state hitherto unspoken issues or questions or ideas. Similar processes happened in the cases of the helpdesk and the catalogue production department, wherever there was more extensive contact with users (and suppliers) which included social reciprocity. Furthermore, in a free market with several competitors, the user usually has a choice; that choice encompasses social aspects as it is unlikely that most companies today would do business with an organisation which they disliked. It is this social choice and the decision of the users to continue to do business with Travel Tours which the CEO acknowledged in his use of the word “sponsor”. He also expressed the importance of the social aspects of reciprocity in his example of the suppliers being Travel Tours’ “ambassadors”, indeed loyalty is more than economic calculation, it also has a distinctly social side to it.

One might say that social reciprocity works as a lubricant, in that it induces communication which not only eases any possible friction in interaction of formal reciprocity (service use), but also increases the likelihood that users will go beyond formal reciprocity and for example give more details or state ideas for innovation. In other words, many cases of reciprocity observed were a combination of utilitarian and symbolic exchange, what Bagozzi termed mixed exchange (1975). The social reciprocity is rarely done directly and for money or a similar reward, it is rather a symbolic or mediated experience engaged in for what it means to the participants (Levy 1959). And it serves a very important purpose which is to bond the users closer to the provider. Not just on a formal business level, but also on an informal level of social interaction and knowledge of each other’s organisations (as well as partner organisations such as airlines). In his explanation of

relationship marketing, Grönroos states that “although exchanges still take place, in ongoing relationships with continuous contacts between buyer/user and seller/supplier it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine when an exchange took place” (2007: 25). This expresses an institutionalisation of the mutual way of thinking. The empirical material shows how social relations, group belonging, status, image, and so on, are expressed through an intangible reciprocity of symbolic statements and informal interaction. It is this which constitutes social reciprocity. And the many processes of social reciprocity taking place during the service encounters between Travel Tours and the travel agencies have the effect of creating interrelations between them. Part of the social reciprocity is calculated and organised, as in when Travel Tours hosts promotion parties; but to a large extent the social reciprocity is simultaneously creating and growing naturally from a positive and socially active environment. In addition, there is one more layer of reciprocity which is also informal, but unlike social reciprocity this kind takes place between single individuals; this is the level of personal reciprocity, which will now be addressed.

### **Personal Reciprocity**

The third and last level of reciprocity found in the service encounters of Travel Tours was personal reciprocity, and it also stretched beyond these encounters. It is characterised by taking place between individual persons and often (but not necessarily) holds an element of emotion in its content. It is often symbolic, but in a psychological way. At this level one finds for example statements of friendship and feelings of acceptance and satisfaction. Like social reciprocity, it can be seen in separate processes, but is more often seen as an aspect of the reciprocity processes taking place. This aspect will now be described and analysed.

### **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: HELPDESK AND SALES**

One relatively salient example of personal reciprocity appeared during the observations of the helpdesk department. An employee answered many of the phone calls with phrases such as “oh hi hon” and “hello sweetie” after having established who she was talking to, and generally seemed very friendly and personable during phone conversations. Not only was she laughing and small talking, she also asked questions about how the caller was doing. She explained that she felt she knew

many of these people because she talked to them so often, despite the fact that she had never met many of these face to face. Several other employees showed similar behaviour, sometimes doing little personal favours for users they knew well such as correcting something in the software system so they did not have to. Furthermore, as explained earlier the Travel Tours employees met some of the users during the summer for barbecues or around Christmas for a traditional lunch, which helped create some ties. These ties were not just of a social but also of a personal nature. One helpdesk employee mentioned that she also met up with some of the travel agency employees in her own spare time, and that in fact this was very common for her colleagues too. In addition to the metaphor of being “familiar” the employees at Travel Tours and the travel agencies also frequently used the word “friendly” about other employees at Travel Tours and the travel agencies.

It was, however, not just in helpdesk that people had personal ties, this was the case across all departments of Travel Tours. And these ties were important to them. In talking about the personal ties inside the business, the head of sales stated: “I have many friends who tell me: Get out of that travel business. You can make a lot more money other places. But I can’t give this up”. Several other employees expressed similar views. In fact, several (including the head of sales) stated that the business was very intertwined<sup>1</sup>; employees at Travel Tours and the travel agencies were friends with each other, many changed jobs between on and the other, and many even ended up marrying each other.

## ANALYSIS

As the method of listening to live calls at the helpdesk did not include interviewing the users on the phone, it was not possible to determine whether those who called the helpdesk employee shared her amicable sentiments, but despite whether these were real friendships or not, the greetings and phrases used were still symbolic signs of friendship which were reciprocated in kind, and so constituted personal reciprocity. The social occasions involving employees at both Travel Tours and the travel agencies show that there are a number of informal bonds or ties of both a collective social and an individual personal nature between them. This is an important motivation for working there for some like the head of sales who in his statement quoting his friends expressed that the personal contacts and friendships were valued higher by him than money. So in this case there is reciprocity at the personal level too; as individual politenesses, signs of friendship and personal ties were offered, these were reciprocated in kind and scope.

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<sup>1</sup> The specific word used by the head of sales was “indspist” which is almost untranslatable but is defined by The Danish Dictionary (<http://ordnet.dk/ddo>) as a group of people “that work closely together, support and protect each other and reject all external interference or criticism”.



This concurs with Malinowski's conceptualisation of reciprocity in which it creates lasting bonds and ultimately the formation and maintenance of a community (1922). Though some examples of personal reciprocity were seen as such by the employees, others were less obviously to them. For example, the friendships they had were seen as private despite being created through the professional contact. Likewise, in his analyses of kinship structures, Sahlins explains that one of the basic phenomena exchanged are women (1972); the marriages could thus be said to be part of (in this case very) personal reciprocity. However, like the friendships these were not necessarily seen as such; again echoing Malinowski's statement that those participating in reciprocity do not always see the complete pattern in its entirety (1922: 83). Nevertheless, an important point of Sahlins (1972) was that reciprocity creates not only a systemic integration (as reflected in the family metaphor and the exchange of staff members between Travel Tours and the travel agencies) but also friendships since it involves repeated contact with others. This corresponds with the personal friendships observed.

Furthermore, using Bagozzi's division of utilitarian and symbolic exchange (1975), personal reciprocity involved both utilitarian exchange (such as personal favours) and symbolic exchange (such as signs of friendship); in fact it was an integrated part of social and formal reciprocity. There is, however, one point at which the observations digress from the literature. Unlike the analysis of repeat purchase drivers by Paul et al., which discusses psychological benefits "that satisfy important intrinsic, self-oriented goals" (2009: 225), personal reciprocity implies a less instrumental conceptualisation; it rather describes close personal ties. As a concept, personal reciprocity is less concerned with goals but rather with genuine emotions, personal interrelations, friendships, marriages, and so on.

In addition to the three kinds of reciprocity which have been analysed so far – formal, social and personal – there are some further themes regarding the way reciprocity occurred and was managed as found in this case. They cut across the division of reciprocity into three kinds and will therefore now be discussed separately.

## **Themes Of Reciprocity**

In this section we will analyse two further themes of reciprocity which cut across the tripartite division made in the previous sections. The first concerns the ways employees at Travel

Tours engaged in reciprocity. At times employees in Travel Tours were very conscious about the reciprocity which they provided and took measures to reify and institutionalise these processes. The second theme concerns how one kind of reciprocity was often combined with another, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, there were also examples of one kind being intentionally or unintentionally disguised as another. These themes will now be addressed.

### **Conscious Reciprocity**

In some of the networks, Travel Tours naturally had a redistributive position due to higher levels of experience. But in some cases, Travel Tours actively and consciously attempted to consolidate their role as the central hub. So Travel Tours actively created and took such a central position, for example by helping travel agencies with the airline ticket booking software or, as described earlier, through training travel agency employees. As the CEO remarked, the courses were not making a profit but “it is a marketing thing”. As this was the only place offering the courses, it helped establishing Travel Tours as a central hub of reciprocity involving knowledge. And there were further examples of such a conscious approach to reciprocity.

### **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: CONSCIOUS DECISIONS OF RECIPROCITY**

At Travel Tours, employees were sometimes very conscious about the decisions they made to engage in a relation or project. One example of this has already been mentioned. It was found in a remark by the head of the catalogue department about the decision to make a catalogue when prompted by a major airline: “If we help them, then they will probably also help us”. Sometimes the travel agencies would also consciously use Travel Tours as a middle man towards the air lines. For example, a female helpdesk employee explained that if a travel agency wished to change or get a refund for a ticket after the deadline has passed, they would need to contact the airline directly. Though some did this themselves, other travel agencies preferred that Travel Tours and the helpdesk department did this for them, which she described as “calling in a favour”. Though there were rejections, in most cases they were allowed to do so. A similar example was found within the area of hotel bookings. A helpdesk employee explained that in case a travel agency wishes to make an annulment of booked rooms, Travel Tours could give a full refund and they could even wave their own booking fee. But this was considered an extra service for the user and such cases were

registered at the bookkeeping department, which kept lists of the favours Travel Tours had made. These lists could then later be used when the travel agencies contacted Travel Tours.

In some cases this went beyond being very conscious, some reciprocity processes were made explicit or regular. A helpdesk employee showed how they often sent oral agreements out to the travel agencies in writing so that the user would have proof of what was agreed, and to make sure there were no misunderstandings. This was something done regularly. The CEO explained about the intentions to make other things regular, such as a particular new edition of one of the software programs. He wanted to “sell it to the travel agencies”. The intention was “to tie them in with the system” by making them used to using it and get value from it.

## ANALYSIS

As seen from the catalogue example, in some cases the employees at Travel Tours were well aware of how the principle of reciprocity works, the (often delayed) obligation to reciprocate when something is given or performed. In that case it was a catalogue for a destination, airline or travel agency. And the employees at Travel Tours used this principle consciously, as when the helpdesk employees apply the same principle to their users, the travel agencies. When Travel Tours, which is a major hub in the business, steps in on behalf of a travel agency that needs some tickets or hotel rooms annulled, it is doing the travel agency a favour. One of the principles of Mauss’ conceptualisation of reciprocity is that the price of a favour is vague and it therefore becomes impossible to settle the score so to speak (1925). This is then the mechanism used by Travel Tours not just to put other parties in symbolic debt to them, but to create ongoing reciprocity processes with other parties, thereby putting Travel Tours in the exact central position discussed above.

This is done not just in a conscious, but even a strategic way as the example of the hotel room refunds and the bookkeeping department above shows; though the score may be impossible to settle, at least a score is kept in order to be used strategically later. Likewise, the reciprocity processes of the service encounters are documented by helpdesk, as in when they send out agreements in writing. Though this may be a formalisation of reciprocity for legal reasons, it nevertheless has the effect of making sure that the reciprocity agreed on does not vanish or is forgotten (in which case it might as well never have taken place). So the agreements are written down and thereby reified and lasting, and this lasting reciprocity is made explicit. Another form of reification – or, rather, intentions thereof – is found in the CEO’s statements on tying the travel

agencies in with the new edition of the software. Making it regularly used means the particular form of reciprocity is tied in with the relations between Travel Tours and the travel agencies, it becomes institutionalised and thereby reified. Again, this is a conscious decision and deliberate wish of Travel Tours. Mauss has described how exchanges are contractual as they involve the three obligations to give, receive and reciprocate; and it is the contractuality of these exchanges which the CEO and employees at Travel Tours use. No doubt, all other parties were equally conscious of their decisions to enter into a particular instance of reciprocity with Travel Tours. Nevertheless, by documenting or institutionalising and thereby reifying reciprocity processes and by using them consciously and strategically, Travel Tours are influencing future service encounters with the other parties; they are, in effect, ensuring a network of reciprocity centred on themselves as the redistributor. In Bagozzi's (1975) division of consciously and unconsciously designed exchange, there were examples of both at Travel Tours. In many cases the reciprocity was not a consciously strategic decision. For example, often social reciprocity was not consciously used, and in the case of personal reciprocity, there were personal favours but they were not used consciously in an overall strategic plan. In the above examples, however, there was a clear calculation of reciprocity for relation purposes.

### **Combination**

Of course, since the three different kinds of reciprocity discussed earlier were found at Travel Tours, this meant that they were generally combined in the service encounters and in the setting overall. But there were some cases where they were combined in specific instances or departments. And in some cases, one kind of reciprocity could also be disguised as another.

### **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS: COMBINATIONS AND GUISES OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF RECIPROCITY**

The IT department served several purposes. An employee explained that not only were employees expected to service the computers at Travel Tours and keep them up to date, they also had standing agreements of providing support to three travel agencies which were regular users. Also, they helped all travel agencies with any problems related to the airline ticket software systems

Amadeus and Worldspan, provided that access to these was bought through Travel Tours. In addition, they could also assist in case of acute problems. For example, as mentioned earlier, when a travel agency had an urgent problem a Travel Tours employee spent three days at the travel agency fixing the problem. Another travel agency had computers and printers set up so that they would auto-print e-tickets. In this way, the IT department employees would take time out of their already full schedules as a favour to help any travel agency asking for assistance. But according to the IT department employee, even the private laptops of employees in the travel agencies could be fixed by them in return for a bill, which happened 5-10 times in a month. In other words, the IT department had service encounters involving formal, social and personal reciprocity.

Another example of a department combining different kinds of reciprocity was the helpdesk. During phone calls and in emails, the formal business which was the reason for the calls or mails was combined with social chatter and even personal statements and questions, as described earlier. When asked about the very friendly and sometimes personal tone of communication, some employees would explain as described in the section about personal reciprocity. However, there were some who said it was more politeness than real friendship. One helpdesk employee explained that there were too many users to know them all personally, so for her it was really a form more than actual content. There were other examples of using one form of reciprocity instead of or in addition to another, such as the social events organised by the airlines and hosted by Travel Tours. Even the CEO portrayed one form of reciprocity as another in his remark quoted earlier, that the users were “sponsoring” Travel Tours with a large amount every year. In talking about future developments, he also remarked that the intention was to “sell deeper into the user” and “get as many threads into the user” as possible, both on a formal and on a personal level.

## ANALYSIS

As discussed earlier, one kind of reciprocity is very often combined with another kind, and they can often be aspects of the same processes rather than clear-cut separate types. Sometimes, however, several kinds of reciprocity are intentionally combined as in the example of the user-oriented consultant-like nature of the IT department, which provides services on many levels to both Travel Tours departments and the travel agency users. Here, formal reciprocity is combined with special solutions and favours for the travel agencies as a form of social reciprocity, and even individual employees at the travel agencies can get service from the Travel Tours IT department. The latter, however, is formal reciprocity as a service is exchanged for a bill, not as an expression of personal friendships. Nevertheless, the many tasks and purposes of the IT department are an example what Bagozzi called mixed exchange, which is a mixture between a utilitarian and a

symbolic exchange (1975:36). In the IT department they combined these different kinds of reciprocity.

There was also a similar, albeit slightly different, phenomenon taking place in the service encounters of Travel Tours. This was one kind of reciprocity appearing in the guise of another. For example in the helpdesk department examples above, formal reciprocity was cast informally in the form of social and even personal reciprocity. Or in the example of the social gatherings, the airlines and Travel Tours cast a formal reciprocity, trying to increase sales to the travel agencies, as social reciprocity, a party or social gathering. This combination corresponds to Malinowski's description of the Kula trade as "on the borderland between the commercial and the ceremonial" (1922:513); or in the terminology used here, the borderland between formal reciprocity and social or even personal reciprocity. As previously shown, the partnership was to the advantage of both the airlines which got increased sales and Travel Tours which was thereby able to take a central position. In both cases, the Travel Tours employees were using one form of reciprocity to gain or enhance another form of reciprocity: the airlines and the employees at Travel Tours used social reciprocity to gain formal reciprocity, and some helpdesk employees used social and personal reciprocity to improve communication and rapport with the users. Likewise, the remark of the CEO about the users sponsoring Travel Tours acknowledged the importance of social reciprocity to formal reciprocity, in this case how loyalty was more than economic calculation. Similarly, his hopes for future developments reflected a wish to combine several kinds of reciprocity or "threads into the user". In his analysis of reciprocity, Mauss (1925) discussed what he called total prestations, contractual gifts such as dowries that were at once economic, moral, religious, legal, social and interpersonal; in other words they combined different kinds of reciprocity. The examples from Travel Tours analysed here are not as thoroughly absolute total prestations; nevertheless, in combining several levels of reciprocity, they too become contractual. And being contractual means binding in the sense that reciprocation is considered obligatory or at least expected. The importance of reciprocity (or lack thereof) for stating ideas for innovation during service encounters will now be discussed.

# Consequences For Innovation

In this section, the importance of reciprocating and the consequences of failing to do so will be discussed. It is divided into two parts; both are concerned with the input given by the travel agencies and the feedback on this input which Travel Tours does or does not provide. The former, however, analyses the processes as seen from a user perspective concerned with the input they provide, while the latter analyses the processes as seen from a provider perspective concerned with the feedback they provide on the inputs received.

## Input

The travel agencies did provide ideas for innovation as well as other input such as various corrections. However, the user reactions to the response they were getting from Travel Tours tended to be negative.

### EMPIRICAL OBSERVATION: USER PERSPECTIVES ON INPUT AND FEEDBACK

The travel agencies provided many examples of both needed corrections and wishes for changes, such as for example adding prices for children or moving the general remarks form containing important information up on the screen so that it would be easier to see. There were several ways in which they could provide such input to Travel Tours. For example, one travel agency described a meeting with a Travel Tours employee: In preparation for the meeting, the travel agency employees had made a list of needed corrections and wishes, and during the meeting these issues were raised. The Travel Tours employee had listened attentively, but after 3-4 months, no changes had been made according to the travel agency employees. A travel agency employee was asked if they passed ideas on Travel Tours and replied: "but that's in fact what we have... they did get them already". One result of the meeting was that an email address had been created, which the travel agency employees could write to with such issues. One travel agency employee replied that they had used this mail only once, another that they had used it for a short while. They could not immediately recollect the mail address and spoke ironically about it. The travel agency employees noted that nothing had happened yet in regards to the issues raised at the meeting, except for the creation of the mail address. Likewise with the list they had made in preparation for the meeting and given to the Travel Tours employee, no changed had come about after 3-4 months.

The phone was also used as a contact point around 25 times per day according to the travel agency employees. This was often in urgent cases or if the issue irritated the employee too much, or it could be a question which the travel agency employees were unable to answer themselves. In general these questions were answered immediately if possible, otherwise Travel Tours would look into the matter. In some cases the travel agency employees would also forward mails from end users to Travel Tours. Another example of the problematic process of input and feedback was the automated information given by a PNR number. Every flight booking has a PNR number and upon entry into the Travel Tours data system, such a number should automatically import other information such as names of travellers, flight information, and so on. The travel agency employees stated that it had not functioned properly for two years. They had complained about this repeatedly, after which it had sometimes functioned for a week and then stopped functioning properly again. To the question of what form of feedback they got when complaining about the missing PNR functionality, the answer was: "nothing else than that they will try to look into it and then..." followed by a shrug. She added "and I feel like, I can't be bothered phoning them anymore now, it doesn't matter now. Because it goes down anyway".

Likewise, commenting on the missing prices for children, a travel agency employee stated that they had written to Travel Tours "840 times that we want the children's prices to be entered [number was a metaphor, not an accurate] ... I could come with some ideas on, what could be improved right now, because I've both had them you know and sent them off and it's kind of... [knocks on the table] so now I'm just waiting for something to happen". When asked about feedback in general from Travel Tours a travel agency employee replied "but you don't get any you know. You write that you would like to and 'couldn't we do this' and then nothing really happens." The employee was asked what Travel Tours replied and she said: "'we'll look into it' and then nothing really happens". The travel agency employees were struggling to understand why there was inadequate feedback and why issues raised were not solved: "but I don't get that it could be that hard moving a text... higher up for example [about the general remarks form] ... but it's worked before, so I don't see, why it can't work again right? [about the PNR functionality] ". Or as one employee remarked when asked what it would mean to them if there was more feedback and results on their input: "That would be super. It would be ten times easier for me and they wouldn't get so many phone calls every time I need a children's price. That's where it's at right? [...] So it would be easier for them. They would not have to deal with a lot of phone calls and would have time for all the emails coming in. And easier for me to give the price to the customers right away and not have to sit and call them all the time".

When asked if anything motivated them to pass ideas and information on, one travel agency employee responded "not at the moment I would have to honestly say". However, the travel agency employees stated that they were almost always asked how things work after something had been changed. Furthermore, some ideas were implemented. For example, end user reviews of the hotels at which they had stayed were passed on by one travel agency; sometimes in the form of the letter or email from the end user, which was then sent directly to Travel Tours by the travel agency. An employee at that travel agency remarked that "we really shouldn't, but on the other hand we might as



well do it and tell the rest of them [the competing travel agencies] that use Travel Tours that this hotel it doesn't live up to the standards it once did". Likewise with hotels of good quality with the travel agency had discovered and passed on to the local agents and Travel Tours. When asked whether they would then be added to the list of hotels, a travel agency employee replied "sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't". She added that she went into the system from time to time to check whether they had made it.

## ANALYSIS

As seen, ideas and suggestions for improvement from the travel agencies were inspired both by errors and lacks, such as the missing children's prices and PNR functionality, and by feedback from end users, such as in the case of the hotels. The inputs came in many forms such as face-to-face meetings; in written form such as the list mentioned above, or in emails either ad hoc or sent to the special mail address discussed above; it could also be via phone calls; or they could simply pass along feedback from end users.

However, such input was often met with what one might call structural inertia; an inability or unwillingness by the complex structure consisting of Travel Tours and their computer systems to handle or respond adequately to the input. In general, the travel agency employees observed and interviewed felt there was an inadequate or even lack of response from Travel Tours in many cases. This was ubiquitous as seen from the many examples above such as the lack of response to the list and to the critical comments made at the meeting with the Travel Tours employee as well as to the request to move the general remarks form. In some cases, even when things did get changed, they quickly stopped functioning again, such as in the case of the PNR functionality. The inertia consisted of two elements, a lack of response to the input given, and a lack of consequences in terms of changes or at least explanations. That the travel agency employees get told "nothing else than that they will try to look into it" shows their disappointment; and replies such as "'we'll look into it' and then nothing really happens" shows the both a lack of response to the input and the expectation of further repercussions. Such repercussions, however, frequently fail to materialise. For example, the metaphor of having written to Travel Tours "840 times" shows the lack of expected consequences of input given; and the response to the question about passing on ideas was that "they did get them already" meaning that input had been given and not enough consequences happened. This lack of response and lack of consequences correspond to Mauss'

(1925) division of reciprocity into three obligations of giving, receiving and reciprocating. The lack of response on the part of Travel Tours is then a failure to fulfil the obligation to receive; the travel agency employees do not feel that they have truly been heard, that their input has been received. And the lack of consequences of the input is a failure to reciprocate; what the travel agency employees want in return for their input is change, correction, or improvement. The inertia is then a lack of reciprocal feed-back and action.

The structural inertia on the part of Travel Tours and the data systems lead to disappointment and a sense of futility on the part of the travel agency employees. One result of the meeting referred to above was the creation of a mail address at which Travel Tours could be contacted, but one travel agency employee had only used it once and another used it but only for a short while. In other words, if the input is not received, then it seems futile to continue to give such input. So even fulfilment of the first obligation of reciprocity according to Mauss (1925), the obligation to give, is impeded. Corresponding to the two elements of inertia, the resulting reactions of futility were also twofold. To the first element, the lack of response, the reaction was a resigned passivity in which the travel agency employees “can’t be bothered phoning them anymore now, it doesn’t matter now. Because it goes down anyway”. The sense of futility means that ideas for innovation are increasingly unlikely to be passed on. In the words of one travel agency employee: “I could come with some ideas” but they are “just waiting for something to happen” before they have any motivation to do so; and so the futility is expressed as a resigned passivity. In addition to this passivity, there was also a second element of futility, which was frustration. This was both a frustration with the lack of feedback on input because “you don’t get any you know. You write that you would like to and ‘couldn’t we do this’ and then nothing really happens.”; but it was also a frustration and disbelief in the lack of results of the input given: “I don’t get that it could be that hard moving a text... higher up for example ... but it’s worked before, so I don’t see, why it can’t work again right?” Like the two elements of inertia, the two reactions of futility correspond to the obligations to receive and reciprocate. A failure by Travel Tours to properly acknowledge a reception of the input given by the travel agencies leads to the reaction of resigned passivity by the employees, and the lack of reciprocation in terms of consequences of the input leads to the reaction of frustration. Together these two reactions make up the sense of futility in the travel agency employees reflecting the lack of response and lack of consequences of which the structural inertia consists.

It was not the case that no input was heard and no changes were made. In fact, as stated by a travel agency employee above, both ideas by the travel agencies and end user feedback were passed on to Travel Tours. However, in the opinions of the travel agency employees interviewed and observed, this did not happen often or fast enough. As one employee explained, they were often asked about their opinion on new features – but after these had been implemented. Add to this that the employee suggesting new hotels had to do regular searches herself to find out if her input had been implemented, and the statements that it would be easier for both Travel Tours and the travel agencies if the corrections and ideas for innovation were implemented, and the result was a clear frustration and disbelief. Using Grönroos' (2007) division, observation and interviews showed that there was a quite strong relationship between Travel Tours and the users in this case, and the many instances of reciprocity did induce ideas for innovation being stated. However, this in itself did not ensure that these ideas were implemented. And so, even with formal, social and personal reciprocity, relations were not always satisfactory. So far, however, this has only been analysed from the perspective on the users and their input. We now turn to the perspective of the provider, Travel Tours, and their feedback on the input received.

## **Feedback**

One way of reciprocating communication is by giving feedback, and the importance of this will now be addressed. At Travel Tours, input from users was often given in the form of statements, criticism, questions, complaints, and so on. And ideas for innovations could be extracted from such communication. When such input was received, however, there were different feedback habits according to different employees in Travel Tours.

## **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATION: PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES ON USER INPUT AND FEEDBACK**

At Travel Tours, sometimes feedback was an inherent part of the reciprocity processes. An example already mentioned was the catalogues which were to an extent co-created with some travel agencies meaning user input and feedback to users were integrated in the process. At times the feedback could be immediate and brief. For example, an employee in the IT department explained that any ideas for innovation given by users were passed on to the head of sales and the user would

be told this immediately. At other times, feedback to the users was delayed. The employee who was correcting ticket prices in the software system explained that, when contacted either through helpdesk or directly by the users, she would answer any specific questions; but any general or more elaborate ideas, wishes, and so on, communicated by users, would be discussed internally in Travel Tours and the user would then get a feedback after a decision had been made.

But there were also cases where feedback was less institutionalised. For example, the head of sales mentioned that there was no regular procedure in that department for what was done with ideas for innovation. And according to the several Travel Tours employees, there was not any guarantees that the users would receive any feedback in some cases. For example, a helpdesk employee stated that often she would give the user the following message on the phone: "That's fine, we'll pass it on to our production department or sales department, and they will look at it whenever". The form in which the input arrives also influences what happens next. Another helpdesk employee explained that often it did not take the form of a statement or a question but a thought or comment, in which case no feedback was given the user and it was rarely passed on.

## ANALYSIS

Evidently, there were different approaches to giving feedback to users at Travel Tours. Sometimes, as in the case of the IT department, immediate and short one-time feedback was given to the user. Such a feedback pattern might satisfy any immediate expectations of courtesy, but it is not very good for continued reciprocity, as it ends the process by turning it into a simple single-transaction, in this case an innovation idea exchanged for a friendly response that the idea had been passed on. According to both Mauss (1925) and Malinowski (1922), an essential part of reciprocity is the mutual obligation into which the exchanging parties enter, but in immediate feedback patterns, the transaction and thereby the mutual obligation ends before the idea itself is properly addressed. Similarly, in many cases, such as in the sales and helpdesk department examples above, there were no regular procedures for capturing and handling innovation ideas. This meant that there was a high likelihood that the users would not receive any feedback at all, which according to one helpdesk employee's own admittance did happen. Whether immediate or no feedback pattern, the user will not receive the final results of the deliberations (if any) of the idea inside the service organisation (whether rejected or implemented). This was the case in Travel Tours: as the user had already been given a reaction, some Travel Tours employees considered the idea reciprocated with an answer. But in fact responses such as "we'll pass it on" only acknowledge that the idea has been received. The result was a failure to fulfil the expectations of a final answer, a failure to reciprocate.

Furthermore, as the Travel Tours employees consider the idea already reciprocated, there was no motivation for pursuing the idea further. In some cases, however, there was a third pattern of delayed feedback. As the employee who entered ticket prices raised issues and discussed ideas for innovation internally, before giving the user feedback after a final decision had been made, the user in these cases received a response not just to the statement of the idea or issue but addressing the matter itself. Following a delayed pattern of mutual obligation, such a feedback pattern also formed part of a process of reciprocity.

## **Discussion**

In analysing the processes of service encounters at Travel Tours and what they mean for innovation, we have used a different view angle than what has been traditionally used in service literature; we have analysed the service process as a social relation. This means that we have taken a basic look at the interchanges taking place and the socio-cultural context of obligations and expectations which they are part of. Thereby we have been able to catch new aspects of professional service encounters. The importance of the context has been pointed out in the service literature. For example, Gummesson has described relationship marketing as going beyond the individual functions inside a service firm and extending to “the total management of the network of the selling organization, the market and society” (quoted in Grönroos 2007: 42). In other words, the researcher must transcend the “text” of the empirical data, which has been done in this study by including the aforementioned socio-cultural context. The observations and interviews of this case study found that in the service encounters, there is a transcendence of the formal obvious reciprocity. Here social forms of reciprocity are added to it, and even individual emotional forms. The division into these three kinds of reciprocity resulting from the study must also be compared to the existing literature. Therefore this discussion will fall into two main parts. First the empirical findings will be discussed. Then the resulting division will be discussed in relation to the existing literature and concepts as outlined in the theory section.

## Empirical discussion

We will now discuss the implications of the empirical findings of reciprocity in the service encounters of Travel Tours; and how reciprocity and lack thereof affects the possibilities of Travel Tours to source user-based ideas for innovation through these encounters. First, the three kinds of reciprocity and the networks which they form part of will be discussed. Implications for innovation will then be discussed afterwards.

### Reciprocity

In each service encounter there are myriad possible processes of reciprocity, and the nature of these as well as the effect and consequences they have varies widely. In order to analyse them in a meaningful way, it is therefore necessary to create order of chaos so to speak, to classify them. This has in the service literature been done in various ways using various parameters. In this study, a division into three different kinds of reciprocity was made. This classification was based on the empirical data and as typical for empirical taxonomies, it does not comprise a sharp division into three clear categories without any exceptions; rather the three kinds of reciprocity are to be viewed as archetypes, categories with fuzzy edges and a certain amount of overlap. Nevertheless they serve to separate different elements in the processes of reciprocity analysed. Though not clear-cut, the categories are built around the following dividing lines. First there is the difference between formal and informal reciprocity. In service encounters, some processes are related to the service provision itself, they are often based on written or oral agreements and are durative in the sense that similar instances repeatedly take place. This is what we have termed formal reciprocity, and it is the most salient kind often involving clearly defined direct exchanges, although it can also take the form of generalised reciprocity. There is a further subdivision within this category. Some processes not only relate to, but *are* the core service provided; this is the official formal reciprocity as negotiated in contracts and advertised with a price. In addition there are more unofficial processes which serve to support and expand the service provided. A main difference between the official and unofficial processes is that without the former, there would be no service provision and so the core product of the service provider would not exist, whereas the latter are more peripheral and not strictly essential. In other words, unofficial formal reciprocity is nice-to-have, but official formal reciprocity is a need-to-have, an absolute must and the livelihood of the service provider. Both

kinds of formal reciprocity aim to produce a concrete result in terms of a service product which can be tangible or intangible.

But there are more processes of reciprocity in the service encounters of Travel Tours than those readily observed at first glance. On the other side of the formal/informal dividing line, one finds the informal reciprocity which is not directly related to creating the service product or exchanging it for money or similar, but rather consists of interpersonal interchanges which are often of symbolic nature. Nevertheless they can still be part of the service provision as they form part of the impression which the user is left with after the service encounter. Informal reciprocity is bisected by another important dividing line, that between reciprocity that of a social nature taking place in the open public realm between several parties and the more personal reciprocity taking place as part of a private sphere or direct relation between persons. Social reciprocity is collective in the sense that it often relates to a group of people, such as for example when an employee in Travel Tours tells a user that it is a busy day and asks the user how busy it is in their travel agency; in this case the state of an entire group of people at Travel Tours is compared to the state of another group of people at the travel agency. Another example shown is the promotion parties hosted by Travel Tours; in this case three groups of people are involved. In contrast, personal reciprocity takes place on an individual level. It is of a more exclusive and private nature and what is reciprocated is often psychological or even emotional, such as the signs of friendship given in the conversations of some helpdesk employees with some of the users, or the personal favours done for some, or even the resulting marriages in some cases. An important distinction between the two is that social reciprocity can take place for example as informal small talk from the very first service encounter whereas personal reciprocity often takes time to build up, such as the friendships between certain Travel Tours employees and certain users. Consequently the former can be more ephemeral and the latter more durative

Based on the dividing lines outlined here, the processes of reciprocity during service encounters were divided into the three different kinds of reciprocity, which can be summarised as follows:

#### Formal reciprocity:

- Formally defined in organisational statements and job descriptions
- More or less directly related to the service provision itself

- Tangible or intangible
- Often direct exchange (but not necessarily)
- Typically money paid for a service
- No social or emotional involvement
- Exists as official (directly related to core service provided) and unofficial (peripheral services, supportive and elaborative supplement)

Social reciprocity:

- informal reciprocity
- social relations
- collective level
- open to almost anyone
- public sphere
- typically not paid for, so rather generalised exchange in Bagozzi or Lévi-Strauss' sense
- communication and interaction between two or more persons or groups
- social structure (such as for example power structure)
- social standing such as group membership
- signals of status and position

Personal reciprocity:

- informal reciprocity
- personal relations
- individual level
- closed, exclusive to a select few
- private sphere
- rarely money involved
- psychological (e.g. signals of friendship)



- emotions
- often direct (can be indirect such as personal compliments said about someone who is not there)

As stated earlier, these archetypes can be either different kinds of occurrences of reciprocity or different aspects of the same occurrence of reciprocity. In practice it is less important to make such a distinction as it depends entirely on the specific occurrence.

Another important finding was that the reciprocity of Travel Tours followed certain patterns. Bagozzi describes complex exchange as a system “organized by an interconnecting web of relationships”, and it is along this web that formal, social and personal reciprocity take place (Bagozzi 1975: 33). Therefore this overall web is created by the “atoms” of interchange, the specific occurrences of reciprocity. As stated by Bagozzi, the web itself consists of relationships, and these relationships in turn unfold through encounters, during which reciprocity takes place. This means that encounters are actually rarely dyadic, in the sense that the reciprocity of the encounters depends on a vast network of other reciprocity processes. The web or network is very complex and follows several “rule sets” or patterns simultaneously. In the case of Travel Tours there have been examples of generalised exchange which is doing something for someone else without expecting something immediate in return; an example would be the catalogues. There have also been examples of complex exchange which is doing something for someone, who in return does something for someone else and so on in a long chain or circle; an example of this is the value chain of Travel Tours. A third pattern was redistribution, for example how Travel Tours functioned as a central hub of knowledge and news. There were other patterns too, all interlinking into a quite complex web or network of reciprocity.

On the level of individual participants this has several consequences as these participants are tied into the network by reciprocity. Taking the perspective of what could be called an independent versus an interdependent decision making process, in many situations decisions were made interdependently by participants in the sense that such decisions took into account the expectations of others such as the users and the obligations of for example frontline employees at Travel Tours. This is not to say that there were no independent decisions, but a large number of decisions took into consideration the rules of reciprocity. In fact, as pointed out earlier, employees at Travel Tours used the rules of reciprocity consciously to create and maintain relations, and to put

other participants in symbolic debt and thereby ensuring further reciprocity. As stated, this is the “fuel” of reciprocity so to speak, the never-ending and impossible-to-settle score. In many cases, employees at Travel Tours were less conscious or strategic about the social and personal reciprocity taking place (although there were examples of strategic use of for example social reciprocity). It was not that these kinds carried less importance, but rather that the moral implications of manipulating or using these kinds of reciprocity strategically were different than for formal reciprocity. For example, if formal reciprocity is broken, it means a breakdown of formal business relations; but if personal reciprocity is broken, it means a breakdown of personal relations such as friendships. In either case, perceived inequality in the *exchange* has negative effects for the *relationships*, both of which form part of *reciprocity*.

There was also another kind of conscious use which must be addressed. It has been analysed how the different kinds of reciprocity were sometimes combined or how one particular occurrence of reciprocity could have different aspects consisting of different kinds of reciprocity. Often, this combination of different kinds of reciprocity was coincidental, but there were also examples of the employees at Travel Tours using this on purpose as a conscious strategy. This could be to support another reciprocal process, such as when helpdesk employees used social reciprocity in the form of small talk as a “lubricant” to aid along the formal reciprocity which was the actual purpose of a phone call. One might speculate whether combining several kinds of reciprocity thereby puts the user who is being helped in more than one kind of “debt” to the Travel Tours employee, this additionally strengthening further reciprocity. However, as the empirical material did not address this particular subject, this shall remain speculation. Nevertheless, the combination could also be used in another form, to disguise one kind of reciprocity as another, such as when a social occasion like a party in fact had a promotional aim. Anyway, the principles of reciprocity also had consequences for the possibility of sourcing ideas for innovation from the users through these service encounters. The effects of reciprocity on sourcing innovation ideas will now be discussed.

### Innovation

As the analysis showed, engaging in several kinds of reciprocity induces ideas for innovation – as well as other comments and thoughts – to be stated by the users. As the reciprocity

takes place during the service encounters, this is also when these ideas are likely to be stated. Furthermore, adding informal reciprocity to the formal processes makes the interacting parties seem friendly, and again this motivates the users to give the service provider ideas for innovation. However, there is also a risk that informal reciprocity can make the service provider feel too confident. As long as relationships are on friendly terms, the likelihood of continued use of a service seems strong, and therefore wishes for changes and demands of improvement may seem of less importance. These get a lower priority or are overlooked. Here, then, is a barrier to sourcing innovation ideas through service encounters. The users are motivated to state these ideas and in fact do so, but the ideas are not properly addressed or implemented. This is because suggestions for innovations must be part of the reciprocity processes in order to be addressed. Of course, the form in which such ideas arrive also plays a crucial role. Complaints will get more focus because they come in a clear form, questions might receive less attention, and thoughts and remarks even less as they are more subtle. Nevertheless, loose thoughts, vague remarks and even more clearly stated ideas are often not caught by the employees at Travel Tours, they only become part of a conversation or correspondence and are forgotten afterwards when the practical issue at hand is solved. Ideas for innovation, complaints, and so on, need to be part of a stream of reciprocity to be dealt with. If they are not reciprocated, they disappear and are never addressed because the felt obligation is lacking even if the expectation is there from the users' side. In this way, a party (such as Travel Tours) can unintentionally fail to reciprocate. In other words, it is imperative that ideas for innovation become part of the reciprocity processes so that any expectations on the users' side can be matched with a sense of obligation on the providers' side, lest the ideas be forgotten. So failure to reciprocate can come from both sides; the user has to be persuaded to engage in such a process, but the provider also has to be attentive to it and responsive to the issues a user raises.

But not only must ideas for innovation be part of the reciprocity processes, they must also be handled correctly during these processes. Often at Travel Tours, failure to reciprocate ideas came about because of differing views on whether the ideas were part of the reciprocity processes – meaning whether there was an obligation to give something in return – and if so, when they had been reciprocated and what needed to be done “in return”. As seen in the section analysing feedback to ideas for innovation, some employees at Travel Tours were under the impression that feedback to the user was not needed – meaning the ideas were not part of the reciprocity process. In other cases the Travel Tours employees were under the impression that such feedback had already been provided, even though the users disagreed with such an assessment. Evidently, there are

diverging interpretations of the reciprocity process and ensuing results. As stated earlier, according to Mauss (1925), reciprocity is contractual meaning those engaging in such a process are under the obligation to do certain things. Specifically, this means that the parties entering a process of reciprocity are under three obligations: The obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to reciprocate.

In the cases of employees being under the impression that feedback on ideas for innovation not being needed, there was a failure to acknowledge this contractuality. However, in many cases this was in fact recognised and immediate feedback was given, yet the users still felt their wishes unreciprocated. This is because that in the cases of immediate feedback the obligation chain which Mauss described is unintentionally broken. The obligation to give is fulfilled when the users state an idea or wish, the obligation to receive is also fulfilled and acknowledged by the employees at Travel Tours, but the obligation to reciprocate is not fulfilled although the Travel Tours employees might think it is. In essence, an acknowledgement of receiving the input is not the same as an offering of the solution or change of service product or delivery. The former fulfils the obligation to receive, the latter the obligation to reciprocate. The immediate response acknowledging the idea may look, sound and feel deceptively like reciprocation from the point of view of the Travel Tours employees, but in fact it is not. It fulfils Mauss' second obligation of receiving, but the third obligation of reciprocating is left unanswered. And as repeated failures to reciprocate appear, the user-provider relationship risks being broken.

The consequences of breaking a relationship change depending on which kind of reciprocity is in question. As one moves from formal to social to personal reciprocity, the consequences of not fulfilling the obligation of reciprocating also become more personal. Failure to continue using a service and thereby breaking the string of reciprocity severs business ties whereas failure to reciprocate on a social level will be seen as rude or even antisocial, and failure to reciprocate on a personal level can even be seen as betrayal or at least letting the other person down.

To sum up, when formal reciprocity is combined with social and personal reciprocity, this can provide incentives for a lot of innovation ideas from the users, and it did so in the case of Travel Tours and its users. But often, the ideas were not implemented and there was no proper feedback to the users. The reasons for this were that the ideas must be part of a contractual reciprocity lest they be forgotten. And employees at the provider, Travel Tours, must realise the three obligations of reciprocity and which one they are addressing with their feedback. We will now return to the theory used in this study to compare our findings to this.

## **Return To Theory**

In this section, the results of this study will be related to the theories used. But the theories differ considerably and are taken from different theoretical traditions. The section has therefore been divided into parts so that each part relates to an author or area of theory.

### **Bagozzi**

In the case of Travel Tours, both restricted and generalised exchange was found. The former was prevalent in the encounters between users in the travel agencies and frontline employees working at Travel Tours, and the latter was identified both in certain activities of Travel Tours such as the making of catalogues, and in the more general networks of reciprocity which both Travel Tours and the travel agencies were part of and depended on. The tripartite division made in this study resembles certain other divisions such as those made by Bagozzi (1975). For example, Bagozzi's utilitarian and symbolic exchange corresponds to a large extent to the division made in this study between formal and informal reciprocity, although both formal and informal reciprocity can be utilitarian or of a more symbolic nature. Nevertheless, what is reciprocated through social and personal reciprocity is often signs and symbols of for example status, emotions or other intangibles and formal reciprocity often has a more pragmatic and concrete aim; therefore the formal/informal division to a large extent follows the utilitarian/symbolic division of Bagozzi. An important difference, however, is that the present study presents a subdivision of three and not two categories, as the reciprocity of the social and the personal sphere was deemed diverging enough to warrant such a subdivision. Another important difference, which is common for all the theories used, is the difference in aim, scope and method of the studies and therefore also the resulting content of the categories derived therefrom. To take the example of Bagozzi, the text is rather a literature review and some theoretical conclusions whereas the current study is a case study using ethnographic fieldwork, and the aim of Bagozzi is to gain an overview of different systems of exchange overall whereas the aim of this study is to understand the micro-processes going on in

service encounters. Another author, the concepts and theory of which has been used extensively in this study, is Grönroos. We will therefore now discuss how the findings relate to his theory.

### Grönroos

This study combines the exchange and relationship concepts of Grönroos (2007) with the concept of reciprocity taken from anthropology. This conceptual combination has already been discussed in the theory section. Nevertheless, some further remarks must be made in regard to the relation between the theory of Grönroos and the general findings of this study. According to Grönroos, the aim of exchange-based marketing is simply to get customers to use a service whereas the aim of relationship marketing is to create a kind of involvement and cooperation with the customers such as value co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004); therefore they are not only two different concepts but also two very different approaches (Grönroos 2007:28). This separation into exchange and relationship marketing is enlightening to the extent that it clearly shows the role of different elements of interchange; the two different concepts are therefore very constructive. However, this study does not find the division into two opposing approaches constructive. No evidence of opposition was found, but rather evidence of the two concepts as supplementary. In fact they were found to be inseparably tied together. Every exchange, however brief, creates a relation; so every transaction implies an interaction. And every relation consists of exchanges. And these exchanges follow the pattern of reciprocity. So to supplement the notion of exchange, we use the concept of reciprocity thereby including the mutual obligation to give back and thereby keep a relation going. It also expresses a built in motivation for giving, in this case a motivation for users to use and pay for the services of Travel Tours and to state ideas for innovation, and a motivation for reciprocating, in this case Travel Tours providing a service to the travel agencies as well as employees at Travel Tours acknowledging the innovation ideas, giving proper feed back on them, and ideally implementing some of them. So in this study, exchange and relationship is intermixed as reciprocity in practice encompasses both types of marketing. But reciprocity also changes the understanding of both concepts. Following the chain of obligations, it becomes clear that exchanges are never made in a social void but always under certain rules, so they must be seen in a contextualised way. Also, the more often and the more different kinds of reciprocity taking place, the closer the relations between provider and users become (or indeed any parties engaging in

reciprocity). Exchange and relationships therefore appear in different conceptualisation in this study than in the writing of Grönroos.

One might question when there really is a relationship between a service provider such as Travel Tours and users such as the travel agencies. Grönroos states that having bonds keeping users attached to an organisation is not the same as having a relationship between the two as they could be bonds of mere convenience (2007:36). According to him, a relationship exists when the users feel it does; it is a combination of a particular mindset of the service provider employees and a particular attitude of the users. Grönroos defines it as “a mutual way of thinking” (2007:36) developing over time via interaction and communication between the provider and the user. In the case of Travel Tours and the travel agencies, both parties talk a lot about the other in the daily life. They also have a lot of thoughts about each other, so the other is very present in their consciousness and indeed communication and interaction takes place very often. Following Grönroos’ definition, one can conclude that there is a mutual way of thinking and therefore a definite relationship between Travel Tours and the travel agencies. However, Grönroos also describes such relationships as a “win-win situation” (ibid.) and here this study must depart from his description, because this was not always found to be the case. As discussed above, there were situations where the employees in the travel agencies felt they were not getting what they expected. There was a structural inertia which lead to a sense of futility and frustration. Interestingly, the dissatisfaction did not just come from a lack of the feature itself, but from the fact that the travel agency employees had told Travel Tours about it and then felt that nothing or not enough happened. In other words, it was in the situations in which there was a lack of reciprocity that the win-win relationship crumbled. The travel agency had given an idea for innovation to Travel Tours, and in return they expected to get a response, preferably a fulfilment of their request. However there was inadequate feedback and so a failure to reciprocate. This did not mean that there was no relationship, but it did mean that there was not always a win-win situation in a relationship. It also meant that the incentive for stating ideas for improvement or innovation was weakened or removed. Or to put it inversely, the incentive for stating ideas was given to the users exactly through reciprocity. So, in Grönroos’ portrayal of user-provider relationships, they are often assumed to be positive or have a positive effect, but as seen from this case, this is not necessarily so. They could also be at least partially negative. And negative feelings might be exacerbated in a comprehensive relation consisting of formal, social and personal reciprocity as risk of “cross-contamination” means

that negative outcomes in one kind of reciprocity may change the sentiments of the users concerning other kinds of reciprocity.

This begs the important question of why users which are dissatisfied with certain exchanges continue to use a service provider. Grönroos has stated that some users may even value the general relationship more than the success of individual exchanges (2007:41). The travel agencies stated negative criticism of Travel Tours during the interviews, yet still continued to use them. Following Grönroos' statements, this case therefore confirms that the general relationship can be more important to the user than satisfaction in single exchanges or transactions: even though Travel Tours may have failed to reciprocate in specific instances, they still provided an overall satisfactory service. This also shows that exchange and relationship marketing are not contradictory; rather they are two different levels. The latter is concerned with the general relation between user and provider, how the user feels and what he or she thinks about the provider and the service offered; the former is about the specific instances of items of phenomena being swapped. As the analysis section showed, concrete exchanges and general relationships intermixed in intricate ways in the reciprocity of the service encounters analysed in this study. The concept of reciprocity itself is taken from the field of anthropology, to which we now turn.

### Anthropology

As evident from the theory section, several authors within anthropology have written about reciprocity. There rarely seems to be direct opposition between them, however. Rather, they often refer to and build on each other, continuously expanding the understanding of the complex phenomenon of reciprocity. This study confirms that there is a complex network of reciprocity taking place, especially in smaller and closely interlinked groups such as the travelling business service sector here described. It also confirms that the specific instances of reciprocity are surrounded by or immersed in certain rules and customs. In the case of the service encounters of Travel Tours, the reciprocity did in fact take place "on the borderland between the commercial and the ceremonial" (Malinowski 1922:513) since there was an intermixing between commercial and socio-cultural interests, interaction and transaction, in the relations between Travel Tours and the travel agencies. Furthermore, although not every instance of reciprocity was a total prestation, it was clear that they were more than just simple and decontextualised single economic transactions.



They were in fact contractual; they tied the employees in Travel Tours and the travel agencies closer together as businesses, as social groups, and as persons. And the three obligations identified by Mauss (1925) were highly relevant, especially in analysing how a failure to reciprocate could unintentionally come about in the case of ideas for innovations. As formal, social and personal reciprocity was combined, the service performed (formal reciprocity) was not separated from the performer (social and personal reciprocity). On a side note, it is interesting to note that Malinowski stated that persons participating in the reciprocity network typically have a focus on individual transactions and therefore do not see the “total outline” of the network (1922:83). This was also found to be true in the case of Travel Tours and the travel agencies. Some employees were aware of at least parts of the entire network, but they were typically quite high up in the system, for example heads of departments or the CEO; most employees, however, focused on the individual transactions at hand and it was these which were described and discussed by them during observation and interviews. Rather than contradicting or disagreeing, this study then adds itself to the findings of anthropology by supplementing with the classification of processes of reciprocity into the three different kinds, formal, social and personal. There have been other attempts of classifying the motivations of users for engaging in commercial relations, and it is to one of these which we will now turn.

#### Paul et al.

Using means-end theory, Paul et al. (2009) have created a tripartite division which at first glance might resemble the one made in this study. Having divided the means-end chain into attributes, benefits and values, they focused on benefits and created the three categories functional, psychological and social benefits. However, there are several important differences between these and the reciprocity categories resulting from this study. First of all, Paul et al. write within a marketing frame, and they are concerned with repeat purchase drivers; that is how users can be driven to purchase from the same provider repeatedly. This study is not primarily aimed at being instrumental towards marketing, but is rather concerned with the micro processes taking place during service encounters.

Another overall difference between the drivers study and the present analysis of reciprocity is that the former is extensive and the latter intensive in scope. Both the model of Paul et

al. and the analysis presented here are concerned with the motivation of users for engaging in service use from a provider, but the drivers model is not focusing on the specific processes such as reciprocity but rather on the general benefits which can be derived from such reciprocity. Thus the two studies are situated at different levels of analysis, concrete processes versus general results of these processes. For example, confidence and welcomeness in service delivery (Paul et al. 2009:220) is a result of social and personal reciprocity; in other words, these impressions of a service provider are created exactly through the reciprocity which is taking place during service encounters. Thus the two elements of motivation, drivers and reciprocity, are linked, but on two very different levels and with two very different aims.

The division into 3 kinds of reciprocity made here also cross-sections the categorical means-end division of attributes, benefits and values made by the repeat purchase drivers study. For example in the attributes category, service delivery drivers such as empathy and authenticity, and relationship characteristics drivers such as connection and similarity would in our study belong to what we would describe as personal reciprocity together with psychological benefits such as confidence in the service provider. The underlying logic of division used in the model by Paul et al. thus seems fundamentally different from the one used here, which has been accounted for above. As mentioned, Paul et al. divide the benefits into three categories which may resemble the three kinds of reciprocity identified in the service encounter in this study. However, to take an example, the social benefits “make people feel closer to one another or portray a desired image to others” (Paul et al. 2009:225), whereas the social reciprocity signals relating or belonging to a group, it communicates a social role and establishes a social status, and it places the individual or group within an overall social power structure. Or to take the example of psychological benefits, according to Paul et al. they “satisfy important intrinsic, self-oriented goals” (ibid.), whereas the personal reciprocity does not necessarily aim to satisfy a self-oriented goal; rather it relates to a more private sphere, takes place in an individual level and often contains or signals emotions.

### Overall theory

Overall, one can say that although this study draws upon different strands of service marketing literature, the aim of it is less instrumental and more exploratory and explanatory than these strands. It is less prescriptive and more descriptive in its aim to identify and understand the specific

processes taking place during service encounters. In this regard it is alike to the anthropological strands of literature, although it takes as its field of study a very different context than those from which the conclusions of for example Malinowski and Mauss have grown (although Mauss did concern himself with contemporary French traditions). Where the anthropological studies have grown out of a macro-level cultural context aiming at understanding overall systemic mechanisms, this study has a more narrow aim confined to micro-processes of very specific situations, encounters, and of a very specific kind, commercial service encounters. Also, it builds on one case study and therefore cannot claim to be valid for all service encounters in general. Rather, it makes conclusions on the specific service encounters observed and from these conclusions it extrapolates some more general underlying mechanisms. Whether these are universal is beyond the scope of this study to determine.

## **Conclusion**

Having observed the service encounters of Travel Tours and made interviews with employees at both Travel Tours and the travel agencies, the research question posed in this study has been answered. There were many different processes of reciprocity taking place during the service encounters, but they could be grouped into the three different kinds of reciprocity as presented in the analysis: formal (with a subdivision into official and unofficial), social and personal. An important conclusion to be drawn from that is how ubiquitous reciprocity is. In the writings of anthropologists and sociologists such as Malinowski and Mauss, it becomes clear how fundamental reciprocity is to human relations. Not only do all relations consist of reciprocal exchanges, but relationships are also part of any exchange; even in the simplest and briefest interchanges, the parties are aware of and form an impression of each other and somehow relate to each other. In this way, reciprocity is different from exchange and relationship marketing; it cannot be controlled or intentionally managed as it involves a myriad processes constantly taking place and shifting. How and which reciprocal process are taking place depends on those implicated in the (service) encounters and on whether they live up to the three obligations of reciprocity. In this way, reciprocity consists of fundamental human processes. There were many formal exchanges going on between Travel Tours and the travel agencies, and when one adds to those all the social and

personal reciprocity, then it is only natural that the relationship aspects of reciprocity become as salient as was the case. The case of Travel Tours was a business-to-business type of setting, and these are often characterised by regular users. It could be argued that relations of reciprocity are more easily created under such circumstances. But even if the users had been one-time users, there would still be processes of reciprocity taking place during the service encounters as even in brief one-time use of a service there is not just an exchange but also expectations and obligation involved; and if these were broken then that could be considered a breach of contract (or even a criminal act such as stealing). Furthermore, even during a single service encounter could a frontline employee initiate more than formal reciprocity (for example through small talk as exemplified by the helpdesk employees) and thereby expand the array of interchanges taking place during this encounter.

So how do the three kinds of reciprocity affect whether ideas for innovation are stated by the users? First of all, simply having many processes of reciprocity means having a lot of contact with the users, which in itself is likely to increase the number of ideas stated as well as the incentive for them stating such ideas. Secondly, different kinds of reciprocity mean different kinds of contact; therefore, adding informal reciprocity to the formal means widening the spectrum of contact so to speak. However, having a lot of reciprocity, and of different kinds, is not in itself a guarantee of innovation based on the users. Perhaps informal reciprocity may induce a lot of innovation ideas, but as seen from the Travel Tours case, the mindset reflected in the family metaphor can also make the provider feel too comfortable in the sense that input from users is not given feedback, and ideas and demands from the users are not followed up on. Ideas are received but not necessarily (co-)developed and implemented. In other words, they are not *reciprocated*. This is because the innovation ideas must be part of the streams of reciprocity taking places between Travel Tours and the travel agencies, otherwise they will be dropped or forgotten, and then the reciprocity is considered broken by the users, the travel agencies. The three obligations stated by Mauss, (to give, to receive, to reciprocate) are all important and any failure to comply with these obligations means that the reciprocity and thereby the relation is either damaged or broken entirely – in any case it is suboptimal at best. It therefore becomes vital for the service provider to not only engage in reciprocity but also to fulfil these obligations. As evident from the many daily phone calls from the travel agencies, faults are immediately detected and reacted upon by the users. Furthermore, the lack of phone calls after a while signals the failure to reciprocate adequately by the provider. If a service provider wishes to gather ideas for innovation through service encounters, it is vital that the

users are motivated to state them. And a vital part of that motivation is that they will get something in return. In other words, these ideas must become part of the reciprocity taking place during the encounters. Furthermore, if the usual reciprocity involved in the daily service delivery is broken, that may severely diminish any chances of ideas for innovation to be added to the reciprocity taking place in the user-provider relations.

Returning to Polanyi's division into three systems of interchange (direct reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange), market exchange has typically been seen as what exists in the modern Western world. However, as this study has shown, there is also redistribution and direct reciprocity. And in all three systems, the basic three kinds of (or aspects of) reciprocity – formal, social and personal – form part of the interchanges. This study, then, is an example on how reciprocity is intertwined and integrated with the free market exchange economy, how these processes work in the case of the service encounters of Travel Tours, and how this affects whether the users state ideas for innovation during these encounters.

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# **CHAPTER 6**

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **TAMING PROFESSIONALISM**





# Taming Professionalism

## **- Barriers to Accessing Users' Ideas for Innovation in the Service Encounter**

### Introduction

“A way of seeing also implies a way of not-seeing”

- Merton ([1949] 1968: 270)

In the relatively rough economic climate of today, many organisations are forced to improve or perish even more so than earlier. This is also true for service organisations, which make up the bulk of the economy in many Western countries (and increasingly elsewhere as well). The choice is between offering the same service product cheaper or changing it. Faced with an increasingly competitive situation, it is no wonder that many service organisations choose innovation. But they are faced with two problems. Firstly, as economic surplus which can be dedicated to extra-productive activities such as innovation dwindles, demand for low-cost innovation rises. Secondly, services are generally processual and relational, and so must service innovation therefore be. But many service organisations find it difficult to get a firm grasp on something as ethereal as relational processes. Add to the list the current focus on user involvement and the increasing demands that all services should be or appear “professional” and the task can seem insurmountable. One possible solution could be to ask users for ideas through an already existing surface of contact – the service encounter. The idea creation phase could thus be integrated into existing processes. Although service encounters have been studied extensively (e.g. Czepiel et al. 1985, Corvellec 2005), and there also is a growing literature on service innovation, user

innovation in services has been studied less so and user innovation through service encounters even less.

The aim of this article is to study the service encounter in order to identify service practices in the professional role of the frontline employees, and explore how these practices and this role might encourage or discourage user-based innovation during it. The service encounter is seen as a resource for user-based innovation as ideas can be co-created and existing ideas communicated by users through the processes of user – employee interaction. The article builds on a case study of a café in which practices were studied through ethnographic methods. Service encounters are purposeful as they serve particular functions, and employee behaviour as user and provider is to an extent dictated by defined roles. But how the encounter is set up, and how these roles are defined, has an important impact on whether and how service encounters can be used for user innovation. With increasing competition, an increasing focus on professionalism in service provision has also appeared; which means the role of the frontline employee has been altered. This raises a series of issues such as how this new role is expressed, how the employees themselves view it, and what this means for user innovation. The following question is therefore investigated in this article: *What consequences does professionalisation of frontline employees have for user innovation through service encounters?* Before specific examples can be analysed and discussed, some background knowledge is necessary. We will therefore summarise some literature on service innovation, and on professionalism and roles. After that, the methods used in the case study will be described. This is followed by an analysis and a discussion of the findings. Lastly, this article ends with a conclusion.

## **Service innovation**

Involving service users in innovation, or at least sourcing creative ideas from them, has been repeatedly stated as important (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000, Thomke and von Hippel 2001) yet difficult (Tidd et al. 2001, Johnson 1998) in recent business literature. Kristensson et al. (2004) have documented the benefits of such a practice by conducting an idea generation experiment involving normal users and professional developers, and subsequently testing ideas for creativity using the dimensions of originality (O'Quin and Besemer 1999), value creation (Ekvall 1997) and realisability (MacKinnon 1968). Kristensson et al. (2004) conclude that ordinary users

produce the most original and valuable ideas, whereas professional developers produce the most realisable ideas. Hence, to whom a manager should turn for innovative ideas thus depends on which properties are desired in the idea. One can add to their conclusion that service users should therefore not be used as a source for ideas for innovation uncritically. Depending on the desired outcome in terms of the properties of ideas for innovation, professional developers may be a better solution if realisable ideas are needed; however, users are an important source for creative and original ideas. The strategy for innovation thus starts with a choice of source.

Several studies (e.g. Alam and Perry 2002, Gummesson 2002) have documented the beneficial outcomes of user involvement in innovation in terms of more original ideas that are also more relevant to users. Few, however, have studied how best to involve the users. Von Hippel (e.g. 1986, 2001, 2005) has documented how some people drive their own innovation as they have certain needs before these needs become prevalent on the general market. In such cases, however, there is not necessarily user-involvement as it could also be people who create and implement innovations without the involvement of service providers. Kristensson et al. (2008) have identified seven strategies for user involvement in innovation including the intrinsic motivation of personal benefit for users. Though more circumstantial than concrete, the strategies emphasise the importance of ongoing user involvement in stating that “more than an annual survey ... [or] merely listening to customers’ retrospective accounts of their supposed needs; it also requires collaboration with the users” (ibid 2008:488). Ideally, then, this collaboration could be done on a continuous everyday basis.

This becomes especially apparent in the case of user-based service innovation as services are often relational in a more direct sense than production (Grönroos 2000). And as “personal interaction between the customer and the service provider is at the heart of many services” (Czepiel et al. 1985:3), the service encounter (Bitner 1990) becomes a significant focal point of this relation and therefore for sourcing ideas for innovation from users. “At its most elementary level, a service encounter is one human being interacting with another” (Czepiel et al. 1985:3) so this is when an active flow of communication and interaction arises between service provider and user. Therefore these “moments of truth” (Normann 1991) provide ideal occasions for sourcing ideas for innovation. Furthermore, this is when the users are experiencing and therefore thinking about all the components of the encounter and their own role (Bitner 1997). This is also when the role of the service provider is manifested, both the role of the overall service organisation and the role of the frontline employees.

## **Professions and professionalism**

As mentioned above, increasingly one of the demands for this role is to be or appear professional. There has been an increasing focus on professionalism in general, and this also affects services. Not only have theoretical and practical insights changed, but the entire focus has also moved. There has been wide disagreement on how to precisely define a profession in the literature (Tawney 1921, Carr-Saunders & Wilson 1933, Marshall 1950, Parsons 1951, Durkheim 1992 [1958], Dingwall & Lewis 1983). The professions themselves have changed considerably in recent years. However, there seems to be some agreement that the traditional occupational professions have four characteristics. First, they possess a *special knowledge* which others do not share. This knowledge often comes from high-level education or long work experience and has been seen as giving professions a special status and a natural monopoly on not only a certain knowledge but also on certain work functions (Larson 1977, Larkin 1983). Secondly, they have a *service orientation* or *commitment for the common good*, which stems from the insights of this knowledge (Cruess et al. 2000). Therefore the professions have been seen as having high morals and virtues in serving the specialised needs of society. Third, due to their knowledge mandate (Halliday 1987) the professions have a large degree of *autonomy* (Evetts 2010). They have been able to function relatively independently from intrusive outside regulation (which they have largely been able to avoid until fairly recently) and have therefore mainly been accountable to peers. This means that they have the freedom to be self-reliant, but also self-sufficient in terms of creation, maintenance and development of their special knowledge and skills. Lastly, they have been a coherent *community* characterised by cooperative and mutually supportive collegiality, a shared professional identity stemming from common experiences during their long education, and a similarity between members which also comes from the similar socialisations of their education (Evetts 2006a). As a result of these four characteristics, the professions have been seen as having various privileges, but also several obligations (Parsons 1939, 1951, Craib 1997). There is much disagreement on the consequences of this; some authors see this as a positive and vital contribution to society (Marshall 1950, Parsons 1951) and others discuss a more negative side to the special privileges which professions supposedly enjoy (see below). Hughes (1958) has described how professions enjoy a degree of trust from others and therefore have a certain authority, but they must in turn also possess

and provide this special knowledge. In other words, the professions have a higher status which comes from their special knowledge.

But more recently there has been a major change of focus both in literature and in society from professions as a special type of occupations to professionalism as an ideology advocating the qualities of the traditional occupational professions (Fournier 1999, Evetts 2003). However, this ideology has also been applied to other occupations, which are not part of the traditional occupational professions. For example, the employees of the café which forms the case of this article faced such demands and expectations, as do most other vocations today (Evetts 2003). From defining and debating the status and nature of certain occupational groups, the focus has then moved to a specific attitude and manner of employees, which is desired by service providers and users and is taken to signal ability and willingness to deliver service of good quality. As this has come to be seen as desirable and indeed necessary, the demands for professionalism have become synonymous with ideological elements.

This overall development has also been linked by Evetts to the emergence of New Public Management (2009) and to what Evetts describes as a change from “normative value system” to “controlling ideology” (2003: 399). The former implies the expectations set by members of a profession and their peers for a professional execution and can have positive connotations of high standard and professional pride. The latter denotes professionalism as an externally superimposed demand on employees who do not necessarily share these goals and aims. Building on McClelland (1990), Evetts (2003) expresses the two views as professionalism “from within” the group of professionals and as “from above”, coming from managers or society. Fournier (1999) has described how the employees internalise these externally imposed demands and then struggle to live up to them. In this way, the demands for self-governing employees in New Public Management of services have often been combined with professionalism as an externally imposed demand or tool for governing the employees (Fournier 1999, Evetts 2003, 2009, Hanlon 1998). And so, how the role of the service employee is defined changes accordingly. But the appeal *to* professionalism by managers is aided by the appeal *of* professionalism to the employees themselves, for professionalism as ideology expresses a number of desirable qualities such as the four characteristics of special knowledge and capability, a morally induced service commitment, self-contained autonomy of the employee, and membership of a community of colleagues. These two forces combine to instil the striving towards professionalism in these employees. However, in many cases they do not possess a special knowledge stemming from many years of higher education, and

the autonomy of the occupational professions is replaced by managerial regulation. These fundamentally different terms of work create a quite altered version of professionalism as will be evident in the analysis. Lacking the content of special knowledge, professionalism becomes hinged on form.

## **Roles**

The role definitions and role performances of especially frontline employees is important for all service organisations, but it becomes vital for service providers focusing on user innovation as this role is performed in the service encounters during which such innovation could take place. This is when the employees come into direct contact with users and have a possibility of sourcing or co-creating innovation ideas. Factors such as the external definition of these roles (Merton 1957, Parsons. 1961, 1965) and the internal role understanding by the role performer (Mead 1934, Goffman 1959, 1967) and how precisely the roles are defined therefore has some important consequences. Linton ([1936] 1964) described societies as patterns of reciprocal behaviour, a view which fits the service encounter quite well. He saw role as the enactment of the position or status a person had in this pattern. But according to Merton ([1949] 1968), the role enactment is also shaped by expectations from others: “The demands and expectations inherent in a social position tend to shape the behaviour of occupants of that position [...] this progressive importation of others’ evaluations and expectations is cumulative and commonly occurs without the process entering into awareness” (1968: 268-269). This means that the role enactor, for example the frontline employee, unconsciously adopts a certain role behaviour as a response to external expectations. Accordingly, the role performer can have several roles depending on with whom he interacts, which is why Merton emphasises the role-relations or role-set in his conceptualisation of role. Likewise, Parsons (1965) conceptualises role as a result of or response to role-expectations which determine what is considered successful social interaction. As behaviour is met with the same expectations over a period of time, repeated (cor)responding practices develop. Eventually, behaviour becomes institutionalised into a structurally given and externally pre-determined role. It is therefore not the role performer who defines the role; instead the role performance is guided by certain role-specific norms stemming from the prevalent overall values of society, which also influence the expectations of others for the role (Parsons et al. 1961). These expectations are found

at two different levels. At one level one finds the role-specific norms which are the expectations that others have of the performance of a particular kind of role; on another level one finds the general values of society which are shared by the population in general and not specific for any particular role (ibid.).

The above conceptualisation of role emphasise how the individual fulfils a role, what we might term the fulfilment perspective. Another perspective is what we might call the enactment perspective, which is less concerned with the structural origins of role definitions, but instead focuses on the everyday practices of role enactment on a micro-level. This perspective is concerned with the ways in which the role performer performs his role; and proponents of this perspective include the symbolic interactionists such as Erving Goffman (1967, 1959). He has conceptualised social role as individual agency and enactment of rights and duties in response to a part which is the role definition given to him by others (Goffman 1959). A person must then perform a role by the use of behaviour and what he calls a front. The front consists of the physical setting of the role performance, and the personal front which is the appearance and manner of the performer. The behaviour or role performance often has a degree of idealisation in order to be accepted (ibid.). This means emphasising and displaying the desirable and hiding the less desirable aspects of behaviour in a role performance to make it congruent with the values of society, so the result of a successful idealisation should be that the performer portrays himself as having ideal qualifications and motives. This also brings about the question of sincerity or belief in one's own role performance. As a performer can in this way manipulate the front of a role performance, he can be more or less sincere ranging from total belief in his own performance to intentional misleading. Another important aspect of role performance is the expressive order, which denotes a congruence of the front, behaviour and overall situation and should create a harmony of social interaction (Goffman 1967). In order to ensure this, the performer must master expressive control, which is the control of how he expresses himself including his role performance and the front (Goffman 1959).

Roles have also been analysed in connection with service encounters (Goffman 1959, Solomon et al. 1985, Broderick 1999). For example, Solomon et al. have pointed out the interdependence and mutuality between users and employees in service encounters (1985). In connection with role identity, they point out the importance of cohesion in a group of role performers: a strong group cohesion among the performers increases the desire to perform a service role well. They have also analysed the importance of living up to the users' expectations during service encounters. Another example is Goffman (1959, 1967). He takes a personalised and

processual view of role enactment and interaction in the encounter which he defines as “*an* occasion of talk or episode of interaction as a naturally bounded unit” (1967: 35, his italics). Since “a single focus of thought and visual attention, and a single flow of talk, tends to be maintained and to be legitimated as officially representative of the encounter” (1967: 34), the consequence of this is that “side foci”, such as e.g. asking for ideas for innovation during a service encounter, tend to be ignored in favour of the official purpose of the encounter which is often the exchange of a service for money. Another important aspect of role interaction is the emphasis which a role performer puts on the social “face” of that role (1967); the importance of this can lead to some unintended and unfortunate consequences when it comes to breaking rules of politeness and appearing professional in favour of honesty and directness.

## **Method**

It has so far been made clear that service organisations wishing to engage in user innovation could do this through service encounters. This means that the role of the frontline employee becomes a central element in this process. It is also clear that employees which formerly were not considered part of the professions increasingly face expectations of professionalism – at least in attitude. But what is not clear is what effect this has on the daily work of the frontline employees and on getting ideas for innovation from users. In order to identify and understand the new role of the employees and its effect on user innovation, a series of service encounters were studied in what was assumed to be a relatively elementary form. It was unknown whether the professionalisation was a driver or a barrier to user innovation.

With this aim, a qualitative case study of service encounters at a café was carried out. As stated, the service encounter would be an ideal situation for identifying and conveying ideas for innovation, so the everyday processes of these encounters should be studied. This has been done from various angles and aims (e.g. Czepiel 1985, Corvellec and Lindquist 2005), but here we are interested in user innovation as well as the human behavioural practices and perceptions. Therefore, the service encounters were studied from an anthropological perspective in order to identify how service practices taking place in these encounters might encourage or hinder user-based innovation.



First a brief note on terminology: When talking about persons in general providing and receiving a service, the words “employees” and “users” are used. When referring to employees in general who are in direct contact with users, the term “frontline employee” is used. However, when referring to the concrete persons working at the café and the specific persons frequenting the establishment, the words “staff” and “guests” are used here. These are the informants’ own appellations and therefore consistent with using emic concepts (see below). The café studied in this case is referred to as Café Classy. This is not the real name of the café, but a metonym created for anonymisation purposes. Likewise, all names of respondents are omitted.

### **Data collection**

The case of a café setting was chosen as it was presumed to be able to provide a clearly defined service situation of short durability and with a relatively simple set-up. Presumably, this simple type of service encounter would aid in identifying processes that could be helpful or hindering user involvement in innovation, particularly when utilising the service encounter as an idea-phase for innovation. However, as will be evident, the frame of these service encounters was far from simple.

Nevertheless, the data collection was done through ethnographic fieldwork (Wadel 1991). This consisted of several elements. The first was a few initial sessions of participant observation (Spradley 1980) during which the researcher took on the role of being a guest at the café. The method consists of the researcher being immersed in the environment and playing an active role within this frame. This involved the researcher entering the field to make first-hand observations and interact with other persons present in the setting to gain a personal impression and comprehension of it. This means taking an active participatory role, engaging in conversation with staff and observing during various contact activities such as seating, deciding on items to order and ordering, receiving food and/or beverages, giving feedback on quality, paying and so on. Furthermore, during consumption the researcher can observe the interaction between other guests and staff. During the visit, various field notes on observations are written down, and these are supplemented with further notes after the visit. In this way, through both noticeable incidents and repeated everyday patterns of behaviour, signs of underlying perceptions and assumptions are discerned. During these sessions, the researcher was accompanied by other researchers and the overall setting was studied. The duration of a visit to the café lasted 1-3 hours which followed the

pattern of other guests. Through the participant observation, the practices of the service encounters taking place within this frame were studied with a focus on whether these practices could be used for generating or transferring innovative ideas from guests to staff and how professionalisation affects these processes. The initial instances of short-term participant observation were then repeated approximately a year later when more sessions of participant observation were conducted over a period of some weeks. At this time, understanding of the setting had led the researcher to a narrower focus on processes taking place and attitudes expressed in the encounter, which lead to a more targeted engagement with staff members. For example, the researcher could casually make some suggestions or questions regarding ideas for innovation to gain an experience of what reactions this would generate.

Another element of the fieldwork was interviews. After the initial period of participant observation, interviews with five staff members were made by the other researchers, in order to further explore their attitudes and perceptions of their role, the possibility of sourcing innovation ideas from users, and their feeling on doing so through the service encounters<sup>2</sup>. The interviews were also qualitative, and they were semi-structured to unstructured as they were loosely built on certain topics but informants were allowed to deviate from these whenever they felt something else was relevant to mention. Thus the researcher's first-hand experiences and observations were supplemented with statements on the direct experiences, opinions and feelings of staff members. The interviews were made in the staff members' own language and translated by the researcher. They focused inter alia on how the staff members see their own role, on interaction with guests, and the possibilities for user involvement in innovation, especially conveying or creating ideas for innovation. Thus the interviews brought forward descriptions of many first-hand staff experiences and their personal reactions to these. On the other hand, participant observation can provide the researcher with an impression of the social interaction as a first-hand experience. In this way, the two methods which are often combined in ethnographic field work supplement each other.

### **Data analysis**

Like the data collection, the analysis of the data was done in an anthropological manner. This means that the researcher systematically analysed and interpreted statements and

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<sup>2</sup> The researcher thanks Jens Friis Jensen and Jon Sundbo for letting her use their data.

observations during and after they were made. In most anthropological literature there has been a tradition of seeking patterns in everyday details of behaviour and attempting to uncover underlying personal and social assumptions and meaning. A stringently systematic method of data analysis such as the rigid comparative classification of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) or mathematical analyses of statistics would not serve this purpose as the former might not allow for enough flexibility in the interpretation of empirical material and the latter might miss the subtle micro-level details often used in anthropological analysis.

This, however, does not mean that anthropologists do not use systematic data analysis. Instead, patterns of meaning were sought through classification and interpretation of these everyday details of behaviour. This means that the methodology is quite inductive and therefore insights categorised using the respondents' own wording. Accordingly, emic concepts are used in the analysis where possible. However, the actual analysis and interpretation of the empirical material is done by the researcher. This means that all interpretations, observations and theory built therefrom, as well as any faults and misinterpretations, rest on the researcher. Interpretations, then, are made based on previous statements and observed behaviour of the subject as well as other subjects, and on a general knowledge of the situation, the place (the café), the practices and cultural traits, the issue studied, and in the case of the interviews a knowledge about the respondent stemming from earlier responses during the interview (the interviews were transcribed by the researcher). Thus as underlying themes and elements of cultural meaning (Spradley 1980) are inductively identified, this allows micro-level details to be interpreted accordingly and thus a pattern of meaning emerges.

As with all methods there are some limitations as well. Often participant observation has been used longitudinally in fieldworks during which the researcher has been constantly immersed in the environment for up to several years; this was not the case here as neither the researcher mimicking the duration of guests' visits nor the overall length of the research project allowed for it. Though access to the field was easy as this was a semi-public setting, the scope of access did not allow interviews with guests, interviews with all staff members, or further interviews with staff members after the second round of observations. Also, the researcher did not take on the role of a staff member but only as a guest, the former would have required more training and time. As the interviews were translated, certain words and expressions will inevitably change connotation as there are not always perfect equivalents in other languages, but the researcher has strived to find as close expressions as possible. Lastly, as this methodology is highly qualitative, no numerical data or statistical overviews on e.g. number of guests or average duration of encounters were generated;

neither was that the focus of this study. Instead the aim was to explore and elucidate processes of meaning related to professionalisation and their consequences for user innovation through service encounters.

## **Findings and analysis**

Processes and patterns of meaning are often hard to discern as they must be induced from details of actions and statements. We must therefore describe, analyse and interpret these everyday details, starting with the staff members' general view of the café and their own role. This is then followed by an investigation of how the staff members perceive the rules of the working place. This is followed by a focus on the rules of behaviour and interaction which are in turn set for the guests. Finally some consequences for staff members' views and opinions on the users and the possibility of user innovation through service encounters will be discerned. The processes of meaning found in this study were linked to the staff members' perception of *professionalism* in their *role performance* at the café.

### **The Importance of Good Quality**

The café was a well-known relatively expensive establishment located next to a square on one of the main pedestrian shopping streets in the centre of the city. The ground floor had large glass facades facing busy shopping streets, in the basement there were toilets as well as the kitchen and other staff facilities closed off to guests. The interior decor was light and minimalistic with small round tables each surrounded by a few chairs facing the table in a closed circle. Along the wall there was a bar with a few stools, and on the walls hung many pictures and photographs and in a couple of places also various newspapers and magazines for the guests. In the summer an outdoor seating area in the pedestrian square was opened up for the season.

It was a relatively expensive and fashionable café which emphasised good quality in the food and drinks. The selection of items in the menu card showed a focus on professionalism and

high standards reflected in e.g. healthy food, seasonality, high quality, freshness, passion for cooking and presentation of food. It also reflected certain ideological values such as organics, fair trade, biodynamic and local produce. The service seemed very professional, it was polite and smiling as well as fast and efficient and generally attentive to the immediate needs of guests. The staff members were well-versed in the food and drinks as well as the processes gone into making them. If asked at any time, they could usually answer most questions regarding raw materials and preparation immediately. They had various backgrounds, but most were relatively young (in their twenties) and had not worked at the café for more than a few years at most. All respondents were frontline employees so they had direct contact with the guests, and almost none of them had any formal education as waiters or bartenders, although some had a little experience from working similar jobs previously. As stated, the visits of guests seemed to last 1-3 hours although some were briefer and a few longer. Unsurprisingly, diners tended to stay longer than guests who only consume beverages. Generally guests were dressed casually and seem to be of all ages from mid-twenties into the seventies. Few, however, seemed younger than end-twenties, and some were bringing their children. This, then, was the setting of this study.

The food served at the café was generally described by staff members as of excellent quality and most often highly satisfactory for the guests. For example, when asked if anything was special about or characterised the café, one respondent replied:

Oh that's difficult now because I've worked here for so long, so for example for the food, there's really a lot of people who say "oh [name of respondent] you eat at Café Classy, it's really so delicious food" and of course I can see that it's delicious ingredients and such [...] But I can hear from people, well who come from outside, I mean people who I bring along to eat there, that it's just like "wow that really is delicious and you can feel that it's delicious ingredients and that it's not just something..." well yeah, but I can't taste it myself anymore.

Like this respondent, the staff members in general not only advocated, but showed great pride in the quality of the food served. For example, during visits, the researcher often received enthusiastic explanations and emphatic recommendations of dishes when the staff members were asked about menu items. Compared to the dishes offered at other cafés in the vicinity, the selection at Café Classy was in many cases virtually identical (although a few dishes did differ), but there was a distinct difference in the execution of how the dishes were served in terms of manner and presentation of the staff members, who generally seemed more formal. In general, what Grönroos

has termed the “technical or outcome dimension” of service quality, in this case the food, was of good quality (1990: 37). But more importantly, the staff members *felt* that it was “delicious”, as expressed in the quote above; not once during observation and interviews was anything negative stated about the food. There was what Goffman (1959) calls an idealisation of this technical dimension as only the positive aspects were portrayed. Also, this consistency in expression was part of the role commitment of the staff members. They genuinely cared about the quality as seen in the following quote:

I think that Café Classy, there's like a lot of things which are well thought through, I mean that they have like thought through well. Something about... I mean why they do this and that. It's different things. It's well thought through, I really like that, that it... that there is a thought behind why they do the various things and that they have organic farming hanging and biodynamic soil... what's it called again, something biodynamic something... I think that's... I mean... well I like that. I'm a big advocate of organic farming and biodynamics and those things, so in that way I just think that it's cool that so much of it is introduced, and I only hope that there will come even more.

The staff members stated during both interviews and observation that they shared the belief in the ideologies of organic farming and biodynamics which was prevalent at the café. Not only did they think the quality was good; it was quite important to them that they could personally agree with the quality and ideology. Because they shared the ideals expressed in the menu card, staff members displayed a pride in their work as they were proud to offer good quality products, which even reflected these ideologies. To use Goffman's terminology, not only did they have role commitment, they also had sincerity or a belief in the part they were performing (1959). Or, seen from a professionalism perspective, the food and service signalled both competence and some higher ideals or principles. In other words, they signalled professionalism. How important this was to the staff members can be exemplified by the following quote:

I can vouch one hundred percent for everything that goes on at the café actually. I mean for what is served [...] Well that they are into organic food and that they use proper raw ingredients, it's a proper quality, it looks properly what you serve and that... well you know that you can trust what is served... of ingredients and such things. And you know that it's not anything like oops, that you just find a carton of something, which is a

week too old among something else and such things. [...] Here they make a big deal out of telling you... well the whole procedure of how their quality consciousness, what their thoughts on quality and organic food and such things are.

An awareness of quality, and pride in work, are in this quote supplemented by an explicit statement of the personal involvement which is part of role sincerity (Goffman 1959). This personal involvement can be taken as an expression that the staff members to an extent identified with the café and the products served there as well as with their role as employees. In stressing the “proper quality” and “proper” presentation, the staff member quoted above emphasises that the setting (the physical frame of role performance according to Goffman (1959)) is something to be trusted. Being trustworthy is often described in the profession literature as an important element of being professional (e.g. Hughes 1958), so this is another signal of professionalism. In other words, the employees not only like, but identify with, the professional setting (as contrasted to the unprofessional hypothetical scenario given as a fictional example). The quote also alludes to how the employees are socialised into being quality conscious in the mentioning of the emphasis put on this by managers.

A major work motivation for the employees was the way they worked together in performing their roles and delivering service in a “particular” way:

It's the social aspect of it. I mean it's something about eh... yeah... yeah it's a *very* [respondent emphasised the word] particular way of being together. The fact that you know you are very busy, and you just know... if you're at work with the right people, the ones you get along well with, then it just works, and even though it's totally busy, then it all comes together, it... for me, it gives some sort of kick in some sort of way. [laughs] Or in a way that you can see, that you are providing a good service and yeah... it... yeah, so it's something about that I can provide a good service and at the same time have fun socially.

There were two interlinked “social” reasons stated by the staff members for liking to work together, both of which are stated in the above quote. One has to do with the internal relations between the staff members; the other has to do with the relation to the guests at the café. The first reason was the social interaction between the staff members, what we might call the “colleague factor” or social aspects of the job. These were quite important to the staff members; sometimes they even spent time together outside working hours as well. This corresponds to the collegiality and shared

professional identity, which has been analysed in the case of the occupational professions (Evetts 2010). However, in this case it was not the result of years of education forming a similar way of thinking in the minds of the employees as in the case of the professions; rather, it simple came from working together. In other words, the origins of collegiality were not a sharing of similar education and complex knowledge, but social interaction. In discussing roles in service encounters, Solomon et al. (1985) have noted that strong group cohesion among the performers induces a desire to perform the service role well, which is concordant with the findings of this case. The second reason for motivation in co-working stated above (and in general) was the coordination of the role performances and the resulting efficiency; this made them feel they had provided a good service and that they seemed capable and skilled, or, in other words, professional. During observation, the staff members were at times quite busy, but always seemed coordinated or choreographed, and they seemed to like this. As the quote above expresses, the right choreography made them feel they had made a successful role performance which was convincing towards both themselves and their colleagues. In this way, they found great satisfaction in appearing *professional*. Also, the emphasis on “the right people” which “you get along with” signals the co-dependence of the staff members, which parallels a community characteristic of the classic professions, namely the peer system (Freidson 1999). The respondent does not mention customer perceptions to any noteworthy degree, but the fact that one is responsible to one’s peers is important.

According to Goffman, the setting is a part of what he calls the front of a role performance (1959). Another element which also form part of this front is the personal front, which consists of the manner and appearance of the performer. Applied to this case, one can say that it was important for the staff members to have a *professional front* or appearance. The staff members feel the quality of what they serve is excellent and lives up to their ideological standards, and not only is this important to them, they also identify with it to an extent. They personally relate to the quality and standards, and they like working there and performing their role the way they do, so they have high role commitment. The good quality, trustworthiness, competence, adherence to higher ideals and importance of peers are all elements pointing to the professionalism of the service encounters. The staff members feel things are professionally done and that they themselves appear professional, which is very important to them. And being professional has a high attraction to them as it signals an array of positive characteristics. Herein lies the appeal of professionalism; it signals skill and competence, and provides legitimacy and validation of their work performance and employee role. In the eyes of the staff members, to appear professional is to be professional. And certainly,



observation in general showed that the service quality was high at the café. In this regard, the adherence to professionalism functioned quite well. The professional choreography alluded to above was no coincidence; it stemmed from a set of rules which will now be addressed.

### **Rules And Structure**

It was not just in the outwards appearance towards the guests that Café Classy took pride in appearing professional. The emphasis on professionalism was also remarkable when seen from an inside perspective, that of the staff members themselves. This focus on professionalism manifested in some ways, which were not immediately visible to the guests. To the staff members, efficiency was an important part of appearing professional; and this view was shared by both frontline staff members and managers. This was codified into various rules. When asked what it was like working at the café, one respondent instantly replied: “I think it’s good, I think our comradeship is good. There are some good rules, so everyone does the same.” This quote expressed an interesting viewpoint, which was heard expressed several times during interviews. It links the three elements of “rules”, “everybody does the same” and “good comradeship” in a chain of causation. The rules correspond to what Linton (1964) has called duties of a role and Merton (1968) has called role expectations. These have then been codified into concrete role-specific norms (Parsons 1961). These norms standardise the staff role performances of service provision and ensure a certain quality. It also provides the good comradeship to which this staff member refers. During observation of the interaction between the staff members, their comradeship did seem good, judging from the smiling and joking fashion of interaction they displayed. This was supported by the fact that they also interacted socially outside working hours, which several respondents mentioned during interviews. Furthermore, during observation the staff behaviour did seem synchronised and standardised; they rarely seemed in doubt of who were supposed to do which tasks. This standardisation was very positive in their views. They relied on it, and in this way the group cohesion (Solomon 1985) and collegiality was supplemented with a system of peer control in which each staff member was responsible to his or her peers. To the staff members, the chain of causation was then 1) rules or norms providing 2) standardisation which made them seem professional and this in turn formed the basis of 3) good comradeship.

Of course, all employees (and humans in general) are subjected to rules; it is a basic condition of being employed. Rules steer actions, limit freedom, and can be experienced as restraining and dominating by employed subjects, but accepted as a necessary annoyance. However, the rules were spoken of in a very positive manner by the staff members. They were keen to accept the rules, which ensured that their work place functioned correctly and professionally. The advocacy of the rules is further elaborated in the following quote:

I think it is really good, because there are some completely firm rules, like manuals for what you should do and when you should do it and in all possible situations. Yes, what you are supposed to do. And that makes it, so that the waiters are free from thinking you could say. [Respondent laughs] So when it's busy, then you're not at all in doubt of what to do and where you are and where the other waiters are, and that I think is a giant advantage.

The staff members liked the rules and relied on them to provide coordination and standardisation. Observation showed that the personal style or role performance of staff members varied, and so did the service provision depending on how busy the café was. Nevertheless, there was a unison expression in the service in some ways: it was usually smiling and polite, but also seemed standardised and rehearsed to the researcher. However, the staff members saw the rules as beneficial in providing guidance or “manuals” for their role performance and a fixed frame of work. This fixed frame is welcomed as it provides instruction and eliminates doubts of what to do, and so provides *security* in their role performance and makes it seem professional. Not only did staff members accept the rules, they actively embraced them as a clear role definition (Linton 1964) and source of support and validation of their role performance as professional. To the staff members, the result of the rules was a standardised, coordinated and professional front (Goffman 1959); in other words, their professionalism was codified into the rules.

However, the professionalism and similarity created by the rules mentioned in the quote above were fundamentally different from that of the traditional professions in one important way. Evetts has written about the lengthy education and socialisation of the occupational professions that “one result is similarities in work practices and procedures, common ways of perceiving problems and their possible solutions and shared ways of perceiving and interacting with customers and clients” (2006: 135). Though the staff members had common perceptions and ways of interacting with the guests, the origins of such similarity were quite different from the

occupational professions. Stemming not from common knowledge but from imposed rules, *similarity as a result of education and knowledge* had been replaced by *uniformity as demand* coming from the management. More than being based on *special knowledge* and skills, the professional service quality was based on *rules* ensuring similar work procedures. In this way, professionalism is transmuted and becomes form-based rather than knowledge-based. In other words, professionalism now lies in appearance and in the rules. The following response shows the effect of the rules to one staff member:

Well Café Classy is a place with many *rules* [word emphasised by respondent] [laughs]. Not that we are little robots running around, but... but there are rules for very many things. But that is also what makes it, so that there is the structure, that there is. [...] Of course, there are not any rules for, how we must serve them, except that we should be open and nice and friendly and accommodating and all those things of course. Then we got seating now, which does, that we are controlling them even more, how the café passes off. Ehm... yeah, then the price range it is in, then perhaps you also have to just give it one extra notch.

As stated by this respondent, the “many rules” were not detailed regulations for tasks, but general rules of behaviour or role performance, which correspond to what Goffman has conceptualised as expressive control (1959). As the role expectations of others are learnt and internalised by the staff members, they become self-governing and focused on how to maintain an expression which is both consistent and congruent with these expectations. This sets the limits (or “rules”) for acceptable behaviour, and serves as role definition and guidelines. The rules of being “open and nice and friendly and accommodating and all those things” are an expressive control, which the staff member must be able to manage. But as the rules are combined, they also form a professional “structure” for action and interaction on which the staff members can rely so that they are “free from thinking” (see quote above) as long as expressive control is maintained. One of the defining characteristics of the occupational professions is the autonomy of each professional worker (Evetts 2010). However, in the café case there is a paradox of autonomy. The result of the rules and structure was that the staff members appeared quite self-sufficient and autonomous to the observing researcher; however, they were in reality governed by many rules and therefore anything but autonomous. Part of the expressive control to ensure a professional front was then autonomy in expression (but not *de facto*). The close connection between the rules and the professional front was pointed out by one respondent who was asked how Café Classy was different from other cafés:

Yeah... I don't know how, if I can define if it is different, since I haven't worked at other cafés as such, but well they do their job well after all, and they care about the quality, I think that is important. And things are done properly and you're there for the guests, right? And you don't sit [in the bar] and drink while the guests are watching, I like that. All those things and rules, they've got, I think that makes it nice working there, very professional.

The previously stated points on the value of good quality and doing things “properly” are in this quote further elaborated with statements on the rules for how to appear to the guests and maintain a “professional” front. The quote mentions three elements of this front. The first is attentive service orientation as stated in being “there for the guests”. The second is capability as signalled in “care about the quality” and “things are done properly”. The third is the *idealisation* of their role performance (Goffman 1959). As previously stated, their attention and appearance to guests was important to the staff members. Such idealisation then served to make a role performance congruent with the values of society (Parsons 1961). In other words, the performer displays the acceptable and admirable parts of his behaviour while hiding the less acceptable parts. In the quote, the example used is that of drinking alcohol. Outside opening hours it was common for staff members to have a drink together; but when guests were present, this was not acceptable. Not once during the field work was such behaviour observed. What was important, then, was not so much the actions and behaviour of the staff members, but the *appearance* of these. It was not considered inappropriate to have a drink with fellow staff members in general, only “while the guests are watching”. In this way it was important to the staff members to feel they have a professional front, and they welcomed the rules as they felt they provided exactly that. In their eyes, the rules made them professional.

During observation, the staff members seemed self-reliant and capable. They also seemed preoccupied with being so; any attempts to have a conversation with the staff members beyond the immediate work tasks failed every time this was attempted by the researcher. It was as if everything was already planned and scheduled into a streamlined entirety which seemed impenetrable to the participant-observing researcher. The many times the staff members mentioned the rules during interviews confirmed this impression. In their eyes there were many rules, and this was a good and important thing. The rules coordinated their work tasks and provided a standardised uniformity to their role performances. They also gave the staff members guidelines for expressive control and created a frame for behaviour, which could provide a sense of security in their

performance. Furthermore, they created a structure for the café and allowed each staff member to be self-contained; “follow the rules and you are doing well” the mantra seemed to be. In short, the rules made the café seem *professional*. Though the staff members might have been autonomous in expression and appearance to the observer, in reality their role performance was managerially controlled.

### **The Rules For The Guests**

In the words of one respondent quote above, Café Classy is a place with many rules. But these rules are not just for the staff members. The guests too were subjected to various rules and expectations, although these were often in the more implicit and subtle form of assumptions of how guests would behave. In many cases, the staff members themselves did not seem to even be conscious of their assumptions. In other cases, however, they were very aware and seemed to almost take pride in enforcing these rules. One area of these rules served to guide the behaviour of guests in a very concrete way. This was the seating system, which at the time of the first round of observations and the following interviews were a relatively new implementation. When asked how the seating system was working out, one respondent answered that:

It's going really well. It's totally awesome. It is... you have control of the guests. And they feel, that you have control... well the thing, that they know “well ok, now she has put us on the list for a table, so now we can just relax, we don't have to stand and...” you know. And also the thing, that someone can't just come from outside and take a table. Well... it... yeah... it's really awesome. Yeah. So besides that there are some guests, who are upset “but after all we always sit down by that table there”. “Yeah yeah” I mean just like “fine” like... creatures of habit! [laughs] Then it works totally well.

As mentioned earlier in the quote from another respondent about how the rules provided a structure, the seating provides a choreography which allows staff members to “control” the guests. Most staff members were very happy that the system had been introduced allowing them to do so, because it provided rules for the guests in a very explicit manner. No doubt, it made it easier for staff members to perform their service tasks. But in the eyes of the staff members, another reason was more important and far more often stated: it also allowed them to handle the guests in a more professional

manner offering higher quality service. However, this system was affecting their relations with the guests, especially the regulars. One would think that making the guests “upset” would be a major concern for employees so concerned with being professional, but this is somehow still acceptable because it makes them seem in control; as they are obviously able to steer and handle things, they appear professional. And guests are expected to conform to the display of professionalism; failure to do so is met with a dismissive remark such as “yeah yeah” or “fine”, as demonstrated in the fictional or self-dialogue, which this respondent gave, illustrating how she remembers the conversation. It is even topped with a slightly ridiculing “creatures of habit”. It is somewhat ironic that a staff member who is allegedly so concerned with high quality service can so easily refuse the importance of such confrontations, but there seems to be a purposeful disregard; after all, “besides that” then “it works totally well”. Clearly, appearing professional by following the rules is in focus. In fact, because the rules for guests were so explicit, it allowed the staff members to appear professional in a very explicit manner. This is also illustrated in the words of another respondent:

There are also a lot of regular customers in there. After we have gotten seating in there... well for example I had like a young couple with their son of two-three years age or something like that, like they are really a young couple. Who sat down at their, like, regular table-ish and where I went down there “they are for dining guests, you will have to...” “There is seating now?” and “we have been coming here for twelve years now” and even though it was like a young couple they were just like “argh!” “well something new happens all the time” and such... so... yeah there are some, they can’t... they can’t things like that. [...] There was also one, who gave a comment like “this is the last time I have been at Classy” and stuff, because he wasn’t allowed either to sit there and read his newspaper. Then, it can be... well it can also easily be that he is coming back in a week, and then he just had to demonstrate. [laughs] Yeah.

Again, using fictional or self-dialogue, the respondent provides more examples of the dismissive attitude displayed towards guests who fail to comply with the rules and structure. The quote also illustrates that there is sometimes a symbolic struggle between staff members and guests on who owns the space; own is not understood in a legal sense here, but rather a feeling of right of use or symbolic territory. What the respondent emphasised is not just the fact that guests sit down at the wrong table, but the manner in which they did it. They “sat down at their, like, regular table-ish” implying that to this staff member (and indeed all of them), there is no such thing as a regular table and behaving as if there was is breaking the rules, to which staff members take slight offense. After

all, there are some guests, “they can’t things like that”; meaning some guests fail to live up to the rules. It may seem ironic that guests, who allegedly have been regular through twelve years can so easily be dismissed with a “well something new happens all the time”, but to staff members this statement means that they are constantly improving and thereby evolving to become even more professional. A similar thing can be observed in the example of the man who was refused to sit and read his newspaper. Losing a guest through confrontation is not the focus of the respondents’ story, instead two other themes appear. The first is enforcing the rules; the second is the struggle for symbolic territory. Indeed, perhaps the guest “just had to demonstrate”, to mark his symbolic territory both in the special term of claiming his right for the particular table, and in moral terms of claiming his right following his own norms of behaviour and not the rules of behaviour set for the guests at the café.

In the case of seating, the rules, though evidently not entirely clear to guests, did have a visible aspect as all dining took place in a particular area. The structure, then, was in this case visible to guests to a certain extent, although obviously not enough. There were no large signs saying “please wait to be seated” at the entrance of the café, and only when crossing an invisible line to the dining section were the rules enforced – unless, of course, guests sat down in the other part of the café and ordered food. Or unless it was summer, in which case the café opened up a section of tables outside and dining was allowed here too. In this way the structure might be visible, but not clear or evident to guests. An important part of that structure, then, existed as a cognitive pattern in the minds of staff members. A pattern to steer the whereabouts of guests, and a pattern serving the purpose of making the café and the role performance of staff members seem more professional.

As a guest, the observed experience was not one of a place with many strict rules to which one should comply. Instead the assumptions of proper behaviour were found in everyday-level presumptions and signalled to guests through subtle hints as well as the observable structure of behaviour which all other guests seem to follow. When guests fail to comply with this, consequences follow without exception. For example, one respondent was asked how staff members handled this type of confrontational situation and whether they would let regular guests get away with the free seating pattern of behaviour which existed before seating was implemented. She replied:

Yeah well, with that we are pretty ehm... with that we are pretty much like you have to follow suit actually. And we also get told this by our managers. Yeah. Of course you shouldn't say it in an cross way. Of course people try to present it in a fantastic way and offer another place for them and things like that. But they are pretty ehm... "You should not make allowances for that".

Here the importance of guests following the rules is stated very clearly "you have to follow suit". Otherwise the café and the staff members risk appearing unprofessional in their role performance. Therefore, there can be no "allowances" or exceptions. This shows the value put on adhering to a pattern, which from the perspective of the staff members make them seem more professional. In other words, it is a necessary evil, mostly presented subtly but at times also through open confrontations, for the greater good of appearing professional.

### **Breaking The Concept**

The "follow suit" mentality also meant that certain statements which did not follow the expected pattern would be overlooked or ignored, or at least they would not be accommodated to. For example, one respondent was asked what comments the guests made in general. She replied that:

Well, most think it's really really delicious. And then there's some who think that it's a little...well in comparison to the price that it's extremely expensive. Or that it's extremely little. I mean that the price, I mean what you get compared to what you pay, they don't think it's worth it or... So it's really a lot about the price range when people complain... I mean they think it's too expensive. Like in general. Also at the coffee and... "why does a cup of coffee cost 43 when we can get it to 32 some other place?" [respondent changed her voice to a very high-pitched complaining voice]. "Because that's just how it is. Of course you can... you are welcome to go to another place".

According to this respondent, "most" guests share the staff members' view on the quality as professional. Only "some" are dissatisfied. Notably, the reason is not the quality but the price. In fact, observation showed that the prices were relatively high at Café Classy, but not more so than at



any other cafés in the close vicinity. Anyhow, complaints that products are “too expensive” are not taken to damage the professional face of the café or the staff members. If anything it is rather confirming it; the professional quality is so high that prices are necessarily very high too. During observation and interviews only one staff member ever responded, that he thought prices were too high. Being educated as a chef, he had been working temporarily as a waiter at Café Classy for 6 months while waiting for another job which he was about to leave for at the time of interview. When asked during interviews or confronted with remarks on the prices during visits, all other staff members defended them. Furthermore, the pride in professionalism meant that the professional structure of things cannot and should not be altered in the eyes of staff members. And it was part of the role understanding of staff members to defend the prices and in fact the entire professional structure. Guests who “can’t things like that” and don’t “follow suit” are frowned upon by staff members as illustrated by the change of voice in the response above. In the fictional dialogue of this respondent they are simply given the remark “that’s just how it is” rather than a substantiated explanation; after all, they “are welcome to go to another place”. The two latter remarks show not only that there is a specific “professional” structure at the café, but also that it is highly valued by staff members – to the point where it cannot and should not be altered by guests, only by managers and staff members.

So, purposefully disregarding certain things would often happen when such utterances were conflicting with the structure which existed (or was strived towards). For example, a female guest was observed complaining about the waiting time for her dish. The lady was sitting outside and came in and went up to the bar asking if they had forgotten her order. The bar staff quickly contacted her waiter and together they explained to her that this particular dish took longer time to cook, up to half an hour. The lady reacted with a dissatisfied remark that she should have been told this information when she ordered the dish. She then left the inside of the café and went to sit down at her table outside. Soon after her dish was served by a smiling waiter with a casual remark in the style of “there we go”. The lady then started to eat her dish. It seemed that the smiling waiter thereby considered the problem solved. Professional appearance had been quickly restored. It was not clear, however, whether the lady shared these sentiments. Furthermore, the problem could have been avoided if for example the fact that this dish took longer to prepare had been said as it was ordered, or if the information had been written in the menu card. None of the staff members seemed to make such deliberations; after all, the immediate problem was solved – more or less. There was a pre-existing structure considered efficient and professional, which had now been restored.

In both the above examples, the confrontation could have been used as an opportunity to question the current structure and perhaps make alterations, but the status quo was defended as it was on this that professionalism rested.

Another instance which happened during observation illustrates how opportunities to ask the guests for ideas are missed due to the professional attitudes of the staff members. During a meal at Café Classy, the researcher noticed a few bags of ground coffee in a glass cabinet at the back of the café in a corner next to the stairs which lead down to the guest toilets and entrance to the kitchen area. The waiter serving the researcher's table was asked about the bags of coffee by the researcher. She replied that Café Classy sold their own coffee. She was already about to leave the table as the unusual fact that the café sold their own coffee prompted the researcher to enquire further by posing more questions. With a polite smile the waiter informed the researcher that the café roasted and ground its own coffee. Again the waiter was politely about to leave the table as the researcher asked if one could buy this coffee at the supermarkets, and she smilingly replied that this was not possible, but it could be bought at the bar. Then she left the table. The obvious attempts of a dialogue failed. Notably, this was not a particularly busy time as many tables were empty, so it was unlikely that the refusal to engage in conversation was due to time restraints; instead the pattern followed the overall structure of a smiling and polite yet somehow non-engaging role performance towards the guests. Evidently, there was a limit to how much and which ways the staff member engaged with the guests, instead the obvious attempts of dialogue were met with an impenetrable invisible "wall" between the researcher and the staff member. There was a behavioural structure avoiding unnecessary interaction with the guests which was followed by the staff and was expected to be followed by the guest as well.

The reason for this adherence to the professional structure was clearly stated in one response from a staff member, who was asked whether the guests could be used as a source for new ideas. After a long thinking pause, she replied:

... perhaps... mmm but I think it's difficult how to do it. Because... one of those questionnaires to fill out, as a guest or like that... pffttt [shrugs] I think that's a little flat. Well it... because then it seems like you want to check the guests extra thoroughly, and after all that's not... I mean, in some way, what I also think is cool about Café Classy is that there is a concept about it. Well this is Café Classy and we don't change how things are, it's quite how it's always been. The guests can come in and they can read their news papers and

they can get their coffee, like they always have. But maybe you could, I just think it's difficult, how to do it.

Well finding out how...

Evidently, asking guests for innovation ideas is not something this staff member has thought about a lot. She is also struggling to find any viable way of doing it. The reason is the professional image or “concept” which is so valued by the staff members. The respondent says that she thinks “it’s difficult how to do it”, but by this is not meant whether a methodology exists to accomplish this, because she proceeds to mention a method. Rather, the doubts expressed are concerned with how to do it without breaking the professional image. In her eyes, questionnaires do exactly this and so are “a little flat”. To use them would mean to engage with the guests in an unfit, an unprofessional manner, and also engaging too much with the guests, checking them “extra thoroughly”. Instead, what makes Classy a “cool” place to work is exactly the professional “concept”, which there is almost a taboo on breaking. “This is Café Classy and we don’t change how things are, it’s quite how it’s always been” – could the sanctity of the concept be expressed any clearer? As long as they follow the rules and do not break the professional concept and the professional role performance of the staff members, then guests are welcome. The staff member is not averse to collecting ideas for innovation, as long as this does not change things. Indeed, “it’s difficult, how to do it” without risking the professionalism of the concept and their role performance, since appearing professional is so strongly emphasised.

The staff concerns, however, are even deeper than this. Even if there was a method to collect ideas for innovation from users, which did not risk damaging the professionalism of staff members’ role performance, the result might not be desirable. Like one staff member, who was asked about using the guests as a source for innovation ideas, remarked:

Respondent: You probably could, ehm... the problem is, that quite a lot, when they go out to eat... if they don't know this business properly, then there's quite a lot of things, which... ideas which they have up in their head, which would not be able to work in practice *at all* [words emphasised by respondent]. And that's one of the things we say, that people sometimes leave... well some issues when they go out to eat, then they have to be held by the hand through it all. So there are some things they can complain about, but a lot of the things are something, which couldn't work any other way.

Interviewer: And then it will create frustration almost opening up a lot of things and they then were supposed to come with suggestions and such, yeah?

Respondent: Yes exactly. I mean if you don't know the business and don't know, how things work, then it's really hard to come with something new. But of course it would be a fresh breath of air because it's totally outside, so perhaps one could use some of the things.

The quote reflects some rather strong sentiments on the futility of using guests as a source for innovation ideas. The problem is not that change is unwelcome, in fact there were several examples found of improvements and little incremental innovations coming from staff or managers. But change must follow the concept and its appearance of professionalism, it must not change it. Otherwise, professionalism might dis-appear. As new staff members are employed, they are socialised into the working of the café not just by managers, but also by other staff members. And someone not properly socialised into this concept, such as guests, “don't know this business properly” and therefore the “ideas which they have up in their heads” are far removed from the practical reality of rules and structure of professionalism which is experienced by staff members on an everyday level. Therefore they “would not be able to work in practice *at all*”, a wording expressing a clear and outright dismissal of these. Guests may have different wishes or suggestions or “some issues”, but things simply “couldn't work any other way” lest service quality as staff members see it – or professionalism – is put at risk. Although many an innovation theorist might believe that it is the outsiders with a different way of thinking who can contribute something new to an organisation and its work processes, here the opposite is concluded: “I mean if you don't know the business and don't know how things work, then it's really hard to come with something new”. But then again, in the case of Café Classy “something new” would have to follow a particular structure and concept, it must not break it or this would put professionalism at risk. Not that using ideas from guests is completely ruled out by the respondent, they might be used as an inspiration or “fresh breath of air” or “perhaps one could use some of the things”. But in general, the guests do not know all the rules and the structure, and so they risk breaking the concept.

# **Discussion**

There is a certain system of work processes at Café Classy consisting of many rules for both staff members and for the guests as well. The rules helped creating a specific structure in and of the work processes, and the result of that structure was a concept, i.e. a special face or appearance of both individual role performances and the overall café. Rules, structure and concept all serve the purpose of making the staff members and the café appear professional. This professionalism resides in how staff members understand and perform their role. The roles of staff members will therefore now be discussed. This will help elucidate different kinds of professionalism or understandings of professionalism, so these will also be discussed as well as what this means for what we have here termed the hyperprofessional employee. This has some consequences for user innovation, which will be discussed lastly. But first the roles of staff members will be in focus.

## **Playing roles**

As stated in the introduction, roles have various aspects or constituent parts which have been analysed by different theorists. There is the role understanding or comprehension, how the individual performing a role understands this role to be; there is the role definition, how a role is more or less formally defined; and there is the role expectations, a socially imposed set of demands from people with whom the role performer interacts. Of course, persons interacting with an individual performing a role can also have their own understanding of that role which needs not be congruent with the individual's own understanding; likewise can the performing individual perceive or even create role expectations, which do not exist in the minds of others.

## **ROLE UNDERSTANDING**

So how do the staff members at Café Classy understand their role? In their own words, “there are not any rules” for role performance, but by this is meant officially and formally

defined rules. There are, however, several elements which in their own role understanding must be included, such as being “open and nice and friendly and accommodating”. Predictable behaviour is also seen as an important part of their role so that “you’re not at all in doubt of what to do and where you are and where the other waiters are”. This is guided by the many rules, which not only make sure that “everyone does the same”, but first and foremost they ensure that role performances appear professional in how, when and by whom tasks are done when the guests are watching. There is of course an official role definition as described in the employment contract of the staff members. But there is also a less formal yet more detailed definition. This consists of all the rules which staff members must follow. The role of being a staff member is therefore quite tightly defined, and they put much effort into living up to both formal and informal definitions.

Being frontline employees, staff members were by definition participating actively in a pattern of reciprocity (Linton 1964). Their formal role consisted of the guests paying for a service which the staff members provided, and these were in their turn paid by the organisation. In this sense, staff members played a role in a Lintonian sense by enacting a particular position in this reciprocal pattern, and this position determined their role definition and performance. But simultaneously they also enacted another position in another reciprocal pattern. This was a pattern of role demands, performances and evaluations which shaped the role enactment (Merton 1968). These demands and how a role performance was evaluated was not formally defined but rather expressed through what Merton calls the role-set (1957). Like most roles, the role of each staff member had many role partners and therefore several types of role-relations such as those to guests, managers, colleagues and even general society. These relations made up an important part of the staff members’ role-set. As stated, one role demand was that staff members should be or at least appear professional, and since this demand came from all the role partners mentioned above, it was necessarily considered vital to a successful role performance by staff members. It was not necessarily communicated in clear words, but hinted through e.g. surprised or dissatisfied reactions if staff members failed to live up to this demand. Staff members themselves rarely used the words “professional” or “professionalism”, but, as Merton has written, role demands can be communicated subtly but have a cumulative effect to the point where the role performer unconsciously adapts and complies without necessarily having made a conscious intentional decision to do so (1968). Thus the increasing demands for professional services in society are distilled into specific role performances by the staff members.

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

When the staff members talk about rules, they refer to these in a narrow sense as specific, defined and explicit. But rules can also be defined in a more broad sense, as general, somewhat undefined and more subtle expectations. If we depart from the narrow sense in which the staff members understand rules, then we find that the expectations of professionalism have become a rule or even a moral imperative and an integral part of the role definition. This confirms Parsons' theory that role expectations induce practices which are repeated and become institutionalised into concrete roles (Parsons and Shils 1965). The professional role of the staff members is therefore defined by others not just in the official formal shape of an employment contract, but in the daily practices. Or to put it another way, the general value of professionalism which is increasingly in focus in society comes to expression as specific norms for role behaviour in the case of the staff members at Café Classy (Parsons et al. 1961). The rules for the staff members then correspond to role norms in Parsons' sense. So these norms are seen as rules which define the roles; the structure is then the resulting system of role performances guided by these rules.

But there are also rules for the guests. They serve the same purpose as the rules for staff members: Ensuring the appearance of a professional structure. In this way these rules too are role norms for what is socially expected behaviour, or in the Mertonian sense they are an inexplicit part of the role-set or role relations between staff members and guests. However, at times the staff members' expectations for the role performances of guests are incongruent with the guests' own role understanding. This is illustrated in the examples of the young couple with a child and of the man who wanted to read his newspaper at a dining table. In the words of one respondent, "there are some ... they can't things like that", meaning that they fail to live up to the role expectations which staff members have for them. In such cases, guests are expected to comply as the consideration for professionalism – or at least appearing professional – takes precedence. In this way there are rules or expectations for all role performers at the café. And as the rules combine into rule-sets for various areas, structures of behaviour appear as the result of the enforcement of these rules. In this way, the staff members attempt to pre-determine how social interaction "passes off"; in other words structures *of* behaviour also become structures *for* behaviour. This allows staff members to enact a role performance which appears in control and professional.

## BEING CLASSY

It might seem strange that the staff members go so far as to defend the prices and even the entire professional structure or systems for behaviour such as e.g. seating, after all nothing indicates that they would lose their job or any income should they fail to do so, so what is their motivation? To the outside observer this may seem like a quite high degree of loyalty, and in a way it is. The question is: loyalty to what? It may at first glance seem that it is to the café, but this is only part of the answer. Just as importantly, in their role performance, staff members are loyal to professionalism or at least the demands of appearing professional. To them, a professional role means guarding and representing and in fact *being* the professional structure of the place. In this way they come to embody the professionalism of the café and of themselves through their role performance. Without their professional role performance, there would not be a professional structure and the entire concept of both the staff members and Café Classy would be radically different.

The “concept”, as one respondent termed it, designates both the professional and efficient structure of work processes but also the outwards image which this creates towards the guests, corresponding to what Goffman calls face (1967). This social impression which a role performance leaves in the minds of the spectators is at the core of the staff members’ understanding of professionalism and high service quality; it has become the main focus of their efforts to be good employees. Writing on impression management, Goffman (1959) states that: “it often happens that the performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer. Thus one finds that service personnel [...] enliven their manner with movements which express proficiency and integrity, but, whatever this manner conveys about them, often its major purpose is to establish a favourable definition of their service or product” (Goffman 1959:77). In the case of Café Classy, actions make the person. Or, using the words of Goffman, by expressing certain characteristics of their tasks and performing them in specific ways, the professional manner of staff members also expresses characteristics of themselves; in their own eyes they become professional by appearing professional. Furthermore, there is a professional image of and at the café which the staff members value greatly. And they contribute to this image by trying to perform their role as professionally as they can. In return, the professional image of the café legitimises and strengthens their own role performance as professionals. In this way there is a



symbiosis of professional appearance or imagery between staff members and the café. For example, the interviewed staff members mentioned the reputation of the café as noteworthy and stated that working such a professional place was an important part of the job motivation.

### **The new professionals**

There is a special kind of professionalism found in this case. It is complex and therefore difficult to define or pinpoint in statements and actions. But it is very much there. A good starting point would be to realise that being professional and appearing professional is not the same; one can have one without the other. But the professionalism is also linked to certain changes in society. We must therefore return to the profession literature for a brief moment.

## PROFESSIONALISM

The academic and public discursive move of focus from professions as particular occupations to professionalism as ideology has entailed some important changes. A change in the literature as well as in Western society in general is that professionalism is now something ubiquitous and not just belonging to those who have traditionally been viewed as professionals in the classical (Anglo-American) literature (Collins 1990). Earlier views on professionalism entailed an element of *noblesse oblige*. Although there was never any official definition of what constitutes a profession agreed upon by those who discussed them, nevertheless one could summarise this aspect of the literature by saying that the professions were generally loosely defined as those occupations performed only or mainly by people with a higher educational background or many years of experience within a certain occupation. As a result they possessed a special knowledge. Because they were seen as having, and indeed had, this special knowledge which others did not have, they also had a special responsibility to perform their work in certain ways, e.g. seeming trustworthy. But as the current focus on professionalism – whether as demand from above or appeal from within (Evetts 2003) – moves into new areas of occupation, the conditions of service provision are changed, which has many new implications.

## NEOPROFESSIONALISM

The ubiquitous emphasis on being professional changes the conditions for service provision. These changed conditions include the role of being a professional service provider which frontline employees perform every day. Employees with short or no educational background and a work experience which is low to none are now supposedly still in possession of this special knowledge implied in being professional. They are what we call the “neo-professionals”. As the focus of both literature and society has changed from professions (as occupational groups) to professionalism (as attitude and mindset), many persons – especially frontline service providers – working as part of the occupational groups which formerly were not considered professions have now been confronted with a demand from managers and expectation from users that they must be professional. Even less than earlier, then, do professions and professionalism have a precise definition neither in literature nor in society at large. They are therefore not given a precise definition in this study either, but instead we have studied some of these new implications – including the consequences for role understanding and performance and also the new conditions for innovating the service provision.

The staff members at Café Classy belong to this group of formerly unprofessional employees. Accordingly, the demand of having a professional attitude and work performance has been laid upon the shoulders of the staff members. Like all demands for work roles, this modern demand of professionalism can lead to a range of reactions from open protest to quiet acceptance. However, at the café an interesting phenomenon, which differs from these reactions, was found. The result is what we have termed *hyperprofessionalism*.

## HYPERPROFESSIONALISM

As mentioned earlier, when the focus in general shifted from professions to professionalism, many employees became “professionalised” into neo-professionals. However, this process can take many forms. For example, it might be that a type of occupation changes and becomes more knowledge-based, thereby becoming a “true” new profession in the classical sense. But it could also be that no special knowledge has really been added to that type of profession, yet

there is still an expectation of a “professional” manner and conduct in work performance. In this latter case, the employees are left with no alternative but to adopt this manner of conduct as outwards appearance since they lack the special knowledge which was the hallmark of the professions. To describe this phenomenon we have created the term *hyperprofessionalism*. This consists of many elements. It is a type of role where appearing professional is a vital part of the role understanding; it is also a mindset focusing on appearing professional to the point where this takes precedence over certain service concerns; and it is an attitude of knowing what to do and how to do it, and of “knowing best”. A hyperprofessional is then a specific type of neo-professional. But it is also a specific type of reaction or resistance strategy to the externally imposed demands of professionalism. Hyperprofessionalism is neither open protest nor quiet acceptance; it is full indulgence as employees embrace this demand. Robbed of special knowledge, the employees implement the brilliant strategy of not only embracing the demand, but turning it into a source of esteem and validation legitimising their role performances. This is not a strategy in the often used sense of planned effort, neither is it coordinated, in fact it is not even a conscious decision, but the result is very much existing.

Professionals (in the classic sense) can be hyperprofessional too. It is not a necessary requirement for a hyperprofessional attitude that the person displaying it possesses no special knowledge; such a situation is merely a very likely trigger. Instead, hyperprofessionalism is rather characterised by an exaggerated emphasis on appearing professional – and as a result often not valuing the opinions of those who are seen as unprofessionals as highly as one’s own or that of professional peers. Thus even e.g. a doctor or lawyer can be hyperprofessional.

## THE HYPERPROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEE

This hyperprofessionalism is what was found in the case of Café Classy; the employees have adopted and indeed indulge in the professional manner as a source of legitimacy of behaviour and authority of knowledge. Unlike those neo-professionals which have had special knowledge added to become professionalised, the employees at Café Classy became hyperprofessionals. Frontline employees face direct demands for professionalism as an everyday lived experience doubly, both from the service organisation and from service users. It was therefore not surprising to find that exactly this group of employees had turned hyperprofessional. The name

given is in one sense oxymoronic as it seems to imply a very high degree of professionalism, yet in reality this is only an externally emitted impression; in fact one could say it covers a less-than-professional interior. In other words, it may be seen as an overly professional manner or form covering a less professional content. However, the hyperprofessional behaviour of staff members is a natural, clever and quite understandable reaction as these neo-professionalised employees, without the special knowledge and privilege characteristic of the professions in the more traditional sense, are expected to still carry a professional conduct and work performance. This hyperprofessional way of thinking not only incorporates a role understanding and mindset, but also includes the resulting attitude, perspectives or views which the hyperprofessional employee has of others. In this case, the staff members' views on complaining guests, who did not follow the rules or role expectations set for them, was that they had to either "follow suit" or go somewhere else. In other words, the hyperprofessional face takes precedence over some concerns for guests; ironic indeed that the considerations for good service should hinder good service.

So what does it mean to be hyperprofessional in the case of Café Classy? The hyperprofessionalism at Café Classy can be seen in the general appearance-over-substance attitude of staff members, or perhaps more correctly appearance-*as*-substance. But it can also be found in many specific examples from Café Classy. For example, in backstage areas such as in the kitchen and behind the bar, staff members would socialise informally and indulge in the social relations which they all cited as one of the main motivations for working there. Also, after working hours, staff members would sit at the bar and have a drink. Yet such behaviour would be unacceptable to do "while the guests are watching" to quote one respondent, because it is important that one appears to be "there for the guests". Goffman (1959) has written about this discrepancy between front stage behaviour, meaning behaviour while others, such as in this case the guests, are watching, and back stage behaviour, meaning behaviour in private, without the glaring eyes of outsider spectators. But evidently there are more aspects involved here than public and private behaviour. The respondent quoted above even uses the word "professional" about the rule forbidding staff members to drink at the bar in front of the guests. So certain types of behaviour, such as drinking at the bar, are considered unprofessional. However, they are acceptable as long as the guests are not watching, as long as it does not damage the professional appearance or face of their role performance. Other examples of hyperprofessionalism can be found in the stories of guests who complain about the seating system, although most guests observed obliged it willingly. In fact one could even say the seating system itself is hyperprofessionalism insofar as it serves to keep a professionally looking

structure of behaviour at the café. Anyway, even in cases where guests seek open confrontation because they are so dissatisfied with the system, their reactions are politely dismissed by staff members; for as long as the system makes their role performance and the face of the café seem professional, then such minor controversies are acceptable, even laughable.

## WHY ARE THEY HYPERPROFESSIONAL?

It is the appearance and face that counts. This is why so much emphasis was put on *appearing* professional. The word appearing has been used many times in the analysis to underline the face aspects of role performance and of the café. Many might say that it is not the same as *being* professional, but in the case of hyperprofessionalism, that is exactly what it is. Herein lies the explanation of why staff members seemed so extremely professional during observation. The two may look alike but in origins they are opposites. As the professionals in the classical sense had spent a long time gaining knowledge and experience, this information changed their insights and therefore how they performed various tasks. The result was a professionalism which was internal, stemming from a wish to do certain things in particular ways because of the insight they had; their knowledge became the cause of their professionalism stemming from themselves. The hyperprofessional employees, however, are met with an external demand for professionalism, and as this demand is imposed on the employees, they have no choice but to internalise certain manners and appearances. So unlike the professionals, whose professionalism is the cause of certain manners, appearance and ways of doing things, in the case of the hyperprofessionals, their professionalism is the result of certain manners and appearance and ways of doing things; because it is in their appearance that their professionalism lies. So a combination of professionalism as an external demand and not an internal wish, and the lack of special knowledge, creates a professionalism in manner and attitude: hyperprofessionalism. And so the staff members at Café Classy came to seem so very professional. Returning to role aspects for a brief moment, it was striking how much they liked their role with the rules and structure and concept involved. This overindulgence in the role as professional service providers was not just externally imposed, it was also reinforced by staff members as it served as a “safety net” eternally providing guidance and correct procedures should anyone be in doubt; then “you’re not at all in doubt of what to do and where you are and where the other waiters are”. It was a concept and a source of security to the

hyperprofessionals, providing job security and satisfaction. Stick to the concept and you know you are doing it right; you are “free from thinking”.

### **Consequences for user innovation**

Hyperprofessionalism is not only an effective resistance strategy to external demands of professionalism and a source of guidance so that the staff members know what to do in their daily task performance, it also creates an efficient service of high quality. In fact the whole focus of the hyperprofessionals is to ensure and maintain a specific high quality service. As such it is very beneficial and desirable for service organisations, especially (but not limited to) where high levels of scripting and standardisation are involved. However, should a service organisation wish to make changes in their service provision or even innovate it, then hyperprofessionalism becomes a barrier. Especially so if user based innovation is involved in the strategy, as evident from the rules for guests. According to the hyperprofessional role, guests “have to follow suit”, “because that’s just how it is”, there is a professional “concept” and if the guests want something different then they “are welcome to go to another place”. Because the concept works, it does provide service of a good quality. However, this means that new ideas can hardly come from guests, only from inside the organisation, from managers or sometimes from staff members.

### **SERVICE QUALITY AND SERVICE INNOVATION**

Since it is here seen in relation to user innovation, service quality is in this study also seen from a user perspective, which echoes the perceived service quality view of Grönroos stating that “what counts is quality as it is perceived by the customers” (1990:37). However, this is combined with a staff perspective on service quality in this study, because their experiences and opinions are vital to the service delivery. As it is staff roles and work processes with which we are concerned, we are leaving out the technical dimension of service quality and focusing on the functional dimension (Grönroos 1990). Service quality is then a focus on making the particular role or service performances satisfying for the user, but whether this is indeed the case is evaluated as much (or in some ways more) through the staff members’ eyes as through the users’. At Café

Classy, service quality means a focus on having a successful concept (and indeed the concept was in many ways successful) and perfecting this concept; to do even better and more of the same. Service innovation, on the other hand, means focusing on changing the particular service performances. This is not to say that there were no changes to work processes at Café Classy, but they were viewed from a quality optimisation perspective, not from a desire to do things differently. The difference is that the former emphasises improving a service within the existing frames of that service performance, whereas the other focuses on breaking the frame so to speak, changing the service performance altogether to something else. To take one example, one respondent comes with a suggestion of putting out jugs of water and glasses for guests “to make things more efficient”. In other words, the respondent makes a suggestion for an incremental innovation motivated not by a wish for changing the structure but to make even more of the same structure. However, because it risks interfering with the established concept (in this case table service) rather than strengthening it, the suggestion is immediately dismissed by herself. In general, unlike ideas for innovation (change), improvement in efficiency (more of the same) is an area which clearly gets attention by staff members at Café Classy. This means that there was in fact a perceived opposition between service quality and service innovation. And so, in reality, there was.

## OUT WITH THE NEW, IN WITH THE OLD

Especially in the case of innovation based on input from users does hyperprofessionalism provide an obstacle. There was a tendency that new ideas or inputs from guests were rejected. Guests were expected to follow the rules or else their opinions would be dismissed, as evident from both the laughable voice given to guests during the staff members’ retelling of incidents, and the explicit statement that guests who were not prepared to get with the programme were “welcome to go to another place”. Moreover, any ideas that managed to get through were filtered by staff members as evident from the follow quote from one respondent asked what they did with comments:

Those ehm... it depends on what comments they are. If it's some that we hear really often then it's just "yeah thanks, we know!" or... and if it's some, then we usually tell... well tell the other waiters or whoever is in the bar or something.

So comments and ideas are sorted by staff members and those deemed worthy of attention are passed on to colleagues, provided that they fit the concept and have not been heard too many times before. Or, to take another example, the observation on the lady, who complained about the waiting time for her dish shows that spontaneous input which could be used as a source of innovation occur as in all contexts, but they will be rejected if they do not fit into the concept. As Goffman put it: “a single focus of thought and visual attention, and a single flow of talk, tends to be maintained and to be legitimated as officially representative of the encounter” (1967: 34). Service encounters at Café Classy (and indeed many services elsewhere) have a pre-conceived definition in the minds of staff members, and what is not in that definition will be purposefully ignored.

This is likely to have some consequences not only for which ideas are accepted, but also for user motivation as the guests are given no motivation for stating any ideas. A good example of this can be found in the observation on the bags of coffee in the glass cabinet. Not only was this a major selling opportunity, which was missed, the staff member could for example have taken it out and showed it or told more about the reasons for roasting and grinding their own coffee and the resulting good quality. But it was also a missed chance of engaging with a guest and perhaps ask for opinions or ideas. Of course not all guests want to be asked about ideas for innovation, many want to be left alone and eat their meal. But it was revealing that during the researcher’s obvious attempts to engage in conversation, or rather despite these, the staff member did not engage further. It was as if there was an invisible barrier or wall between the staff members and the researcher. Not that the service felt unfriendly or as if the researcher was being ignored; the service was friendly, smiling and polite. But it appeared to follow a certain pattern, which it was not possible to break in the moment despite the researchers’ best attempts.

## DESTRUCTIVE INFORMATION

Obviously, keeping the concept intact is important for staff members as this guarantees a certain service quality. They “don’t change how things are, it’s quite how it’s always been. The guests can come in and they can read their news papers and they can get their coffee, like they always have.” This is true for each individual staff member’s work routines, each employee can feel validated in their role performance as long as they live up to role expectations of



professional appearance. But the role performance of each staff member influences the overall image or face of the café and therefore also the face of other staff members' roles. Therefore, there is peer pressure to conform, communicated not so much as explicit demands but rather as subtle hints of expectations as staff members discuss their work with each other; it seems that not only guests have to "follow suit". The result is a specific definition of the service encounters which the staff members as a team are also expected to follow.

This confirms what Goffman wrote about how a team must sustain the definition of a situation: "One over-all objective of any team is to sustain the definition of the situation that its performance fosters. This will involve the over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others. Given the fragility and the required expressive coherence of the reality that is dramatised by a performance, there are usually facts which, if attention is drawn to them during the performance, would discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters. These facts may be said to provide "destructive information". A basic problem for many performances, then, is that of information control; the audience must not acquire destructive information about the situation that is being defined for them" (1959:141). The staff team this definition of the situation to a very high degree, so much so that some facts are not just under-communicated, but are outright overlooked. Again, the observations on the lady who complained about the waiting time for her dish and the researcher who tried asking about the bags of coffee in the glass cabinet may serve as illustration, they had elements which did not fit the definition and therefore were ignored or avoided. In fact, the impression of "efficient and smiling service" conveyed through the service encounters is so vital to a credible role performance, that one respondent even said: "I can vouch one hundred percent for everything that goes on at the café actually". That the expressive coherence should not be disrupted or discredited is assumed as a natural given among staff members on an almost unconscious level, and therefore information control is rarely stated explicitly. There are, however, exceptions when the adversity to "disruptive information" (ibid.) becomes explicit, such as when an informant states that "the problem is, that quite a lot, when they go out to eat... if they don't know this business properly, then there's quite a lot of things, which... ideas which they have up in their head, which would not be able to work in practice *at all*". Of course, some ideas might be generally impractical or impossible in general. However, seen in the context of how staff members adhere to their hyperprofessional roles, the message is also a statement against disruptive information. After all, any change should follow the concept and if you are not following the concept (like some guests), then you cannot perfect it; or in

the respondent's words: "I mean if you don't know the business and don't know, how things work, then it's really hard to come with something new" which follows the hyperprofessional concept and roles.

This is the origins and result of the hyperprofessional role which these frontline employees were enacting. They did not have a special knowledge, so for them appearing professional naturally comes in focus. The irony is that any attempts of gathering ideas for innovation, and thus build some special knowledge, are dismissed insofar as they are perceived to risk damaging the (hyper)professional role and the (hyper)professional appearance. No doubt, the intentions are good. Professionalism makes a trustworthy service provision. And even if there is no special knowledge to support a special professionalism, it can still be present in manner and attitude, thereby ensuring a high quality service. So far there is nothing undesirable about hyperprofessionalism, it is even an impressing strategy for employees who must cope with the increasing demands for professionalism. But if a service organisation should want to innovate their service, especially if this includes involving the employees and users, then the hyperprofessional role understanding becomes an important mental barrier which must be addressed in order to succeed.

## **Conclusion**

The staff members at Café Classy faced a serious dilemma. However, they did not seem aware of it, at least none of them mentioned this. But the results of this dilemma were omnipresent and could be observed both through participant observation and in interview responses. The dilemma was as follows. Professionals have often been views as persons with a special knowledge; information and insights which give them access to special skills when performing job tasks and which makes them more trustworthy than a lay person. This special knowledge comes from special education, a long training or internship, or at least long term experience. But the staff members at Café Classy lack all these; they generally lacked any formal education as waiters, most had been there less than a year or were only working part time, and many had focus on other commitments, such as getting other educations which were unrelated to being a waiter. So far there is no real problem though, these facts simply place staff members in the category of non-

professional workers. At the same time, however, there is an externally imposed demand on staff members to be professionals, or at least to display professionalism as they are frontline employees with direct contact to the users. The demand is ubiquitous and therefore difficult to pinpoint, but it manifests in concrete remarks and more or less explicit assumptions of proper professional behaviour from managers, from the guests and from society at large. How did the staff members solve this dilemma? The solution was found in their hyperprofessional role performance and the face they displayed towards managers, guests and even each other.

Studying the practices of the service encounters at the café anthropologically and analysing interview responses have revealed some underlying mechanisms. In essence, the staff members were defined as professionals qua their role performance; it was necessarily herein that their professionalism lay. And this is why the face of their role performance and the overall concept were so important to staff members – and not just their role performance, but also that of their colleagues. They were united in this focus on appearing professional, and so demands of professionalism came not only from managers, guests and society in general, it also came from their peers. And if they were to break this, then they would lose the professionalism which they have.

So what consequences does professionalisation of frontline employees have for user innovation through service encounters? The answer depends on which type of professionalisation process is taking place, whether the formerly unprofessionals have become neoprofessionals in the sense of having new knowledge added to their field or whether they must to place their response to demands of professionalism in appearance. We have seen the effect the increasing demands for professionalism have on the daily work of this group of frontline employees, and how their role has been shaped in particular ways. And we have also seen how the hyperprofessional structure of and for service is a barrier to innovation and especially user innovation. As the staff members are defined as “professionals”, guests are seen as the “unprofessionals” and therefore different from the staff members. This is then reflected in the knowledge or insights they are presumed to have (or not have as the case is). Innovation has generally come more into focus in society during the current turbulent economic climate, and this is also true for services. Furthermore, innovation either directly involving the users or at least based on input, wishes and ideas from users is increasingly seen as the way forward. But simultaneously, professionalism is also increasingly in focus and a demand from both users and service organisations. Hyperprofessionalism is therefore an issue which must be taken seriously and addressed by any service provider wishing to innovate. User innovation involving frontline employees can only succeed if they are adequately prepared with the right skills

and role definition. And it is the managers who to a large extent define their roles. In this case, the employees were efficient, friendly and provided a high service quality, in fact they fulfilled all expectations of their role. Yet hyperprofessionalism was still a barrier to progress and innovation.

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## **CHAPTER 7**

### **ARTICLE 3**

# **OTHERING IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS**





# Othering in service encounters

- How a professional mindset can hinder user innovation in services

‘To speak for others is to first silence those in whose name we speak’

- Michel Callon (1986)

## Introduction

This chapter deals with the issue of how the professional attitudes of employees and the concomitant process of othering may actually hinder user innovation in services. The aim is to analyse the possibilities and barriers for service innovation through service encounters. Many services consist of service encounters during which the service providers’ frontline employees come into direct contact with the service users. This, then, would seem like a good opportunity for the employees to ask the users for innovation ideas. However, there may be barriers to this. This chapter builds on a case study of a café. The empirical findings from the case study are used to illustrate and discuss the implications of some attitudes of staff members in relation to user innovation. Users may have ideas for innovations but whether these are communicated depends on the behaviour and attitudes of the immediate receiver – the employee. Furthermore, these ideas can be (and often are) stated in various forms such as outright suggestions, questions, complaints or even vague signals of needs in snippets of sentences. In this case it was found that an emphasis on appearing professional combined with strong social group coherence among staff members may prevent users from stating any ideas for innovation. And even if these are stated, they risk being overheard or ignored by staff members due to the phenomenon of othering.

## **Theoretical background**

Within the field of relationship marketing (Berry 1983), various authors have pointed to some core factors which are necessary for success in service provision. These include the importance of the service provider and the frontline employees creating a bond of trust (Macintosh 2009), loyalty (Gremler and Brown 1996) and rapport (Gremler and Gwinner 2000) with their users. Beyond the general service relation, services often involve situations in which they are performed; the so-called service encounters (Normann 1991). These encounters are important to the service experience of the user (Czepiel et al. 1985, Corvellec et al. 2005), and are therefore opportune moments to build the bonds mentioned above in order to create a good quality service. They are also important for sourcing ideas for innovation from users (Edvardsson et al. 2000) in order to create an innovative service.

In theory, the line of argument seems clear enough. Service research has shown that services are relational (Grönroos 2000) and that service encounters are important (Czepiel 1985). During these encounters, an organisation has the direct opportunity to, ideally, create a bond of trust (Macintosh 2009), loyalty (Gremler and Brown 1996) and rapport (Gremler and Gwinner 2000) with its users through its frontline employees. In this way one can generate easily accessible and understandable ideas for innovation from the users. However, other methods of acquiring customer input are used much more frequently. Examples are user surveys in the form of customer feedback forms or cards on the tables (e.g. Edvarsson et al. 1994) and focus groups consisting of inviting a few users to an in-depth session in which they are asked about their ideas (e.g. Morgan and Spanish 1984, Merton 1987). The former involves a time delay making further exploration of feedback difficult as the user has left the service encounter; and it might also be said to be too extensive for user innovation as it only yields brief superficial statements from many people. In focus groups, users are taken completely out of the encounter situation, and there is the question of representativeness; it may be too intensive for user innovation as only a small limited number of users that are usually asked. 'Use the service encounters instead' the argument goes, as these take place as an integrated part of most service provision anyway, and this is when the service provider comes into direct contact with users through its frontline employees. On a running basis, service organisations can thereby constantly measure their user environment or at least get a feel for the users and what they want.

However, in this case study it is found that this process might be more complicated than assumed due to the professional role of staff members. Within the field of sociology, the profession literature has debated the definition and status of what has been termed the professions for more than a century (Tawney 1921, Carr-Saunders & Wilson 1933, Marshall 1950). In particular, the obligations and privileges of the professionals have been debated as being either positive or negative (Parsons 1939, 1951, Dingwall & Lewis 1983, Craib 1997). Despite the disagreement on definitions, there seems to be agreement in at least the majority of the literature that the professions have a special status which is more independent compared with other occupations. Importantly, a professional job is also based on a special knowledge coming from either a long education or years of experience.

Within the last decade or so, however, the focus has changed from defining (the status of) professions to discussing the appeal of professionalism as ideology (Hanlon 1998, Cruess et al. 2000, Evetts 2006b). Many groups of employees which formerly were not considered part of the professions are now expected to live up to standards of professionalism. Again this has been seen as both positive and negative depending on whether the perspective has been the appeal of professionalism to professionals or the appeal to professionalism made by organisations; in other words whether professionalism has been used as a motivator for employees or as an externally imposed demand for employees.

Eliot Freidson (1994, 2001) has argued that professionalism constitutes an ideal alternative control mechanism to free market competition and Weberian bureaucracy. Unlike the two latter which have a tendency to standardise the service product and demotivate the professionals, it builds on personal knowledge, obligation and judgement leading to service customisation and better service performance quality (Freidson 1994). He thus represents a more positive take on professionalism, what one might call the 'professionalism as (positive) motivator' tradition.

A number of authors, however, have analysed the appeal to professionalism prevalent in New Public Management in more critical terms, as organisational ideology forced upon employees (e.g. Fournier 1999). They can thus be said to belong to the 'professionalism as (negative) external demand' tradition. A good example of an author within this latter tradition is Julia Evetts (2003) who has discussed the differing conditions of various occupational groups for defining and using professionalism. Building on McClelland's concepts of 'from within' and 'from above' (1990), Evetts describes how ideals of professionalism 'from within' the professionals has

been replaced with demands of professionalism ‘from above’; and this is especially done by managers in New Public Management (Evetts 2009). The crucial difference here is whether the professionalism is internalised in the employee or not; whether it is the result of internal wishes and motivations or the external cause of certain employee behaviour patterns. From an outside perspective, these two may look similar, but from the employee’s subjective perspective they are direct oppositions.

The specific service providing organisation studied in this case was a café. Like so many other formerly unprofessional groups of employees, the staff at this café have become ‘professionalised’ and thereby join the group of those who are now suddenly supposed professionals but who do not necessarily share the distinguishing mark of special insider knowledge which characterised the professionals of earlier times. But how do these immediate service providers, the front-line employees, themselves see this new role? And how have the implications of suddenly being professionals changed the conditions for service provision? This has not been covered much in the current literature. Furthermore, even less attention has been given to how this affects innovation and especially user innovation in services – and in particular the possibility of employees collecting users’ ideas for innovation during service encounters. In this study, the following question was therefore posed: What effects do the professionalised staff roles have on staff views of guests, and what consequences does this have for the possibility of sourcing innovation ideas from users during service encounters? The role and perspectives of staff members are described mainly by themselves although there is of course an official external definition of their role. In order to answer these questions, this chapter will now continue with some methodological descriptions and reflections followed by a section presenting, analysing and discussing some empirical findings from the case. This leads to a discussion of two important findings which in this chapter are conceptualised as space of living and othering (both will be presented in detail later) and how they can function as barriers for user innovation through service encounters. Finally, the chapter ends with a conclusion summarising the empirical findings and briefly elaborating on some theoretical findings, as well as giving some answers to the questions posed in this introduction.

## **Method**

First a brief note on terminology. Throughout this chapter, when concerned with the specific persons working at the café and those being customers there, the terms ‘staff’ and ‘guest’ are used. When speaking more generally about service providers and those who deal with these, we use the terms ‘frontline employee’ and ‘user’. A frontline employee is thus the first-hand representative person of the overall organisation, the ‘service provider’. When the name of the café is mentioned, Café Classy will be used as a metonym. This is not the real name of the café, but a fictional name created by the researcher.

To answer the questions posed above, certain issues had to be investigated, such as what the consequences of the changed staff role are for staff perspectives. How has their role changed in terms of changes to how staff members see guests and understand their own role? And how does this affect the conditions of user innovation and specifically the possibility of staff members sourcing innovation ideas from users during service encounters? Therefore, a study of a café was carried out. Since the questions pertain to processes, meaning and personal views, the study was done as a qualitative case study in the form of ethnographic fieldwork which was carried out at the café. The empirical material included in this chapter consists of two kinds of data. One comes from participant observation during which the researcher posed as a customer; and the other comes from interviews with frontline employees.

The data collection was done during two periods. Initially, a brief pilot study was made consisting of three observational visits to the café. Following the initial visits, during which the author was accompanied by other researchers, five interviews with five different staff members were made by these other researchers. The purpose of the interviews was to further elucidate the attitudes and perceptions of staff members regarding the service encounters and the possibilities of user innovation during these.

The respondents quoted in the following analyses had different backgrounds, but nevertheless they shared certain important characteristics: they were all in their twenties, thus none of them had worked at the café for many years; they were all frontline employees working as waiters yet none of them had a formal education as such; and they all had extensive direct contact with the guests on a daily basis. The interviews were based loosely on an interview guide but also deviated from this when responses necessitated or inspired this; and so the interviews were semi-structured and at times unstructured.

Approximately a year later, an analysis of the initial data had led to a narrower focus, and with this in mind, more participant observation was conducted. Over the duration of several weeks, the researcher (the author of this chapter) repeatedly frequented the café in the role of a guest. The visits lasted 1-3 hours, which was judged by the researcher to be approximately the same average duration of visits by other guests as they were observed by the researcher. Since the café was a space open to the public, the researcher fitted in naturally as a guest and neither other guests nor staff members seemed to notice the researcher to a remarkable or unusual degree. The visits were undertaken at different times of day, different days of the week including weekends, in rainy and sunny weather. These conditions decided not only how many guests there were but also how crowded the bar and indoor serving area was. No observation scheme was used because rather than a pre-planned rigidly systematic approach, participant observation holds an element of ad hoc improvisation in the sense that what is observed (or not observed) determines further observation. This was done in order to study the processes which took place during the service encounters studied. As the researcher took part of what was studied, the method was participant observation, albeit not in the traditional anthropological sense of permanently immersing oneself in an environment for a longer period of time (Spradley 1980, Agar 1980, Robben and Sluka 2007). Having done so would not have followed the temporal pattern which other guests had, so instead visits of a shorter duration was opted for. There was, however, a process of active observation, interaction with staff and (to the extent the setting allowed) other guests, as well as taking down field notes (Emerson et al. 1995). The visits consisted of certain key points of contact such as arrival and getting a table, getting menus, posing questions about and ordering food, paying for the bill, et cetera. During these, the researcher tried to interact as much as possible with the staff members. Furthermore the researcher also tried to increase the interaction by asking questions. This is likely to have made the researcher seem like an inquisitive and engaging guest, more so than the average guest. This contains the risk of 'contaminating' the service encounter and making it more engaging than the typical encounter experienced by other guests. However, despite the researcher's efforts, the attitudes of staff members seemed as engaged or disengaged as those towards other guests. During and between these key points, the researcher observed the interaction of guests with staff and with other guests to get an impression of everyday life at the café and especially how staff interacted with guests. At times the researcher tried to sit close to the bar area as this was where the frontline staff spent their time when not busy serving guests; in this way the researcher could

observe the internal interaction of the staff group. All the interaction observed took place in the public space of the café and could therefore not be considered private or secret.

Subsequently, the empirical data was analysed with a specific focus on the processes going on inside the frame of the service encounter and on the perspectives of staff members, especially their views of the guests. Unlike much social science research, the ethnographic research cycle involves several turns around the cyclical process of selecting a focus, asking questions, gathering data, making a record and analysing the data leading to a new focus (Spradley 1980). Thus the research focus in this process has been narrowed from a general interest in the processes going on during service encounters, to the possibility of sourcing users' ideas for innovations during these service encounters, to the staff's role in this process, to the perspectives of the staff and what consequence their role has for their view on the guests. Thus the mode of enquiry has gone from being comprehensive to being topic-oriented during the research process (Hymes 1978 in Spradley 1980).

Like the data gathering, the data analysis has been conducted ethnographically as well, by searching for underlying views, perspectives, and patterns of speech and behaviour in the concrete data gathered from interview responses and social situations observed. These elements of cultural meaning (Spradley 1980) are discerned from the concrete data and combined into higher level patterns and taxonomies. This was done informally without the use of software, and so the data was not rigidly and systematically coded but instead interpreted by the researcher for elements of cultural meaning. Instead field notes and interviews were read many times to identify patterns and underlying themes.

The café itself was a relatively expensive establishment in the centre of the city of Copenhagen, Denmark. Its decor was light, minimalistic and with allusions to famous historical events. The food and drinks served all reflected an underlying ideology; as far as possible everything was organic or biodynamic, locally sourced, seasonal and of good quality, something which the prices reflected. Tables were available inside and also outside in the summer on the square where the café was placed. Both areas had table service, and some seating areas were reserved for dining customers whereas others were reserved mainly for non-dining customers. In general, the service was professional in various ways; it was polite, smiling and reasonably knowledgeable about the products served. This formed part of the professionalism which was very salient to the observer.

## **Findings**

It was not surprising to find that staff and guests had different roles at the Café (Goffman 1959), neither that there were certain semi-closed social circles such as the staff group and each group of guests. These social circles will in this chapter be referred to as ‘spaces of living’ which implies that those included not only had their main personal social interaction within this space, but also that during the social interaction they – temporarily at least – identified with the living space as a role definer. In the case of staff members they saw their role as carrying out the vision of being a professional service provider. This had the effect that a process of ‘othering’ took place, through which guests were seen as different from staff. This was evident in both behaviour (how they provided the service and generally conducted themselves and how social interaction with guests was limited), and in speech (how social life within the staff group and the cautious attitudes towards asking guests for ideas for innovation were expressed in statements). So the way they saw their role had some consequences for the mindsets of staff members, both in terms of their understanding of guests and their view on the insights which guests might have. And the main consequence was this process of othering which can be described as a mental emphasis on the differences between the self and the other; in this case the staff member and the guests. Furthermore, this process of othering ultimately had some consequences for the acquisition of ideas for user innovation during service encounters. The structure of this section will be as follows: First the professional mindset and what being professional means to staff members will be described briefly. Then the staff space of living will be discussed and lastly the process of othering will be analysed.

### **The importance of being professional**

Café Classy is an illustrative example of workplaces which formerly were not considered to be included in the category of ‘professions’ (in the classic sociological sense), but have now been included in this category. The (demand for) professionalism has been internalised by staff members, who have appropriated it and indeed take pride in being young professionals. The following quote from a young male staff member is an example illustrating this attitude:



And things are done properly and you're there for the guests and you don't sit [in the bar] and drink while the guests are watching, I like that. All those things and rules, they've got, I think they make it nice working there, very professional.

This professionalism in work performance was seen as an integrated part of their role as employees; furthermore it was a source of job satisfaction and even pride in representing a café which made an effort to stand out. The ubiquitous emphasis on being professional meant that staff members had a strong focus on performing their job according to their own comprehension of their function and in accordance with the 'rules' which they were given by management. In other words, the quality of service and the correct performance of the service delivery were within the core focus of staff members. To describe this strong emphasis on performing work professionally we have created the term hyperprofessionalism. It is a role and mindset which stresses a professional appearance and manner of behaviour as well as an attitude of knowing what to do and how to do it. At the café, the hyperprofessional mindset meant that the mental focus was put on service provision in a quite formal way preventing a relaxed informal attitude which could help staff members relate to the guests on a more egalitarian level. This focus on being professional was not only created but also frequently reconfirmed both in their individual role performance, but also in the interaction between staff members. This interaction took place in what was not just a group of work colleagues but also a social group or space.

### Space of living of the staff

This section will mainly focus on the staff members' space of living although the groups of guests also had their own internal spaces of living. Beyond a mere working space, to staff members the café was also a space in which some of their social life took place both during and outside of working hours. There was thus a space of living for the staff members at the café, both in the concrete physical sense of the café being the space in which they lived more than just worked, but also in the more social sense that there was a pattern of social interaction within the staff group. In this latter sense, the space of living is conceptually similar to the general sociological concept of intragroup interaction.

During periods of observation, the staff spent most of their time performing work activities. When not busy doing so, they chatted more privately with other staff members behind the bar. It was clear that they shared a social community beyond being colleagues. Likewise, during interviews staff members described how they participate in social activities together outside working hours yet still within the frame of the café. When talking about social interaction after working hours, a female respondent was asked if there was a personnel room where staff members would drink a beer together. She replied that:

Then we sit up in the restaurant. [...] We have a personnel account of 400 kroner per month, which we pay, and then we can drink and eat as much as we like there actually. And that makes the social [togetherness] really strong. Well there is almost always someone sitting in there eating. And that's definitely a giant advantage about it, that you have the social [togetherness].

Repeatedly during interviews, 'the social' was mentioned as one of the main attractions of working at the café. The social was never precisely defined, but usually implied both the social interaction between staff members and the commonality of experiences and perspectives which they shared during working hours. From the observer's point of view, the daily chatter between staff members gave an impression of togetherness, camaraderie and even friendship. Together, then, this formed a space of living for the staff members. This was a complex space consisting of various elements such as common experiences and viewpoints as well as social interaction both during and after working hours. New employees were initiated and socialised into the staff space of living as well:

Well I think that those who are the experienced employees are good at receiving the new ones. Well we're very... reminded that 'remember, when new [employees] arrive, be nice in receiving them, just like the experienced ones were when you arrived'.

This way the group was maintained. Not only was there social interaction between staff members even outside of working hours; they form a coherent social group, although not everyone had completely identical viewpoints. The space of living is therefore not implying identity but rather commonality of the formal work role description making staff members colleagues. During observation, it was repeatedly found that staff members talked a lot among themselves and to the observer they seemed to share viewpoints on various practical matters

relating to their task performance. During interviews they also expressed similar opinions on many topics, but still had different wordings and ways of expressing them. So the staff members were a group sharing certain characteristics and perspectives but consisting of individuals with individual experiences and opinions. Nevertheless, there was coherence in the staff group as this was formed not only by a shared official role definition but also by common perspectives, and in the space of living it was unfolded verbally and behaviourally through processes of social interaction.

Interestingly, the interaction and commonality of experiences and perspectives was repeatedly stated during interviews as one of the primary attractions of the job for the staff members, who tended to be from 18 years old to the mid-twenties. As staff members shared a space of living and perspectives, they also formed opinions about the guests in general. These opinions indicated that the guests themselves had their own space of living. This, however, was less so through social interaction between individual and groups of guests, in fact little social interaction was observed between guest groups. Nevertheless, observation revealed that the majority of guests shared certain characteristics which may be difficult to specify or define, yet intuitively they could be sensed. This intuitive observation was also made by staff members. For example, when one staff member was asked about different types of users and whether Café Classy and the café across the street (which was also upscale) were competing for the same customers, the staff member replied:

I don't think so because those who go to Café Classy, that's the ones who want to sit and enjoy themselves and have everything delivered right? Because there's not so much difference in the prices really. [...] So I think there's a difference in what kind of guests go where.

Not only different social groups, but – to varying degrees – different spaces of living were formed, each with their own characteristics and form of cohesion, whether verbal-interactional or common-trait based. As the above quote illustrates, in the eyes of staff members, one thing characterising their guests compared with other types of café guests was that they expect a high level of service. It seems only natural, then, that this is something which staff members focus on providing, and not surprising that this has become one of the defining attributes and manners of the staff as a social group.

The social interaction and common emphasis on certain values indicates a strong sense of group belonging among the staff. In general, the consequence of this kind of sense of group belonging is a salient boundary across which those outside the group find themselves viewed as

different; not part of the group or space of living. Perspectives from inside and outside the group are not the same, and neither is the knowledge possessed.

This was also the case at the café, which could be seen as a field hosting an interplay between distinct social groups. As evident from observation and interviews, the staff members viewed themselves as different from guests. This had the consequence that social interaction with these was limited. It also had some consequences for user involvement and service innovation as will be evident later on. The division between the spaces of living of the staff and of the guest groups is of course intrinsically linked to the set-up of the situation. The service provision unfolds in a context of mental and physical bisection as staff and guests have different pre-defined roles and physical spaces, which, though perhaps intended to be supplementary in nature, stand in opposition to each other. As a result, staff members saw themselves and guests as different in a number of ways, resulting in fundamentally different perspectives and knowledge.

### Othering

From the participant observation, the researcher had an overall impression of staff members as having the view or opinion that there was a basic difference between themselves and that of the guests. This was evident from how staff members generally only interacted with guests when it served a practical work-related purpose such as serving food or giving the bill, but it could also be seen in how they interacted a lot between themselves when not busy performing work tasks. Clearly, social interaction of a more informal friend-like nature was reserved for colleagues, and many statements were not to be shared with guests; in effect these were two separate groups which were not the same and not to be treated the same way. However, this view of a unified difference between the two groups was modified and elaborated during interviews. In their responses, staff members showed many parameters for how guests are viewed as different from them and not as people they would naturally spend time with given the chance. For example, when discussing types of guests, one respondent was asked whether he had an impression of what the central location meant for the café, whether the guests were mostly people passing by coincidentally as they were walking down that street or wanted coffee. He partially disagreed and further elaborated why:

No. Yeah that too, but quite a lot... it's kind of a posh café, a very special target group I think. Not my target group, that goes there. (laughs) There's not a lot of young people either, it's mostly older

people going there, who probably also go there because it's Café Classy and not so much because they like it I think... or they like it, but not so much because it's what they go for [i.e. the food] but more because it's where to go when you want to show off right? Like [another café] and all the others.

In the eyes of this respondent, not only do guests expect a high service quality, they also expect a certain posh image to be performed and maintained at the café. This, then, is included in the perception of the professional role which staff members should perform. That the guests are different from the staff is a perspective which several staff members emphasise – or as it is expressed in the above quote, guests are not the respondent's 'target group'. Allegedly, then, there are various parameters according to which the guests are different. A female respondent, who had worked at another café before beginning her job as Café Classy was asked whether there was a lot of difference in the clientele from where she worked before to those coming to Café Classy. Her reply was:

Well there's a lot more foreigners here. Yesterday I realised several times I was speaking English to Danish guests because you're just... also because here at Easter, there's been a lot of tourists. But otherwise it's eh... I don't know how many, but they are perhaps a little more fancy, the ones coming here.

The list of perceived differences includes class, age, personality, (life)style and in many cases language and nationality. All these differences combine to form a mental image of guests as quite different from staff. This is what has been called othering (e.g. Weis 1995, Johnson et al. 2004). It is a concept used in various strands of literature in various different ways, but it may here be defined as a mental focus on the differences between oneself and someone else while similarities are purposefully ignored. This is not to state the self-evident fact that humans are different from each other; most humans have various similarities and differences. Rather, othering is a mental process whereby similarities and differences are given unequal value; the mental focus is predominantly on the ways in which an individual or a group of people are divergent or even contrasting to oneself while any similarities may be unreflectively taken for granted or even ignored. What is interesting to the individual engaged in the mental process of othering are the ways in which the other is different from oneself. This process of othering is linked to hyperprofessionalism; or rather it is a consequence of it. According to the hyperprofessional mindset, when the other is different, then it is easier not to relate to each individual in a different way but to have a general attitude and mindset in

service provision. A traditionally professional mindset might focus on service customisation, but as the hyperprofessional attitude strives towards excellence (in outwards appearance at least), the best practice approach becomes standardised and formal. And that is what was strived towards at the café. Again, this is an understandable result: As some people – in this case the staff members – are suddenly defined as professionals and thus as having a special knowledge, others who are not professionals – in this case the guests or users – do not share the same insight and are therefore different from staff members; they are others.

This othering has some implications for user innovation and for staff perceptions of whether it would be a good idea to ask or collect ideas from users. If prompted about asking the guests for ideas, staff reactions generally varied between non-reflection to outright dismissal. When asked whether it would be interesting to notice what guests say during service encounters and gather ideas for innovation from these users and then pass the ideas on to the management, one staff member replied:

... ehm... yes well if people express it and such, then sure... It's also if I can feel, something would be easier if you did it that way, then they'll say so... I generally think they are pretty straight forward.

As a space of living implies similar but not identical perspectives, staff members vary in their attitudes and reactions to asking guests for ideas for innovation. This respondent was open to listening to guests' ideas, but in a re-active rather than pro-active manner. The respondent had not reflected on this type of innovation before; this 'road to change' was not part of the professional mindset. Likewise, in some cases seeking ideas from guests was not something the staff member would naturally consider until suggested by the interviewers. This could simply be because it was seen as falling outside the normal job of being a staff member, but it could also be a result of the process of othering, i.e. it would instinctively be seen as futile since the guests are different from the staff members and do not have the same insights. Nevertheless some interview responses showed an altogether lack of reflection on this. When questioned about asking the guests for ideas, a young female respondent replied:

You mean that one should ask them or...? Yeah ... I suppose one could ... it's not something I have thought about, but one could... hear, what they liked best. But again, there will probably appear a thousand different dishes, I mean... or a lot, right?

In this case the respondent reacts by being puzzled or slightly surprised as if asking guests for ideas is outside the 'normal paradigm' of being a waiter. This was in accord with the general observation made at the café that the professional mindset of staff members seemed focused on perfecting the existing rather than change. Guests are perceived as having different perspectives and insights from staff members, which reflects on the perceived usefulness of asking guests for innovation ideas. This is linked to the staff space of living. One defining feature of the staff group was their emphasis on being professional, but this begs the question of how people outside this group, i.e. the guests, are then considered. Unprofessional? From both observation and interview responses, it would seem so. We have already seen how the staff space of living limits social interaction with guests, but importantly this also raises the issue of the perspectives and opinions the staff members; in other words how these 'unprofessionals' are viewed by the 'professionals'. It seems that othering is an unfortunate effect of space of living; as the focus is put on intra-group processes and interaction, what lies outside the group becomes to a certain extent strange and different.

Furthermore, the puzzlement in the above quote is supplemented with scepticism that the ideas which guests could produce would be practicable or realisable. This, again, is an indication of the process of othering. That guests are seen as different from staff also means that they have a different perspective and that their ideas might not be very useable. This is also reflected in the knowledge or insights they are presumed to have (or not have as the case is). For example, when asked about using the guests as a source of ideas, a female respondent emphatically and insistently replied:

You probably could, ehm... the problem is, that quite a lot, when they go out to eat... if they don't know this business properly, then there's quite a lot of things, which... ideas which they have up in their head, which would not work in practice AT ALL [words emphasised by respondent]. And that's one of the things we say, that people sometimes leave... well some issues when they go out and eat, then they have to be held by the hand through it all. So some things they can complain about, but a lot of the things are something, which wouldn't work in any other way.

Interviewer: And then it will create frustration almost opening up a lot of things and they then were supposed to come with suggestions and such, yeah?

Respondent: Yes exactly. I mean if you don't know the business and don't know, how things work, then it's really hard to come with something new.

As the guests are 'others' (i.e. not members of the staff's space of living), they are seen as different from the staff and having different perspectives, and they are not presumed to have insight into how the staff 'world' works. The staff has a professional responsibility to provide a certain service quality and act in certain professional ways. The guests, on the other hand, are *unprofessionals*, the mere receivers of service, the *others*. Such is the frame of interaction or the role definitions and how these roles are played out in the service encounters. This is a consequence of the current professionalisation of certain groups such as the waiters at this café; those who are outside the staff's space of living are not professional and therefore the professional mindset must be sceptical of what it can learn from these unprofessionals. This scepticism is exacerbated in the mindset and perspective of the hyperprofessional employee; in strongly emphasising to themselves and each other the importance of being professional, they also emphasise having a knowledge which non-professionals do not possess. In this way othering is linked to hyperprofessionalism, the more you emphasise and rely on being a professional, the less the help from non-professionals seems relevant, for they are of the other kind which has a different knowledge and experience. Sociological literature provides several definitions of the professionals as knowledge-based; for example the one stated by Julia Evetts: 'professions are essentially the knowledge-based category of occupations which usually follow a tertiary education and vocational training and experience' (Evetts 2003, p. 397). Unlike the 'classic professionals', the hyperprofessionals such as the staff at café Classy do not necessarily possess such an elaborate education, instead they are presumed and indeed expected to be professionals by virtue of performing their job 'professionally'.

What does that mean for user innovation? Are the ideas for innovation which 'unprofessionals' might have as valuable as the ideas and insights of 'professionals'? As staff space of living minimises interaction with users, the user is also less involved. As evident from one quote, asking users for ideas is not something the staff member had thought about. And as othering makes the user seem a different kind of person without the necessary and desired knowledge, the user seems less relevant to ask for ideas concerning innovation. In other words, both user involvement and user ideas are systematically disregarded as a result of staff space of living and the process of othering. This means that there is a barrier to user innovation in services in this type of situation: user ideas are not turned into service innovation because they are either regarded as substandard or not regarded at all.



## **Discussion**

In this section we will discuss the phenomena of space of living and othering both in general and how they have appeared in the case studied here. We will also discuss what they mean for user innovation through the service encounters.

In the case presented in this chapter we have described how the phenomena of space of living and othering may become a barrier for user innovation. A space of living among employees is not necessarily bad; in fact many organisations spend a lot of money building coherence and team spirit. A well-integrated team is presumed to be a more efficient and well-communicating one, and indeed observation showed that in this case the frontline staff members were very fast and efficient. They were also good at communicating internally. But there is more to the space of living than group cohesion; in order for a workplace to be a space of living there must be some 'extra-curricular' social life, and indeed there was in this case. This, however, can potentially create a managerial dilemma. On one hand an inwards looking team of employees is often a coherent one; on the other hand frontline employees must also be outwards looking as they face the service users. And if a service provider decides to attempt user innovation this becomes even more important, especially if this is done through the service encounters. In the café case, an important attraction of the job for staff members was exactly the space of living and so this came to play a major role in their mindset and perspectives as seen both in observed behaviour and as emphasised in interview responses. But as staff members indulged in this, they were looking inwards, amongst themselves. This is not to say, that they did not also look outwards or were blind to the opinions or feedback from guests, but the main motivation still seemed to be looking inwards as this is where the rewards of social life lay. Though not a simple and unified blindness to guests, nevertheless this was hardly conducive to user innovation.

A similar statement could be made about the othering found in the case. In its basic sense, othering simply means to see something or someone as different or other than oneself. It is both a process of estrangement and the resulting state of alienation. It has often had a negative connotation of the other being undesirable or worthless. But it can also be the opposite, the other as something desirable or even unobtainable. In order to discuss othering in general, in this case, and what it means for user innovation, we must first take a closer look at the concept itself and how it has been used in other contexts. Othering has been conceptualised, illustrated and analysed in many different ways and for a number of different purposes within various academic traditions of social

science, notably within anthropology, sociology and social psychology. Already in the 1950s it was used in feminist studies by authors such as e.g. Simone de Beauvoir (1952). Decades later, George Herbert Mead (1970) wrote about the generalised other. Within anthropology it has been used by the subaltern school (e.g. Spivak 1988, Prakash 1994) in its postcolonial criticism of Western domination, especially how it was justified by conquerors and missionaries who came to ‘liberate’ the poor and godless from their predicament. Writing within social psychology, Mead (1970) discussed the formation of the self and its relation to the generalised other. His aim was to explain the process of socialisation, how the self is socialised into becoming part of society. Writing about game and play, he illustrates how an individual must merge the knowledge, attitudes, indeed the general existence of others into a common set or stereotype called the generalised other. In order to develop the self, the individual must then rehearse being the other. This can be seen done in various ways such as children’s play which is a rehearsal of being what they are not – adults. Likewise, indigenous peoples rehearse through cultural rituals being representatives of wild nature or the gods, temporarily taking on the role of the other. By playing this role, the individual can understand the other and rehearse becoming one with the generalised other. In other words, this is how the self matures into being part of the world. Mead’s conceptualisation of othering as a process is thus not a focus on differences which help the individual purposefully perceiving himself as different from the other (and have different knowledge and insight), but rather a focus on differences which the self must learn to overcome to become one with the other. Nevertheless the important focus is still on differences.

Less concerned with the socialisation of the self, certain anthropologists have analysed othering in quite different terms. Focusing especially on colonial and post-colonial developments in India, the subaltern studies have been concerned with a number of issues including the process of othering as a tool for domination. Various authors such as Spivak (1988) and Prakash (1994) have discussed how indigenous populations were subjugated and dominated not only by militant force but also through Western imperialist discourses (Prakash 1994) which served to add hegemonic mechanisms through the legalisation and naturalisation of domination. This consisted of a two-fold process; first a separation of ‘us’ (i.e. Western man) from ‘them’ (i.e. indigenous populations) through a focus on the differences between these two groups; secondly the two groups were placed on a normative scale and assigned different values. In this way, a cognitive landscape was constructed in which the subalterns did not share the knowledge and insights of Western man, and therefore had to be governed. This was of course a very ethnocentric world view.

Othring has thus been conceptualised in quite different forms, as a process of socialisation and formation of the self through playing the role of the other, i.e. focusing on differences in order to overcome them; and as a process of emphasising differences between social groups and using this emphasis to naturalise domination. There are some important differences between these conceptualisations, the former deals with the generalised other whereas the latter is rather grown out of encounters with what one might correspondingly term the specific other – concrete people and actions. Furthermore, one is considered a natural and beneficial process whereas another is considered unnatural and harmful. Both, however, share certain characteristics such as an essentialist stereotypification of the ‘other’ and a resulting bisection of the social field of interaction.

Returning to the café, a different process of othering took place, which shared certain characteristics with the above conceptualisations. Here we are concerned with a less radical – yet still related – form of othering, which links the phenomena studied. As we have seen, in the field of social interaction – the service encounters – the spaces of living become reified units with a focus on internal similarity. Not surprisingly, this is then accompanied by a focus on external dissimilarity; there is an awareness of the various characteristics of the guests, which are considered different from those of the staff group. But there is more to the othering found in this case than a focus on differences. When asked during interviews, staff members readily give a number of examples of what characterises the guests. The latter are thus to an extent seen monolithically as a homogeneous mass. This is not to say that staff members believe all guests to be exactly the same, but nevertheless, this tendency to stereotyping is also part of the othering. On the other hand, one could say that this is necessary in order to have a clear target group to innovate for. Anyway, the consequence is that guests and staff members are seen by the latter as having different knowledge, different insights, different agendas, and different perspectives. There is thus a focus on differences, but unlike the subaltern conceptualisation, this is not used to dominate but rather to overlook or evade the opinions of the other. Also, while there may be a certain need to synthesise the specific others into a generalised other in order to be able to innovate for a general user base, unlike Mead’s conceptualisation (1970), the staff members do not need to rehearse being the other – the guests – in order to aim for becoming one of them. Rather they need to put themselves in the guests’ place in order to understand them, both as an overall ‘generalised other’ and as individual ‘specific others’. In this way the othering could perhaps be overcome. In other words, the frontline employee in the service encounter needs neither to agree with the emotions nor share the emotions of the user, but

simply to understand them; to understand both the idea for innovation itself, and the context from whence it sprung. Ideally, the frontline employee would use the service encounter to gain a feel for the user. But in the café case, there was a tendency for staff to view guests as different from themselves and thus unable to understand their work and what would improve it. The othering at the café was then a process of focusing on differences of role and characteristics and how this created different insights. As a result, asking guests for innovation ideas was either not considered or the utility of this was directly questioned or even perceived as somewhat futile.

The process of othering found in this case is not a salient feature of the field of interaction, it is not clearly signalled in service encounters or the general manners and attitudes of staff members, neither was it something of which most staff members were even aware. Instead, it was a subtle everyday phenomenon which was interlinked in complex ways with all other everyday processes taking place at the café. During visits, it was not only observed but also felt personally by the researcher as a subtle reluctance to engage with the guests; for example when prompted to engage in conversation the staff would smilingly give short, precise, polite and non-engaging answers. Likewise, it was reflected more or less openly in some answers during the interviews. Othering is a natural process as any person faced with many specific others must necessarily synthesize these into a manageable unified entity, the generalised other which becomes a stereotype, in order to be able to relate and interact with these persons as a group (Mead 1970, Goffman 1959). Therefore it is neither undesirable nor avoidable. However, it has some consequences for user innovation. Several barriers can hinder user innovation; such as lack of ideas, miscommunication or no communication of ideas, a lack of understanding of ideas or of users' general needs, and a wrong implementation of ideas. But none of these barriers are even relevant if the frontline employees do not see the purpose of gathering ideas in the first place. As othering is unavoidable, yet a barrier to user innovation, service organisations wishing to innovate based on user ideas must learn to overcome this barrier for example by training frontline employees to be aware of this process and to gain an understanding of their users.

So far, we have ignored one important argument. One could ask to what extent innovation is a natural part of the frontline employees' job description. The answer to this question cannot be simple. In most cases it is not included in the operational instructions for the job and so any prevalence of employee space of living or othering would not be a problem – with the modifications that this is at least insofar as it does not hinder a good quality in service delivery, and at least in the short run. Another important modification is that in the long run, most service

providers do need to improve or innovate, or classic economic logic would dictate that they would be outdone by more modern competitors. Granted, in the cases where there is not a demand for frontline employees to focus on innovation, this is likely to affect their attitude towards the users and especially towards users' ideas and input. They can 'afford' not to care, to consider them irrelevant or even substandard. However, in cases where there is a demand for innovation and especially when the focus is on user innovation, then employee space of living and particularly othering become important barriers. Again, however, there are important modifications. There is a certain tendency in both debates in society and in some literature (especially in the so called 'management self help' literature often written by consultants and found in every airport kiosk) to consider innovation as intrinsically beneficial and something to be sought after. This is far from true as much innovation fails in either the idea or the implementation phase. It is often a huge investment both money and timewise and often does not pay off at least in the short run. The answer to the question posed above must then be that often innovation is not part of the frontline employee's job; however when there is a demand to even the smallest extent for user innovation then othering does become a barrier. In the actual case, both Café Classy as overall service organisation and the managers as service providers did want to be innovative. There was not an explicit strategy for doing so through user innovation (although certain methods for systematically gathering ideas were tried during the period of study), but there was at least an expectation of staff members to keep an eye out for new ideas. In this case, their attitude and mindset towards the guests were not affected optimally with regards to user innovation.

## **Conclusion**

So what effects do the professionalised staff roles have on staff views of guests? From both observation and interviews, it was clear that it was important to staff members to be and appear professional. This was emphasised not just in behaviour but also verbally, in fact being professional was a source of work satisfaction. But as staff members emphasise that they see themselves as professionals, the concordant conclusion is inescapable: Guests are necessarily not professionals and therefore different from the staff members. At the café, the professionalised staff role thus had an effect of othering or stressing the differences between staff and guests.

And what consequences does this have for the possibility of sourcing innovation ideas from users during service encounters? Othering had certain consequences for user innovation: following the hyperprofessional mindset, asking guests for ideas for innovation may be seen as outside the job description, inappropriate or even useless as guests according to some staff members lack the knowledge, skills and insights which characterises a professional with proper practical insight in the service provision. Seen from this perspective, even if guests should be asked at all, the ideas they would have risk being impracticable or irrelevant. To this is added the importance of the professional façade and the emphasis on not breaking it, which (if focusing too much on asking users) is a risk in the eyes of staff members, and so all interaction and communication between staff members and guests is limited to a strictly professional level.

Of course, there is a normative value in this. Guests may only want their beverage and to be left in peace. The guest space of living should not be intruded upon and one could argue that this is exactly the reason why interaction is limited in this way. So, returning to the argument discussed above, this begs the question of whether one should risk imposing oneself on the guests while providing the service, or whether the service encounter should indeed be kept to a professional minimum. The answer to this is not simple for it depends on what one wants to achieve as a service provider. If the aim is user innovation using service encounters as an occasion for sourcing ideas, then this may actually be hindered by professionalism. In its emphasised form, hyperprofessionalism, it often encompasses othering as well as performing daily tasks in a professional manner and perfecting that form to a level expected by guests (according to the perspective of staff members at least) rather than looking for ideas for innovation. In other words, the focus is on perfecting rather than changing the service provision, which means that a too strong focus on service quality can ironically hinder service innovation. The othering itself was in this case linked to the hyperprofessional attitude and manners which staff members showed. The external pressure to be professional which is put upon staff members results in this hyperprofessionalism, which creates a division between the professionals and the non-professionals. As the latter are different from the former and presumably do not have the same insights and knowledge, then it may seem irrelevant or even futile to ask them for ideas for innovation. Thus professionalisation becomes hyperprofessionalism, which results in othering and so a barrier to user innovation through service encounters is created. All of these are subtle everyday processes which are easy to overlook but quite relevant for service providers wanting to engage with their users in order to gain ideas for innovation.

The empirical findings of this case have also brought an increased understanding of othering on a more theoretical level, especially in connection with service provision and service innovation. As we have seen, othering has in the literature been characterised as a way of dominating others, as a process whereby the dominant can estrange – and thereby legalise their power over – the subordinates. And like every social process which takes place between two different persons or groups of persons, the process can be seen from the perspective of both ‘ends’, the dominant othering person and the subordinate othered person. Interestingly, however, the process can also be reversed by the subservient othering the dominant, or at least it can be a two-way process. In the café case, the frontline employees may play one or more roles which are more or less tightly defined. But no matter how they are defined, a key element in what they are expected to do and indeed the behaviour they are displaying is serving the guests; they are in the business of providing service. Per definition, then, the employees are the subservient immediate service providers and the guests are the dominant ones who pay and expect service in return. Yet in this case it is the frontline employees, the staff members, who to an extent are othering the guests. So from a power relation point of view, othering can go both ways.

To sum up, seen from inside any socially coherent group or a space of living, anyone outside can be seen as other, so othering is a common practice which intentionally or unintentionally happens. And when you define yourself as ‘professional’, then others must necessarily be the ‘unprofessionals’. This means that the latter know less or have less insight and experience than you do. Therefore you must be sceptical of asking them for advice and ideas. So a too strong focus on professional service quality can be a barrier to service innovation, if this is done through user innovation – and especially through service encounters.

Like all case studies, this empirical study has some limitations. As it is only building on observations from one café, the scope of research is limited to multiple social situations within a single social institution (Spradley 1980). Furthermore, the researcher only did participant observation as a guest, not as an employee. Therefore all observations are seen from a researcher-guest perspective, though this perspective has been supplemented with various in-depth interviews with staff members. Any conclusions drawn from the case study can therefore only be claimed to be valid for this particular case during the time of study, and only as a result of the researcher’s own analysis and interpretations. It is reasonable to assume, however, that certain fundamental elements of service encounters as well as staff perspectives and attitudes may be valid more generally – thus some results have been extrapolated and inferred as more general patterns. Furthermore the methods

also have some benefits. For one thing, to the service studies field, participant observation is a novel approach which has not been utilised much in studying services and especially service innovation, service encounters and user innovation through these encounters. Also, anthropological methods such as participant observation allow the researcher to come close to the data, both in the sense of being immersed in the environment studied and thereby experiencing the data first hand, and also through extensive analysis and interpretation of the data. All analysis and interpretation including any misinterpretations are therefore solely the responsibility of the researcher, not the respondents. Neither data collection nor analysis and interpretation can therefore be claimed to be objective in a positivistic sense, but then again this is not the aim within the anthropological paradigm either. Rather, an acknowledgement of the subjectivity of all empirical study is combined with search for underlying perspectives, patterns of behaviour and elements of cultural meaning. This study, then, was a search for how the demand for professionalism affected the behaviours and processes going on in service encounters and it found the behaviour of a staff space of living and the process of othering. It was also a study of how possibilities of user innovation were affected, and although a clear and short answer is hard to produce, it would seem that it is not precisely made easier by the findings.

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# **CHAPTER 8**

## **CONCLUSION**



# **Reciprocity, hyperprofessionalism and innovation**

## **- Concluding thoughts**

So far, topics have been addressed, research questions have been posed, data has been analysed and some conclusions have been reached. These findings must be tied together and related to the overall topic of whether and how ideas for innovation can be sourced from the users during service encounters. This section will do exactly that. It consists of three parts. Since every article has presented many findings and conclusions, the first part will summarise these for each article. The second part will then tie these together in a discussion of how they relate to each other, and some implications of these will also be addressed. In the third part, the three kinds of contributions made in this project will briefly be outlined. But we will start with briefly summarising the findings before they can be discussed.

## **Findings and conclusions of the articles**

In this section, the main points of the articles will be briefly summarised. This will not only include the main conclusions but also some interesting points that have been raised during the theoretical sections, analyses and discussions. This will form the basis of the discussion which will follow this section.

### **Article 1: Reciprocity in Service Encounters**

The first article addressed how users and providers relate and interact through processes of reciprocity taking place in service encounters. These encounters are complex and

involve many different processes of reciprocity. As innovation is important for long-term survival of an organisation, it was suggested to ask the users and motivate them to state ideas during the encounters. Therefore the question was posed: *During service encounters, which kinds of reciprocity take place and how do they affect whether ideas for innovation are stated by the users?* First a theoretical typology was made of three types of interchanges; exchange, relationship marketing and reciprocity. Exchange consists of single exchanges or chains of exchanges, not necessarily involving a relationship or any further contact. Relationship marketing implies mutuality between user and provider involving social relations often characterised by commitment and trust. Reciprocity is concerned with how interchanges create a mutual debt and thereby lasting bonds; it is contractual in the sense that it involves an obligation to reciprocate and thus makes partners of the interchanging parties. Reciprocity is in some ways different from both exchange and relationship, but in other ways it could be viewed as encompassing the two other concepts into a continuum – and reciprocity also adds something more to this continuum than the other concepts, namely the obligation and expectations of reciprocating or giving back. As mentioned this creates a debt and after a while it becomes impossible to settle the score. Reciprocity is often delayed, whereas exchange is often seen as a simultaneous interchange.

The empirical analysis showed that in the case of Travel Tours, the processes of reciprocity often followed a network pattern, and a service delivery can rely on many such networks. Some of these networks followed a pattern of redistribution where one player, in this case Travel Tours, becomes a central hub gathering a resource, such as for example information in the case studied, and then redistributing it. Travel Tours played this role in several networks, and intentionally strived to have such a role in even more networks. A main point of the article was that there are different kinds of reciprocity. We made a division of these, but not according to which pattern it follows, nor what specifically is reciprocated; instead the processes were categorised according to the meaning of what was exchanged, what the implications were and what was signalled or symbolised. In other words we were concerned not with the (economic) value but the (social and moral) values of the interchange itself. When analysing the role of the processes of reciprocity, three “levels” of interchange were found.

The first was *formal reciprocity* which is typically an interchange of more or less concrete things such as objects or services in return for value (usually money) and it constitutes what is formally offered the user. There are two kinds of formal reciprocity: official formal reciprocity which is the most explicit as it is the main (service) product or value offering; and



unofficial formal reciprocity, the “services-on-the-side” which were less explicit. Travel Tours was looking to increase the unofficial formal reciprocity as they either generated money, supported the main offering or provided the user with “something extra” and thus gave Travel Tours a competitive advantage. In this way they functioned as separate add-ons or additions to the core offering (the official formal reciprocity). In addition to the formal reciprocity, two additional (and informal) kinds of reciprocity were found in the case. *Social reciprocity* consists of interpersonal statements and social interaction. It can express group belonging, status, social relation and so on, and can convey a social image of oneself or someone else via expression and impression. It was found in chit-chat or small talk, and in work- as well as spare time social activities which served to create social bonds between those involved. It can be less concrete than formal reciprocity and take on a more intangible and indefinable form of symbolic statements and social interrelations, but it is no less real than formal reciprocity. In fact, there were often clear reciprocity elements in the observed social interaction in the sense that expectations, obligation and immediate sanctions seemed more salient. Social reciprocity induces more communication between the frontline employees and the users, and it provides integration on a systemic level; in this case the travelling business. Unlike social reciprocity which is primarily collective, the third kind of reciprocity found, *personal reciprocity*, occurred primarily between individual persons. There was often emotion in its content, and it was mostly symbolic in an individual psychological (not social) way. It was seen in various ways from politenesses, over signs of friendship, to marriages, implying a mutual trust and respect and feelings of acceptance and satisfaction. This kind of reciprocity provided integration on a personal level.

It was also found in the case that there was a conscious use of reciprocity by Travel Tours. They were using the reciprocity intentionally and strategically to gain an advantage or create closer ties to their users. The process consisted both of attempting to get more of all three kinds, and of reifying and thereby “capturing” the sometimes quite loose and “aethereal” reciprocity taking place during service encounters; and sometimes they even tried to institutionalise it to ensure that it would last. Another interesting finding was that there often was a combination of reciprocity. The different kinds of reciprocity could take place simultaneously. They could either be separate processes and activities, or different aspects of the same processes and activities. Sometimes the different kinds were combined intentionally (for example when using social reciprocity to support and “lubricate” formal reciprocity such as in the case of promotion parties), and sometimes one kind of reciprocity was cast as another to make it more palatable or attractive to the users.

The reciprocity processes had several effects on whether the users would state ideas for innovation during service encounters and what the consequences of them doing so were. Ideally the process would consist of the users providing input to which the Travel Tours employees would respond with some feedback in the form of communication and possibly also action such as implementation (and if so then the user stating the original idea should of course be provided feedback about its implementation as well). Seen from the users' perspective, however, the close connection and frequent communication did prompt them to state their wishes and ideas, but the response was far from always ideal. Seen from their perspective, the wishes and ideas were met, not with a rejection or negative attitudes, but rather with a structural *inertia*, an inability by the complex system to respond adequately to the input of the users. The inertia consisted of two elements: a lack of response to the user stating the idea (in other words a failure to live up to the obligation to receive); and a lack of consequences or explanations in the form of inadequate information and inadequate action by Travel Tours (which is a failure to live up to the obligation to reciprocate). The result was a sense of *futility* in the users, and this futility consisted of two reactions corresponding to the two elements of inertia: the lack of response lead to a state of resigned passivity in which the users simply gave up mentioning their wishes and ideas; and the lack of consequences lead to outright frustrations. These two reactions also reflected failed obligations of reciprocity; lack of proper reception was met with passivity and lack of proper reciprocation was met with frustration.

Seen from the provider's perspective, they did often provide feedback on the input received. Sometimes they would reply right away either thanking for the ideas or saying it would be passed on. But then the user would hear no more of it and the idea would essentially be lost. In other cases, the reception of the ideas and wishes was properly acknowledged and so the obligation to receive was fulfilled. However, the consequences in terms of careful deliberation and decision or even implementation were either absent or, in cases of actual implementation, not communicated thus leaving the users to find out for themselves. Finally, there were also cases in which the ideas would be properly acknowledged and even implemented based on the processes of reciprocity. These were the success stories on which the future trade of Travel Tours was based. However, often when an idea was received and acknowledged, it was thereby considered reciprocated by the employee – but in fact it was not. And in such cases, to the employee there was no reason for them to pursue the idea further. So reciprocity might induce many ideas which may also be stated by the users during service encounters, but this does not mean that the ideas are all adequately received or implemented.

## Contributions

In relation to user innovation theory, a reciprocity perspective adds new insights to what motivates the users to state ideas for innovations as well as some different kinds of motivation. It also elucidates how such motivation through reciprocity is a mutual commitment and that a business must therefore be careful when engaging in such processes and be conscious that they take on a series of obligations to the user when doing so.

With regard to service theory, a reciprocity perspective encompasses and spans the division between exchange marketing and relationship marketing. In relation to exchange marketing, the reciprocity perspective takes the socio-cultural context in which exchanges occur into account, and in comparison to relationship marketing, it emphasises mutuality in the service relation to an even higher extent and divides the relation into three levels (formal, social and personal). In addition to both perspectives, a reciprocity view adds the moral dimension of obligation (to receive and reciprocate) to the analysis of the processes of interaction, and it explains how the service relation itself is created and maintained. It also contributes to the service encounter literature by pointing out, that reciprocity is a basic condition of human interaction and therefore also of service encounters.

Finally, in relation to anthropological theory, a reciprocity perspective supports and further elaborates the theory on reciprocity, but also adds a new empirical field to the classical analyses, namely the business relations between service providers and users in modern Western service society. Furthermore, it adds three distinct levels of reciprocity to the literature, which means that specific forms of reciprocity are added to the general basic reciprocity of humans.

## Article 2: Taming Professionalism

The second article further explored the preconditions for service innovation involving users as a source of ideas. It was suggested that the service encounters might be used consistently as an occasion for sourcing these ideas from the users. This places the frontline employees with direct

user contact in a central role and therefore the professional role of these was the main focus of the article. These employees face increasing demands of professionalism and therefore the question was asked : *What consequences does professionalisation of frontline employees have for user innovation through service encounters?* First four characteristics of the traditional occupational professions were identified, namely the possession of a complex special knowledge which is inaccessible to outsiders, a moral service commitment for the common good of society, autonomy from intrusive regulations from outsiders meaning that accountability was mainly to the professional peers, and a community consisting of mutually supportive collegiality, a shared work identity and a similarity as result of the long socialisation processes. It was also shown how the ideals of the professions have been transformed into an ideology of professionalism which has been applied to vocations that are not traditionally considered part of the professions. This has then been used as a managerial tool of governing the employees at a distance by instilling the ideals of professionalism into them, but this appeal to professionalism is supplement by the appeal of professionalism to the employees themselves because of the positive characteristics this signals.

Taking an enactment perspective on roles, the role performances and statements of the employees at a café were then analysed as meaningful behaviour within the frame of a professionalised role. It was found that the employees put emphasis on the good quality of the food served and of their own service delivery. Not only did they take great pride in this, they shared the ideals of organic food and high quality set by management and identified with these. The collegiality or social aspects and successful coordination of their work further contributed in creating what the employees felt was a professional front towards the users. They also stated that there were many rules for behaviour, but they embraced these rules as they provided guidance in their role performance and thereby provided a sense of security. The employees also welcomed how the rules aided in creating an idealisation of their behaviour towards the users, and helped them keep an expressive control so that they would appear in this particular idealised way towards them. Furthermore, the rules provided a structure of behaviour which created uniformity and also contributed to the professional front of the employees. Their emphasis and embrace of professionalism thus relied on the many rules and the existing structure which they created.

There were also rules of behaviour for the users, such as the seating system, which the staff members expected them to follow. Just as they were controlled by the managers, the staff members could in this way control the users, which they felt was important and beneficial. Not only does doing so make the role of the staff members easier to perform, it also creates further structural

choreography of behaviour at the café. This further contributes to what the staff members saw as being professional, namely a professional front and appearance. The emphasis put on this front is so great, that user complaints over being controlled can be ignored as the professional front takes precedence. This adversity to changing the professional front also meant that it is difficult for the staff members to ask the users for ideas for innovation. This was because doing so might jeopardise their professional appearance, but also because the ideas might not work along the existing lines of structure. In this way, as far as the innovation ideas risk changing the structure of the professional rules and exiting ways of performing their work tasks, the staff members reject them.

The adherence to professionalism as ideology displayed in the case of the café frontline employees is in various ways different from the ideals of the classic professions. The professionalism of the staff members was not based on a special knowledge resulting from years of education, but instead rested on their role behaviour and front. Their role understanding was then that they had to perform in such a way that they appeared professional, which is supported by the demands from management that they behave in certain specific ways. The role expectations which the managers have of them are then expressed in the many rules which the staff members themselves adhered to in order to be professional in appearance. In turn, these rules are passed on to the users who must also comply with general standards of behaviour – despite protests. In this way, the staff members have role expectations of the users, and this is again done to ensure a professional front of the café overall.

This professionalism *in form* was a primary source of validation of their work performance, and therefore it functioned as an ideology in this case. But it is very different from professionalism *in content*. Professionalism as the ideals of privileged professions with a special knowledge, moral service commitment to a greater good and autonomy becomes transformed into a prescriptive and controlling ideology as it is applied to the neoprofessionals who are not part of the occupational professions and do not possess a special knowledge of autonomy. The unprofessional employees at the café have, however, not only managed to live up to neoprofessionalism in form, they have even managed to appropriate it and turn it into a source of validation of their role performance. In fact, they have come to rely on it to such an extent that neither users nor ideas for innovation can be allowed to change the structure of their professionalism in form; they have become hyperprofessionals. This entails having an exaggerated emphasis on appearing professional. As the employees faced demands of being professional from both managers and users or society in general, and did not have a professional special knowledge, professionalism was cast in form only,

as front, manner and attitude, and this created a logic of appearance-as-substance to the hyperprofessional employees.

This has several consequences for service and innovation. It tends to standardise role performances as they must (and willingly do) adhere to the many rules. In the café case, it also ensured a high service quality in terms of the quality of what was served and attentive service delivery. However, it prevented flexibility in how the service was delivered. Users had to follow the rules and individual wishes such as sitting at a particular table are not accommodated to if this conflicts with the professional front. Furthermore, such adherence to a particular way of doing things as a source of validation of work performance entails an adversity to change. Therefore, user wishes were overlooked or ignored and asking users for ideas for innovation was problematic for the staff members. As far as it conflicted with the existing system of work tasks and the professional front, asking users for ideas was rejected by them. In fact, if ideas aimed at changing the concept which ensures a professional front, they were seen negatively as disruptive and destructive. So the effect of a hyperprofessional role on user based service innovation is negative.

## Contributions

The case shows that sourcing ideas for innovation from the users during service encounters can be a problematic process as it depends on the role of the frontline employees. It is important that these are open to such a process. In the case of neoprofessionalism one must be cautious as there is a risk that the employees adhere to existing rules to become overly professional in their expression, in other words that they become hyperprofessional. They will then either unintentionally overlook ideas for innovation which the users might express in various forms, or they will intentionally oppose these ideas insofar as they change the source of their validation.

Hyperprofessionalism can be seen as having both a positive and a negative effect on service provision. It tends to standardise role performance and in the case of the café it ensured a high level of service quality. On the other hand, it also means that flexibility and customisation in service provision is not allowed for.

The article contributes to role theory by providing an analysis of a particular type of role. It supports and further elaborates the theories and concepts of Erving Goffman as it illustrates how the elements of a role performance come to expression in concrete situations. It also expands

some of these concepts as for example expressive control can be extended from expressive control over oneself to expressive control over others.

For contributions to the profession literature, see the summary of the next article.

### Article 3: Othering in Service Encounters

Like article two, article three was also based in the case study of a café here named Café Classy. Whereas article two addressed a hyperprofessional role in service encounters, article three was concerned with the hyperprofessional mindset resulting from that role, and especially how this mindset views the users from a particular perspective – as different from the employees in important ways.

#### Hyperprofessionalism

“Traditional” professions had a special status because their job was based on a special knowledge which only they had, but as professionalism has turned into a prescriptive ideology, it has become an externally imposed demand on service employees without access to such knowledge rather than a motivation and job pride coming from within the ranks of the professionals. Lacking this special knowledge, the newly professionalised frontline employees in services must rely solely on professional appearance, manners and attitudes and focus on correct formal processes of service delivery in order to live up to this new demand. The question was posed: *What effects do the professionalised staff roles have on staff views of guests, and what consequences does this have for the possibility of sourcing innovation ideas from users during service encounters?* It was found that the staff members took great pride in displaying what they saw as a professional attitude, which to the observer appeared as an impenetrable front of being very professional and “in the know”, despite not being based on special knowledge; in other words, it was a *hyperprofessional* attitude.

## Space of living

The staff members shared a working space which was also the scene of a part of their social life and an important attraction of the job for them. This was a social sphere in which they chatted privately and interacted with each other both during and outside of working hours. This was in the article conceptualised as a *space of living*. More than a social group, the staff space of living was a private (meaning relatively closed off to outsiders such as the guests) field of social interaction, integration and reciprocity also extending outside working hours, and which was an important source of their role identity. Though many perspectives and experiences were common to its members, they also had individual and differing perspectives, experiences, opinions and viewpoints; so the mindsets of the members of this space were not identical but did share a commonality in important ways. These commonalities included, as mentioned, a strong emphasis on appearing professional and a strong coherence of this space of living with the two important results that, firstly, those outside this space, such as the guests at the café, were externalised and seen as different in that they did not have the same knowledge about the job as the staff members, and secondly interaction with the guests was limited to certain formal kinds related only to the service delivery itself. More social and personal interaction was reserved for the staff space of living internally.

## Othering

An important result of this was a process of othering which was defined as “a mental emphasis on the differences between oneself and the other”. This conceptualisation of othering is different from other conceptualisation in that it is a more subtle everyday form. It consists of two elements, first a stereotypification of the others which to an extent are seen as homogenous, and secondly a focus on the dissimilarity between oneself and these others. Apart from the obvious role difference between staff and guests, the differences mentioned by staff members included class, age, personality and lifestyle (and in some cases also language and nationality). Importantly, the differences in knowledge and insight about the job were seen as paramount. Meanwhile, similarities were to an extent purposefully ignored to allow staff members to relate to the guests in standardised and formal ways which were seen as important parts of their hyperprofessional role. This othering, which was an effect of the salient staff space of living, meant that those outside this space, such as the guests



and competitors, were seen as different in ways that were very important to the staff members. In other words, as role performance relied on being (or appearing) professional, the resulting mindset saw the *others*, the unprofessional guests, as lacking important insights.

### Innovation consequences

While the staff space of living meant a well-integrated, well communicating and efficient team and so can be seen as beneficial in important ways, it also meant that the staff members were primarily looking inwards to their own space of living for ideas for innovation. Also, the hyperprofessional mindset of the members was limiting communication and interaction with the users to certain formal kinds related to the performance of their job tasks. The resulting othering was a barrier to users stating ideas during service encounters in several ways. First, there was a reluctance to engage with the guests during service encounters beyond a strictly work-related level. Secondly, when faced during interviews and observation with the suggestion that they should ask the guests for ideas for innovations, reactions varied from having never thought of it, over slight puzzlement and this falling outside their normal job function, to a degree of scepticism, a sense that this would be inappropriate, or a dismissal of this as useless or futile since the guests did not have the same insights into the work as the staff members did. In other words, ideas stated would be either ignored or seen as inadequate. Without a special knowledge characterising the classic professions, the staff hyperprofessional role focused on maintaining the professional front and therefore perfecting the existing rather than changing it. The results were a lack of motivation for the users to state ideas for innovation and a certain lack of motivation for the staff members to receive these ideas and take them seriously. To sum up, as emphasis on appearing professional (hyperprofessionalism) is combined with a strong group coherence among the staff members (space of living), the ways in which the users are different from the staff is seen as important and is focused upon (othering) which hinders user innovation by demotivating them to state ideas and viewing the ideas as less relevant if they do so.

## Contributions

This article contributes to the literature on user based innovation by showing how the mindset of the frontline employees is crucial to sourcing ideas for innovation from the users during service encounters. It shows how patterns of interaction and a strong group coherence, while having positive effects on mutual support and collegiality, can exist at the expense of orientation towards outsiders, namely the users.

Both this and the previous article contribute to the profession literature. It elucidates the effects of professionalism as ideology on unprofessional employees. It also further elaborates on the forms this process can take by showing how the neoprofessionalised employees are not necessarily helpless subjects of demands of professionalism but can actively appropriate these demands and turn them into a source of validation of their role performance.

### **A discussion of reciprocity, the hyperprofessional role and othering**

In the three articles that have been summed up, we have analysed and discussed various elements and mechanisms of the three main topics which were reciprocity, the hyperprofessional role and othering as a consequence of a hyperprofessional mindset. In this section these overall topics will be discussed and interrelated, and the implications of them for service in general and for sourcing ideas for innovation through service encounters in particular will also be addressed. This section will in this way attempt to answer the following discussion question: How do these findings relate to each other and what are the implications of them both in general and specifically regarding the possibility of sourcing ideas for innovation from the users through service encounters? It will be structured as follows. The first section will discuss the nature and implications of reciprocity and what it means for services and service encounters, and the second section will address the hyperprofessional role and hyperprofessionalism in general. This leads to a section discussing the interrelation of the hyperprofessional role and the mindset of othering and a section discussing the relations between reciprocity and hyperprofessionalism. Finally the consequences of these for sourcing ideas for innovation through service encounters will be addressed, and some contributions of the project will very briefly be outlined.

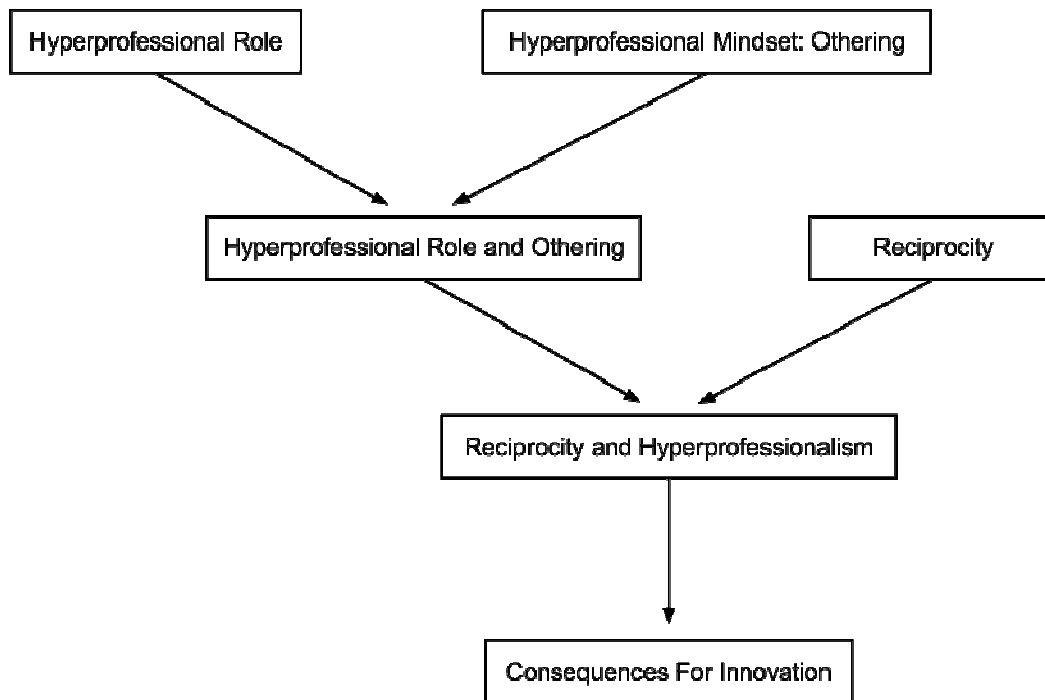


Figure 1: Structure of the conclusion.

The structure is as outlined in the below figure with the exception that the hyperprofessional mindset is not discussed in a separate section but instead forms part of the section on hyperprofessional role and othering. However, as a model of the conceptual structure of this PhD project, the hyperprofessional mindset of othering merits its own branch in the model.

### Reciprocity

Reciprocity has been analysed in the field of anthropology as a basic human condition (Malinowski 1922, Mauss 1925). One might say that the social nature of mankind consists of exactly that; the exchange of *possessions* and *phenomena*. Whether land, money, objects or other material items are being exchanged, they must be ours to give away in the first place; in other words, they must be possessions. Similarly with immaterial phenomena which can include not only

physical (service) acts and words, but also body language, signs, signals and symbols of various things such as relations, emotions or evaluations of each other; these too must be owned in the sense that they must be created by someone before they can give them away. This is what persons exchange in service encounters and in general, possessions and phenomena. But reciprocity is something other and more than exchange, because it includes the *obligations* to give, receive and reciprocate as stated by Mauss (1925). As seen from the Travel Tours case, it also includes the *expectations* of reciprocity partners that the person entering into reciprocity will fulfil these obligations, and lastly it includes *sanctions* if they are not fulfilled (which theoretically can be anything from refusal of reciprocity and breaking off contact over voiced frustration to passive resignation; in the cases of the travel agency employees interviewed the latter two were found). But what do these three elements – obligation, expectation and sanction – mean for services in general and for service encounters in particular?

The importance to the users of these often unwritten and implicit rules of reciprocity being complied with can be seen in the statements and reactions of the employees of both Travel Tours and the travel agencies. To the extent that it is successful, close bonds both businesswise and otherwise are formed, and descriptions of their relations by both groups use the metaphor of family. Through service encounters and otherwise, ideas for innovation are stated by the users who are engaged with the service provider continuously. To the extent that it is unsuccessful, lack of response to such ideas and lack of consequences (in the form of implementation of these ideas) are met with reactions of futility ranging from passivity to open frustration, and with reactions of disbelief in the lack of change. Although the empirical material did not show clearly to what extent users were motivated to state ideas for innovations during the service encounters when the reciprocity was successful, it did show that they strongly felt discouraged from doing so when it was unsuccessful.

The importance of reciprocity to the service provider is equally relevant as it is to the users. Seen from a managerial prescriptive perspective, the reciprocity mechanisms might be used actively during service encounters to “indebt” the user to state ideas for innovation. However, it has not been the aim of this project to be instrumentalist in such a way; rather, it aims to provide a further understanding of the fundamental processes of which service encounters consist, and thereby further the general understanding of these encounters. The case of Travel Tours did show conscious use of reciprocity by Travel Tours employees to gain contacts and turnover, but this did not necessarily reflect a conscious and explicit understanding of the complex mechanisms of

reciprocity. Interestingly, though these mechanisms might have been used to increase business, they were not used specifically to motivate users to state ideas for innovations. One can speculate whether, perhaps, a certain kind of focus on reciprocity during service encounters is needed for such an endeavour, one which specifically motives users to state ideas for innovation rather than buying something. Nevertheless, as stated the analyses were not intended to enhance an instrumental use of reciprocity. Rather, it follows from the insights gained that frontline employees, managers and service providing organisations overall must understand the mechanisms of reciprocity in order to be able to act accordingly, to live up to them so to speak. In the case of Travel Tours, it is interesting to note that despite the more or less conscious attempts to gain further reciprocity and despite the explicit intentions of becoming more innovative and listening more to the ideas of their users, in many cases they still somehow managed to not live up to their reciprocal obligations. In many cases they did live up to both voiced and unvoiced expectations of the users. However, the many reciprocal ties and mechanisms in which they were involved made up quite complex circumstances. And it is paramount that a service provider understands the mechanisms of reciprocity in order to be able to work “by the rules” so to speak.

The many ties with which Travel Tours was involved could also be seen in the networks which they formed. This shows two things about reciprocity as found in the case. First, there is an exclusion as not everyone is included in all reciprocity; one reciprocates with some and others not. And secondly, the reciprocity that does take place follows a network pattern. Having a central position in this pattern is beneficial because it provides customers, contacts and information. Therefore a service provider might want to engage in many reciprocity processes (as was the case with Travel Tours), but that also means having many service encounters, and thereby entangling them in a multitudinous and complex *web of obligations*. In order to be successful in its reciprocal endeavours, it is then paramount that the service provider keeps a balance between on one hand actively reciprocating, creating contacts and motivating users, and on the other hand having skills, knowledge and resources to fulfil the obligations which they are committed to by the users whether explicitly or subtly. In the case of Travel Tours, they were overwhelmed by the obligations and the multifariousness and sheer amount of wishes for innovation stated by their many users, and so they were unable to respond adequately. Also, some employees had not fully understood the implications of such obligations, that they were expected to both give more than immediate response and ensure that action was taken regarding the issues raised by the users. Any service provider with many users will invariably find themselves wrapped in this web of obligation and due to its complexity may

find it an insurmountable task to respond adequately to all processes. However, understanding the underlying mechanisms of reciprocity might be a good starting point.

One final point on reciprocity must be addressed. It was found in the case that there are three kinds of reciprocity; *formal, social and personal* based on the empirical material. This is of course not the only way in which reciprocity can be classified, but it was a relevant classification in this case as the different kinds influenced each other and suffused the working environment at Travel Tours. Formal exchange has traditionally been in focus in economic literature. Service studies and especially literature on service encounters have emphasised relational aspects and therefore social exchange has received some attention in this strand of theory. And certain topics within business studies, such as emotional labour, basically address personal exchange. However, none of these strands of literature have addressed the topics from a reciprocity perspective including the above discussed mechanisms.

As with many empirically founded concepts, precise demarcations and definitions covering every possible example are difficult to pinpoint, nor are they necessarily helpful in an analysis. Rather, focus should be on the use and the implications of these three kinds of reciprocity for services. In the Travel Tours case, the different kinds were used in various ways; sometimes one kind would be combined with another, at other times one kind would be masked as another. But more than this, there is a *hierarchy* in the three kinds of reciprocity which, like a thermometer, might indicate how close the user-provider relations really are (Grönroos 2007). Mere formal reciprocity is then at the bottom of this hierarchy, social reciprocity is in the middle and personal reciprocity is the top of the scale of relational closeness. This should not be based on a surface level analysis of what informants say; one must dig deeper to see how much reciprocity is actually taking place and of which kinds and with whom. In some service encounters, social and even personal reciprocity can be obtained, whereas in others the focus might be on (failed) formal reciprocity. This depends on how successful the encounter is in creating closeness with the user. Sometimes, as seen in some examples from the helpdesk at Travel Tours, employees will pretend that there are more successful relations of reciprocity than what the case really is. This is related to the front of a role performance (see the chapter on roles for more discussion on this). In this way reciprocity can be used in various ways during role performances in service encounters. A particular role or kind of role performance during service encounters was the hyperprofessional role which will now be discussed.

## Hyperprofessional Role

A hyperprofessional role is a role in which the frontline employee seems extremely professional to the users, to the point where the “perfectly polished” façade does allow any statements, opinions or ideas of the user to penetrate this front. However, as found in the case of Café Classy, this role performance was not based on professionalism in the sense of having access to important and complex knowledge which the unprofessionals do not have. The staff members did not have a formal education in being café waiters, but were still met with increasing demands of professionalism, so the result was an emphasis on appearing professional rather than being so. Hyperprofessionalism, then, is not necessarily based on a professional knowledge but rather on professional manners; and this to a very strong degree. This role might seem undesirable and something to be avoided for a service provider. However, one cannot say that it is inherently “good” or “bad”, this depends on the purpose of the role. In fact, the hyperprofessional role could be claimed to be good for service quality. It is a great instrument for capturing and maintaining the loose, unspecific and “aethereal” processes of human behaviour and interrelation during service encounters, and provides a certain model of interaction with the users through the service encounter. It can be used to standardise service encounter behaviour, but not in the sense of scripting as seen in some service encounters (often used by telemarketers and fast food chains). Rather, this allows the employees to think for themselves and independently figure out a way to react to any event during encounters, although such a reaction follows certain underlying principles or guidelines of the role performance which should be followed. The frontline employees had not only learned these, but accepted them and therefore internalised them into the role they were playing during encounters. In this regard hyperprofessionalism is unlike scripting and more like the Gramscian concept of hegemony (Gramsci 1975) in the sense that the rules, norms and values have been internalised, accepted or legalised, and thereby naturalised into this role. Hyperprofessionalism thus provides an instrument to concretise a pattern for these aethereal processes of reciprocity. Just like in the case of formal reciprocity, how much is offered and for which price is generally agreed upon. However, there is still room for some negotiation. The hyperprofessional role ensures that what and how much social and personal reciprocity is allowed to take place through service encounters is mentally regulated and controlled according to certain standards, and through these standards therefore made concrete.

However, when a service is to be innovated, then the set of guidelines or principles need to be changed. And this is counterintuitive to the hyperprofessional mindset which has internalised and naturalised the current set. This means that despite clear communications by a manager that the frontline employees should now focus on collecting ideas from the users through the service encounters, despite any structural incentive systems such as a reward for the best idea or getting the most ideas, and even despite any honest intentions by the frontline employees to engage in such a process, as long as a hyperprofessional mindset is internalised and naturalised into the service providing role, it is likely to hinder or at least impede this process. Gathering ideas is simply not seen as a main task of this role as it is enacted on a daily basis, and due to time constraints and being busy the employee is struggling to juggle the (the importance of) the many tasks which are part of this role. Instead, the hyperprofessional mindset is focused on doing things in a certain way. It is not that it is closed to any change, but the logic behind such changes should not break the underlying logic of the role. Therefore it would be perfectly in tune with the role to optimise various tasks in small ways, to move something closer, or swop two things around, and so on. But only as long as it improves the status quo and does not change it. In other words: as long as this provides more of the same and not something else. Devoid of a professional knowledge, the hyperprofessional role rather relies on a fragile appearance and manner of doing things. To the extent that such changes provide something different, they must be met with scepticism and a certain amount of resistance, whether intentional or intuitive. And so, the user is met with an overly of *hyper*professional front. And despite clear communications, rewards or honest intentions, as long as the hyperprofessional role remains intact, both the process of getting ideas for innovation from the users and the ideas themselves are likely to be met with a certain amount of intuitive resistance. One important aspect of the hyperprofessional role is the hyperprofessional mindset or perspective and how it creates a mental process of othering or distancing. This will now be discussed in relation to the hyperprofessional role.

### Hyperprofessional Role And Othering

Another important reason the ideas and the process of gathering them is met with resistance has to do with a particular part of the hyperprofessional role. This is the concomitant mindset and how it regards the users. When those playing a certain role (the frontline employees)



are importantly and conspicuously defined as the professionals, then the others (the users and to a certain extent also the competitors) must necessarily be defined – equally importantly and conspicuously – as the *un*professionals, those lacking the knowledge and insight needed to understand the underlying mechanisms of the service provided. The employees and the users are thereby mentally divided into differing spheres of interaction, different *spaces of living* so to speak. To the hyperprofessional frontline employees, these others are in this way different from them; and so they and their ideas are less insightful and therefore less relevant or important. This is a process or mindset of “othering”, of emphasising the differences rather than the similarities between on one hand themselves as “professional” employees and on the other the users. As the hyperprofessional frontline employees become engulfed in their own role play (as indeed any convincing role player must), certain ways of relating to others become an integrated part of this; in this case the relation is one of othering. This othering becomes an important distancing mechanism which is both defining the employee space of living and setting it apart from others. And the basis of this cognitive separation is found in the hyperprofessional role and its paramount emphasis on acting and appearing professional. In other words, if being professional is characterised by having a specific insight and knowledge, then the result is a creation of a mental border between those supposedly in-the-know and those supposedly not in-the-know.

As the role performance is based on relatively fragile elements of appearance and manner, the concomitant hyperprofessional mindset also becomes focused on stability. Therefore it is not only in actual behaviour, in role enactment, but also in the attitudes of the staff members that a resistance to change is to be found. It is not just that the hyperprofessionals are not open to too much or too radical innovation, they are not at all focused on change, it is not part of – and in fact contrary to – their understanding of their own role. For this exact reason, as stated, the hyperprofessionals are skilled at maintaining innovations, but not gathering ideas for them or implementing them. In other words, any innovation rests on both processes of stability and of change, and it is the former processes with which the hyperprofessional role is concerned. Othering is but one expression or aspect of the hyperprofessional mindset. Comparing the hyperprofessional role performance and mindset, they are two sides of the same coin so to speak. The behaviour analysed in article two is the front appearance and manner of the hyperprofessional role, and the attitudes and perspectives reflected in article three are the concomitant mindset which in this case was expressed (among other things) as othering or distancing. In other words, the former is the external part and the latter the internal part of the hyperprofessional role. In order for a role to be

successful and convincing, the performance must be consistent and the performer must at least pretend to believe in the role. In this case, the staff members did seem to believe in the role they were enacting. Together, then, these external and internal elements made up a very convincing role performance by the staff as being very professional, and only by further analysis was this revealed as resting on an unprofessional foundation; it was hyperprofessionalism.

### Reciprocity And Hyperprofessionalism

Hyperprofessionalism entails a strong emphasis on what is seen as correct performance and manners of relating to the users. This means that it has a focus on the formal processes going on in service encounters. It is not that there was no friendly small talk by the staff members at Café Classy, the users were always politely asked how the food was and any questions would be answered. Other elements of conversation such as comments on being busy, the weather and other “safe” topics were also observed. But one did not have to dig deep in the conversation to find that this chit-chat was not open and hearty. Rather, it was a formal friendliness rehearsed as part of the role performance, and which stayed on topics which were expected not to offend any guests; they were safe. Despite several attempts, the observer found it impossible to include less safe topics such as tipping, if the working hours were too long, or elicit any truly personal views which did not seem rehearsed and safe. In other words, there was a strong emphasis on formal reciprocity. There was also social reciprocity taking place in the service encounters at Café Classy, but not of the same kind as was observed at Travel Tours. Instead, it seemed official and rehearsed. Perhaps, then, social reciprocity can be subdivided in the same way as formal reciprocity into an official and an unofficial variety; but since the two kinds did not appear in the same context, such subdivision could only be based on a decontextualised comparison without empirical examples to elucidate the border between the two, and therefore they would hold very different meaning to the two groups of service employees. In other words, the two versions of social reciprocity are not easily and directly comparable in an anthropological sense without losing the connotations and context out of which they have grown. In any case, no real personal reciprocity was observed between users and the hyperprofessional frontline employees at the café. Using the framework of the three kinds of reciprocity, hyperprofessionalism is then a too strong focus on formal reciprocity

by which spontaneous social reciprocity is belittled and actively discouraged, and personal reciprocity was lacking altogether.

However, inside the staff space of living, all three kinds of reciprocity were observed; in fact, social and personal reciprocity seemed clearly dominant here. This is what makes a space of living coherent and limits it from others: With whom one reciprocates in a social and personal way. Other groups might have only formal reciprocity taking place inside them or have all three kinds of reciprocity with individuals outside the group, but at the café the space of living between the staff members was characterised by being the only place in which they would engage in social and personal reciprocity. Similarly in the case of the different groups of guests observed, they would also share a space of living with all three kinds of reciprocity; but between these spaces, mainly formal reciprocity with the outside others was observed.

In this way, “the other” becomes an important category for distancing between “us” and “them”. Applying a reciprocity perspective, the process of othering or distancing entails two elements: first, a view of “the others” as somehow different in important ways; and secondly, the result of this view which was a withholding of certain kinds of reciprocity with them because of this. The staff members at Café Classy did not reciprocate with the guests on a personal level (nor on a social level in some ways, see above), and when prompted to do so by the observer, this was politely and subtly denied. As long as certain kinds of reciprocity are withheld, the image of the other as different can be maintained and the distancing will continue. The antithesis to othering would therefore be not withholding, but to engage actively in all three kinds of reciprocity during the service encounters. This opposite process, which we could then term “sameing” meaning an emphasis on commonalities with another person or group, could be observed in the personal greetings and small talk used by the helpdesk employees at Travel Tours, and in the family metaphor which was found repeatedly not only throughout the organisation of Travel Tours but also at the travel agencies that were studied. Through social and personal reciprocity, the role partners become more familiar with each other (although they may not ever meet each other in real life as was the case with some helpdesk employees and their users). In this way, a broad spectre of reciprocity functions as an antidote to othering. To overcome hyperprofessionalism as role and as mindset, one would then have to thoroughly change or redefine the role and its resulting mindset by proactively using all three kinds of reciprocity. And to create and maintain a hyperprofessional role and mindset, the frontline employees should be socialised into a modified and simplified view of

the processes of reciprocity emphasising the formal aspects and a professional appearance regardless of user behaviour.

### Consequences For Innovation

The consequences of the above for innovation have already been described in some detail. However, in this section some overall conclusions will be made. Hyperprofessionalism is the result of various factors relating to three phenomena: innovation, service and professionalism. Regarding innovation, the Western business world becomes ever more competitive and demands for innovation increase. Regarding services, they often involve service encounters where a frontline employee is faced directly with the users. And regarding professionalism, the demands and expectations by the users, managers and society in general of professional behaviour in the employees seems ever increasing; however, in many cases these employees do not have a relevant education, training or similar. The result is that professionalism becomes hyperprofessionalism which is a superficial non-knowledge based version. But that means that it must place its claims to legitimacy in certain rules and structure, and so becomes a rigid and in fact less flexible version. Ironically the transformation of professionalism into “professionalism light” intended to aid along flexibility and innovation can become a hinder for that very innovation process. One can speculate whether, in order to change or innovate something, having an in-depth comprehension and experience is a deciding prerogative. In that case, innovation becomes something very different from how it is often used in society today. Currently it has become a ubiquitous “fix-it” word, by which is meant that there is a tendency to see it as a solution to all problems. But according to the above insight, it could take years of experience and special knowledge in order to be able to innovate things meaningfully, and innovation becomes an extensive and elaborate process. Nevertheless, as mentioned, hyperprofessionalism is a stability-oriented role and mindset, and therefore it can grasp and maintain the subtle, insubstantial and aethereal processes of reciprocity which take place during service encounters and in this way be helpful in service standardisation. In short, hyperprofessionalism can be helpful in maintaining a certain service quality, but it provides an obstacle when it comes to service innovation.

A similar statement can be made for othering. As it views the user as different and lacking the necessary insights, ideas are rejected or at least received with great scepticism and

therefore othering has negative consequences on gathering ideas for innovation from the users. Regarding service quality, the consequences are mixed. Othering is perhaps helpful in service standardisation as it simplifies the process of interaction with the users which are seen as of one specific kind. However, it has negative effects on service delivery, especially when it comes to customisation and customer experience. In fact, it is the antithesis of relationship marketing, a rejection of the mutuality.

As for reciprocity, it increases contact with the users and motivates them to state ideas for innovation. It is not necessary to have all three kinds of reciprocity in order to provide a well functioning service. If the sole goal is to sell the service product, then formal reciprocity may suffice (depending on circumstances). But if one wants to innovate this service, then it would be advisable to also engage in social or even personal reciprocity in order to motivate the users to state ideas for innovation. However, as reciprocity induces statement of innovation ideas, another issue may arise. This new obstacle is the necessary feedback and action – or lack thereof – and consists of three elements which are idea constipation, attitude and the nature of feedback. As a stream of user ideas is flowing at the service provider, the latter risks getting idea constipation which means getting more ideas than they can cope with. One way of reducing this is to be careful to not just receive error corrections (though they are important too), but to make sure that the users come with new ideas. The second element has to do with the attitude of the provider. As multi-faceted reciprocal relations between the provider and the users motivate communication and a feeling of being connected to each other, it is easy to feel perhaps too relaxed about the demands, wishes and ideas stated – after all, relations are already fairly positive. In this way, the service provider employees risk feeling too confident or relaxed making implementation seems unnecessary or at least less pressing. There is no ill intent from the frontline employees; the result is simply a too relaxed attitude towards the input given. The third element is the nature of the feedback given to the users. Immediate, short and one-time feedback is not good for continued reciprocity as it ends the reciprocal process and turns it into a simple single-transaction. Delay, lengthy and repeated feedback, on the other hand, induces reciprocity. Also, employees must be careful not to confuse reception with reciprocation. More than acknowledging the reception of the input, they also have to do something, to consider the input, perhaps implement the new ideas, and in either case give some final feedback to the user regarding the decision made to reject, postpone or implement the idea. The result of this obstacle is that too many ideas are not implemented and even if they are, there is a lack of feedback to the user. This means that there is no motivation for the users to state ideas, but

also that there is no motivation for the employees to take the ideas further if they consider them already replied to and thereby reciprocated and done with. In other words, the ideas are often stated as something extra on top of the regular business and therefore not seen as part of the reciprocity processes and their concomitant obligations, expectations and sanctions. Therefore, in order to be successfully received and processed, the ideas must be made part of a genuine reciprocity process. So reciprocity may motivate, but in no way guarantees, a successful user-based innovation process.

The cases and issues analysed in this project have shown that the service users do have ideas for innovations of the services they use, and that it is possible to gather these ideas from the users during service encounters. But it has also shown two important barriers to this process. First, hyperprofessionalism does not motivate the users to state their ideas. Hyperprofessionalism as external role behaviour and an internal perspective or mindset of othering can, however, be dissolved or changed via reciprocity. Having both formal, social and personal reciprocity breaks down the imagined distance between user and frontline employee and motivates statement of ideas. But then the provider is faced with the next barrier, what to do with the ideas. While reciprocity does motivate the users to state ideas, it can make the provider feel too relaxed and so provides a new obstacle to user-based innovation: The ideas are not implemented as it does not seem necessary, or if they are, then feedback is not given. So the conclusion is that sourcing ideas from service users during encounters is possible, but there are two barriers of which one should be aware, and they are placed at two different places in the journey of an idea from the user to the provider; first getting the user to state the ideas and accepting them, and secondly processing the ideas and providing adequate feedback.

## **Contributions**

Having concluded the project, the contributions which it provides will now be briefly outlined. This project has provided three kinds of contributions: A methodological, an empirical and a theoretical. The former was discussed in the method section; suffice it here to mention that if detailed everyday processes of service encounter are to be studied, then they should be studied with a method which is suited for this. Ethnographic fieldwork and especially participant observation has not been a common method of studying services in general and service encounters in particular. This project has applied these methods in the data gathering and analysis of the topics and shown

what types of results they can provide, and thereby the project has provided a methodological contribution.

An empirical contribution has also been made. The two case studies have provided new empirical findings in the form of observed behaviour and statements. They show what the everyday lived experience of service provision is like for the frontline employees and to some extent the users; what is valued and found important; their attitudes; their priorities; the possibilities in terms of sourcing ideas for innovation during service encounter and so on. Furthermore, the three kinds of reciprocity were as much an empirical finding as a theoretical one, for they are heavily based on the empirical observations of the processes taking place during the encounters. Perhaps the most important empirical finding is how complex service encounters are and how many elements and processes are involved in them. Too often is variety and multiplicity sacrificed for simple measurements.

Finally a theoretical contribution has been made. The effects of professionalisation on frontline service employees has been investigated; especially on their role, perspectives and mindset, and on sourcing ideas for innovation from the users. Through Goffman's conceptualisations of role and through various anthropological conceptualisations of reciprocity, we have analysed service relations in general and service encounters in particular from a different perspective and with a different aim than what is found in much marketing literature. Our focus is less instrumental but more fundamentally descriptive in aiming at a deeper and more detailed comprehension of the processes and attitudes of the service encounters. This led to the formation of the concepts described in the articles.

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