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A study of the experiential service design process at a luxury hotel

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A study of the experiential service design process at a luxury hotel.

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the process of designing experiential services at a luxury hotel. These processes were surfaced by means of a methodology that used the principles of jazz improvisation. Due to similarities between experiential service design and elements in jazz improvisation, representing experiential service design through the jazz improvisation metaphor leads to a new framework for exploring the process of experiential service design that is iterative in nature. A gap in the service design literature is that experiential service design is not operationalized in organizational improvisation, and one contribution from this study will be to fill that gap. This study contributes to the field of knowledge by exposing a new perspective on how experiential services can be better designed by adapting some of the design tools from this luxury hotel; a second contribution is a recommendation for how the improvisational lens works as an investigative tool to research experiential organizations. In the process, some new dimensions to understanding complexity are contributed.

The research process utilized qualitative research methods. Frank Barrett (1998) identified seven characteristics of jazz improvisation which I have used as a heuristic device: 1) provocative competence (i.e., deliberately creating disruption); 2) embracing errors as learning sources; 3) minimal structures that allow for maximum flexibility; 4) distributed task (i.e., an ongoing give and take); 5) reliance on retrospective sensemaking (organizational members as bricoleurs, making use of whatever is at hand); 6) hanging out (connecting through communities of practice); and 7) alternating between soloing and supporting.

This research is grounded in the body of literature regarding complexity, organizational improvisation, service design and experience design. The role of heterogeneous minimal structures that are fluid and optimize uncertainty is central to this investigation. Themes such as sensemaking and the role of story, meaning-making, organizational actors' use of tangible and intangible design skills, and embracing ambiguity in efforts to design experiential services are explored throughout the dissertation. The anticipatory nature of experiential

service design is a principle outcome from the data that is incorporated into the new conceptual framework highlighting a "posture of service".

This thesis is solely the work of Natalie Rebecca Weathers Nixon.

The name of the participating company has been disguised in this thesis.

PREFACE

I have memories of being four years old, relaxing on my father's lap at the end of a summer day after a good supper and a bath, listening to jazz music. My dad would be content, tapping one of his trim fingers on the arm of the chair to the tempo of Art Blakey's drum, or Miles Davis' trumpet or Charlie Mingus' bass. I would be amazed at the way he knew the subtle differences in playing style between musicians from one recording to the next.

As I grew older I began to appreciate the soothing smoothness of jazz's sonorous sounds as well as the more complicated and intricate dance emitted from feistier bands. It seemed to me that the jazz musicians were his old buddies; that they had all grown up together, proud in their unflappable style, neat suits and hats positioned just-so on their heads. The music was iconic, an art form that was simultaneously ephemeral, soulful and very much grounded in the political realities of the day. For my dad, jazz music was proof of the beauty and complexity that our African-American culture had contributed to the world.

So it is a little awe-inspiring to me that some thirty years later, an element of my ethnic heritage, jazz improvisation, informs the theory that I use in my doctoral research. The jazz I listened to as a child has traversed a network of meaning and contexts to illuminate the way I can understand the dynamic of designing experience. In those moments with my dad, he was taking me along a path of experiencing meaning, exposing me to a meaning-making process that I continue to enjoy and to deconstruct. It is a path that I now explore in new terms when it comes to understanding the design of experiential services. Experience is crucial to constructing an understanding about the world and about meaning-making. Throughout this study I have been involved in a continuous process of evaluating and monitoring my present actions, shaping and transforming unanticipated ideas that come to me. The jazz improvisation that my dad exposed to me is present in my life again in a new iteration.

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Introduction to Chapter 1

My research question is "What does the improvisational lens reveal about experiential service design?" The improvisational lens is an investigative tool used to research how meaning is designed into services. I explore this question by studying the processes used to design experiential services at the Hotel Luxe, an organization which no longer considers itself merely a hotel, but in the business of delivering wow moments. In the past ten years, the Hotel Luxe has made significant changes in order to integrate its focus on highly efficient operations with experience design principles that are improvisational in nature. Embedded in this shift was the realization that delivering high quality goes beyond an operations platform and extends to meaningful engagement and experience. The Hotel Luxe has become a leader in a new business model, one where experiential services are the destination and elevate the luxury experience to an art form (Michelli, 2008; Voss, 2008).

At its core, luxury is about being rare and special. Consequently, one challenge is to reposition what is rare and special among a targeted luxury consumer whose new currency is memories and experiences- *not* the old currency of collecting rare objects. Redefining luxury really results in redefining meaning. The Hotel Luxe paid closer attention to the mechanics of meaning and the ways that meaning is delivered (Diller, Shedroff and Rhea, 2006) as it began to re-evaluate its service delivery in 2001, before the full effects of the global recession of 2008 were manifest. The luxury sector can be divided into pre-2008 enterprises and post-2008 enterprises. According to The Luxury Institute, prior to 2008, luxury enterprises were closed systems that did not value continuous collaboration and cooperation with their customers; in contrast, the post-2008 luxury enterprises are open, self-reflexive systems on a journey in an "organic and rugged landscape" of continuous discovery for what best suits the needs of customers (Luxury Institute, July 2009). By 2008 rare objects in the luxury sector had become commodities as luxury brands tried to be all things to all people. The Hotel Luxe's solution was to actually encourage customers to travel less, and to make those few occasions count for more. They shifted from

focusing solely on excellent quality service to service that was also experience-centric, based on delivering meaning to guests.

This study explores through the improvisational lens how one firm, the Hotel Luxe, designs experiential services and identifies additional (currently poorly-understood) aspects of the experiential service design process. Because what we can learn about experiential service design through an improvisational lens is multi-faceted, it is hoped that this exploration will lead to a new way of thinking about service delivery and about experience design. The body of knowledge on improvisation is fragmented and conceptual and empirical studies are scarce (Vera and Crossan, 2004). This research will identify characteristics of organizational improvisation in experiential services and propose a conceptual framework contributing to the literature on service design, experience design, organizational improvisation and the hospitality industry.

Research Objectives

My research objective is to explore the design of experiential services through the improvisational lens in order to understand optimizing uncertainty from the producer's perspective. I identify structures and interpretive processes and the improvisational lens, epistemologically, allows me to do that.

My research objective stems from my pilot study (to be outlined further in Chapter 3) where I was interested in exploring how ideas transfer from the fashion and style realms to consumer products and services. I discovered in my pilot study that such style diffusion endowed consumer products and services with meaning. I have used the improvisational lens as a tool to understand how meaning is designed into experiential services with a specific focus on a luxury hotel. The following diagram reflects the journey I took in developing my research design:

Diagram 1. Research Design

Pilot Study

Hotel Luxe

Phase I	
interviews re: scenography	minimal structures at Hotel Luxe: 12 Service Values, Motto, Line Up

Phase II --> complexity and organizational improvisation (Chapter 2)		
interviews re: CST	structure and flow	research on organizational improvisation

Phase III --> jazz metaphor and improvisational lens as methodology (Chapter 3)	
examples of improvisational activity?	role of intuition, art of anticipation and emergent leadership

Phase IV --> Chapter 4	
Barrett's 7	correlation between B7 and interview data

Phase V --> Chapter 5	
determine outcomes in terms of experiential service design	2 contributions from this research

During the pilot study where I examined idea transfer and style diffusion, one of the people I interviewed directed me to meet with members of the Hotel Luxe. He thought that the work the Hotel Luxe was doing with scenography to deliver meaningful experiences to its guests was an excellent example of how ideas about style elements were transferring to the hospitality industry. Thus, my initial interviews with executives at the Hotel Luxe were about the use of scenography as a design tool. I soon learned, however, that scenography was one of many structures employed at the Hotel Luxe to deliver experiences. In Phase I of my research, I focused on learning about and understanding the minimal structures at Hotel Luxe including scenography, the 12 Service Values and the Motto.

In the second phase of my research I immersed myself in learning about complexity in order to contextualize and operationalize these minimal structures. Concurrently, in a non-PhD related project where I am employed, I was introduced to chaordic systems thinking (to be explained in Chapter 2). Phase II of my research design was dedicated to reading the literature on complexity, chaordic systems thinking and organizational improvisation as an example of the structure and flow that is employed in complex organizations. My readings on organizational improvisation, specifically the work by Frank Barrett, coupled with a review of my interview data which surfaced references to jazz, led me to

settle on the jazz improvisation metaphor and to develop an improvisation lens as methodology to map out my aggregates of open codes and categories about experiential design at the Hotel Luxe. This formed the basis of Phase III in my research design. In Phase IV I dedicated my efforts to correlating Barrett's seven principles of jazz improvisation to my interview data. This is explained in detail in Chapter 4. In the final phase of my research, Phase V, I reviewed memos developed in Phases II, III and IV to determine the outcomes in terms of experiential service design and discovered two contributions to the body of knowledge based on this investigative study. Those contributions will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

The interesting quest for me has been to examine through the lens of organizational improvisation how those experiences are developed and to understand why and how an organization inundated with sequences of operations ultimately designs and delivers service via iterative structures that prioritize experience and memory. A recurring metaphor alluded to by several of my interviewees was that of jazz. Hotel managers, executives and even consultants to the Hotel Luxe invariably referred, to the front line staff as "artists" and to the delivery of experience, when it was functioning optimally, as "really good jazz". Thus, the research kept pointing me to jazz improvisation as a metaphor for the way the Hotel Luxe designed and delivered memorable, emotional experiences to its guests, and these references prompted me to learn more about organizational improvisation.

<u>Research Origins</u>

In the beginning of my doctoral studies I was interested in the one-directional transfer of ideas from the fashion realm to realms where those ideas are translated into product design and branding strategies. This led me to explore concepts around mimetic learning (Miner and Haunschild, 1997), weak ties (Levinson and Asahi, 1995) and the diffusion of innovation (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Mintzberg, 1987; Tuomi, 2002). In my pilot study I explored the social networks present in the fashion infusion process as networks of meaning. My research questions centred on understanding the impetus to integrate fashion elements into consumer products that would result in experiential

products: that is, how did fashion elements become integrated into experiential products? This notion of transference, from an idea to an experience that is part of a network of meaning, is the sole stream that remains alive in my resulting research endeavour. What I named idea transfer, other scholars writing about the hospitality industry have called vicarious survival-enhancing learning:

> "By observing their population, organizations can potentially learn the multiplicity of strategies, administrative practices and technologies employed by other successful organizations" (Baum and Ingram, 1998:999-1000).

But my interest in such vicarious learning, or idea transfer, went beyond the implications for strategy, administrative practices and technology, to viewing meaningful experience as an outcome of the service delivery. My interest in idea transfer from the fashion industry to other realms began with consultation work I completed in 2005 with an international chewing gum company on their package design. In the consultancy with the gum company, I collaborated with designers and trend researchers from Gucci, Coach and Maybelline Cosmetics. Our task was to explain to the industrial designers at this gum company the ways that fashion brands apply colour forecasting, trend forecasting and fashion design principles, and then assist them in transferring and implementing those fashion brands' strategies to the chewing gum's package design. From this consultancy I learned that design and branding concepts used in the fashion industry are learning tools for other industries. This led to my interest in exploring why and how consumer products companies integrate ideas about the fashion industry into their product design and branding strategies.

I was more interested in the producers' motivation for borrowing from the fashion and style realm to innovate, rather than the consumers' motivation to adopt. The ways that ordinary consumer products integrated elements of style and aesthetics to add value intrigued me: why was there a proliferation of svelte cell phones, cars merchandised in a palette of nail polish colours, one-off boutique hotels, dish detergents available in exotic scents such as ylang-ylang and lavender, and chocolates designed with textile screen printing techniques? After a 2007 pilot study where I interviewed the producers of cell phones, automotives, hotels, chocolates and laundry detergents I learned that using the term "fashion" was limiting and confusing because it took on different meaning

in different contexts, so I adopted the term style diffusion instead of fashion diffusion. Additionally, some of my earliest informants, for example an architect who designed urban restaurants and hotels, pointed out that the incorporation of fashion elements was not a direct physical relationship among producers, but that "the whole world is moving in this direction and fashion is just one of the first indicators… and because of that, (the hospitality industry) looks to fashion" (Interview, S.G., 2007). Some of these same informants early on introduced me to the idea that the greater learning outcome might not be idea transfer, but rather the experience and meaning that were being designed into these formerly mundane consumer products. I shifted away from only examining the transfer of fashion ideas to looking at the application of style and aesthetics- broader terms than 'fashion'- that delivered meaning to the marketing and branding of ordinary consumer products. My focus shifted away from fashion diffusion to style diffusion.

Style refers to those attributes which convey meaning whether implied, deliberate or accidental (Shedroff, 1999). The 2007 pilot study demonstrated how consumer products companies strive to make meaning through the transference of ideas about stylistic attributes. Making meaning is a logical and timely evolution that has become important in today's economy because of the need to more deeply understand consumers who have a heightened sensitivity to design's power, and embrace a more collaborative practice among industry peers, as consumers are not necessarily distinguishing among firms in their quest for brands that contribute to their lifestyle on the whole. The improvisational lens highlights interesting ways to deliver meaning, or meaningful experiential services.

In the course of conducting the qualitative interviews for the pilot study, I met with the president of the Luxury Institute, an organization which conducts qualitative and quantitative research on high net-worth consumers. After hearing about my interest in the integration of style and aesthetic elements into hotels (as one example of a consumer product) he encouraged me to take a look at the Hotel Luxe. I conducted my research on the Hotel Luxe at a time when it was in flux, adapting to new leadership, a new competitive landscape, a new design strategy, and a global economic recession. The most outward indicator of this adaptation was the employment of scenography, which utilizes

aesthetic and interior design cues- e.g. colour, lighting, fabric, music, scent design- to create a story that taps into the property's history, its architecture and the culture of the surrounding geographic area. The more inward-pointing indicator of this adaptation was the development of flexible structures designed to affect experience delivery.

In 2006 the Hotel Luxe, known as a luxury brand that delivered consistently high levels of quality service, embraced a new strategy to appeal to the luxury consumer whose preferences and demographic profile had shifted. They redesigned visual cues in its interior design using a methodology called scenography. Scenography was my entree into examining the Hotel Luxe's use of tangible aesthetic details, story and script to design and deliver meaning and experience. I met with a group of Hotel Luxe associates in their corporate headquarters, where I was introduced to scenography, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4. Ultimately, scenography delivers meaning by giving a sense of place to the particular hotel and, I learned, was one of many structures used at the Hotel Luxe to design experience. It was clear that the Hotel Luxe was an organization that valued structure and systems: its operations-oriented approach helped them to win two prestigious Malcolm Baldridge Service Awards. But it was also evident that a shift had occurred in the organization, one where structure, systems and frameworks were being used in new and fluid ways, to empower employees to act more independently and creatively. The Hotel Luxe staffs have become artists and designers anticipating the needs of guests in creative and inspired ways. When the Hotel Luxe does this well, it is like really good jazz, each actor improvising solutions. The Hotel Luxe addresses people's growing desire for meaning by intentionally designing cohesive experiential services based on specific meaning, expressed through various consumer touchpoints.

Shortly after I decided to focus this study on the Hotel Luxe, I was introduced to the writings of Dee Hock, founder of the credit card company VISA International, who viewed the organization as a chaord (his own neologism), an entity that utilizes a dynamic of chaos and order to evolve into a state less centralized and hierarchically driven, and where more localized problem solving and self-organizing occurs. This introduction to "chaordic systems thinking" (CST) made me realize that phrases which kept resurfacing in my interviews with the Hotel

Luxe, e.g., the Hotel Luxe Motto "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen", and the president's urging that "We must be consistently inconsistent" were chaordic in nature. Learning about CST necessarily required me to examine the literature on complexity and structuration. As I reviewed my interviews from the earlier stages of my research gathering, I observed references and explanations of how Hotel Luxe associates designed experience on an improvisational basis which led me to review the literature on organizational improvisation. I discovered that a gap in the service design literature was that experiential service design was not operationalized in organizational improvisation, and one contribution from this study will be to fill that gap.

Research on the hospitality industry shows that established hotels have concentrated on quality and efficiency, but that they often fail to update their business concepts in accordance with market changes. That research also reflects that very few in hotel management take advantage of organizational improvisation, uncertainty or CST to promote creativity and innovation in their organization (Hallin and Marnburg, 2007; Baum and Ingram, 1998); the tendency is to focus on effectiveness and efficiencies. Thus, while service design is an integrated facet of tourism and hospitality literature, CST and organizational improvisation are not.

This dissertation argues that due to numerous similarities between characteristics of experiential service design and elements comprising jazz improvisation, depicting experiential service design via the jazz improvisation metaphor are a stimulating exercise that provides a conceptual framework for understanding experiential service design. The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a literature review; Chapter 3 presents an explanation of my methodology approach; Chapter 4 presents observations on the data and is where I operationalize experiential service design based on characteristics of jazz improvisation; and Chapter 5 links outcomes of experiential services to the improvisational lens offering a new framework for exploring the process of experiential service design.

Introduction to Chapter 2

A common methodology in service marketing, service design and experience design has been blueprinting, where "service blueprints" are created. This blueprinting methodology presents service processes in the form of flow diagrams, and does not deal with the question of how the more iterative dimension of client interaction or employee engagement can be integrated systematically into the design process. Although service design methodologies are represented as linear and neat, the literature allows for experience design's iterative nature (Hollins and Mager, 2008; Alakowski et al., 2007; Voss, 2007; Shedroff, 1999 and 2001; Press and Cooper, 2003). The service design and experience design literature has not fully integrated intuition, improvisation as a methodology or tacit methodologies (Crossan, Lane and White, 1999).

While improvisation is not a new exploration in the organizational literature, it has been treated more as an unintended outcome (March and Simon, 1958) or as an organizational design failure (MacKenzie, 1986). Literature on the improvisational lens has evolved from a sociological-historical-anthropological school of thought in organization theory (Geertz, 1973; Granovetter, 1992) where social sciences offer an account of social organization. By drawing upon organizational memory, improvisation both contributes to and is an outcome of the organization's absorptive capacity for new knowledge and structural flexibility (Lewin, 1998; Cohen and Levinthal, 1990; 1994; Moorman and Miner, 1997; 1998). Since improvisation is about delivering an experience through reinvention and transformation, the organizational member who improvises is both the conduit and the participant, a tenet related to Giddens' concept of the duality of structure which will be explored later in this chapter.

Organizations are neither static nor fixed. Shostack (1984) and Weick (2001) posited that organizations are loosely coupled systems and organized anarchies, and described organizational design as improvisational instead of as an architectural blueprint (Shostack, 1984; Weick, 2001). The improvisational lens is a means of explaining how organizations design their systems and work

within and around their structures. Employing the improvisational metaphor as a methodology for viewing experiential services, instead of the architectural metaphor of blueprints (Gioia, 1988) is intriguing for how it can expand upon the current literature in experience design.

As explained in Chapter 1, the Hotel Luxe organization no longer identifies itself as a hotel company in the services sector, but rather as an organization that is about the business of designing memorable and meaningful experiences. As such, I posit the Hotel Luxe as an organization which designs *experiential services*, or *experience-centric services*, and will explore its experiential service design outcomes and processes through the improvisational lens. Throughout the dissertation I use the term *experiential* services and *experience-centric* services interchangeably. This chapter is organized into two phases. In order to lay the foundation for the connection I make between my original pilot study and the resulting research focus on experiential service design, the first phase of this chapter reviews meaning as a precursor to contextualizing the literature on service design and experience design. Next is a review of the literature on service design and experience design since the lineage of experiential services has its roots in those two frameworks. I will review design methods by drawing parallels to Lévi-Strauss' concept of bricolage, then review the service design literature, explaining how meaning evoked in services for market differentiation led to the development of experience design, followed by a review of the experience design literature, and conclude with a review of the literature on the design of experiential services.

In the second phase of this chapter, I review the literature on viewing the organization through the improvisational lens. Because this literature is connected to the complexity literature, I will review complexity and the organization in order to contextualize organizational improvisation. There will be discussion of chaordic systems thinking because chaordic dynamics between structure and creativity are very present in the improvisational lens. The chapter culminates with an exploration of applying the jazz metaphor to organizational improvisation followed by some thoughts on the limitations of the improvisational lens.

Endowing Services with Meaning

In my 2007 pilot study I explored the ways that consumer products of various industries were endowed with meaning when the producers engaged in idea transfer from the fashion industry and style realm to their own realms. As Cooper and Press (1995:10) have observed,

> "The concerns of design to express lifestyle have always been paramount in the fashion industry. The difference now is that this principle is being extended into other fields of design such as cars and electronic consumer goods."

Experiences, like objects endowed with style and fashion elements, bring meaning to our lives. A typology of meaningful experiences has included harmony, luxury and community (Diller et al., 2006). Style adds meaning to ordinary products (Norman, 2004:57; Postrel, 2004) and reflects the fragility of the reflexive side of design; that is, what is valued and here today, could be gone tomorrow. It is important to establish meaning as a pivotal outcome of the design of experiential services. Through experiential service design, as highlighted by the improvisational lens, the Hotel Luxe makes it possible for guests to more easily access the experience of a particular meaning. Literature on the meaning that elite, luxury hotels deliver to the consumer on a symbolic level is helpful. The elite hotel sector, of which the Hotel Luxe is a member, represents a manifestation of subjective symbolism that gets reinterpreted by the guest. The improvisational lens reveals one of the ways that organizational actors construct a context for guests to engage in reinterpretation and have meaningful experiences. Commercial hospitality has become a medium for people to act out their multiple selves and desired socio-economic roles; consumption defines a person's position in society (Bourdieu, 1984; 1979). The new luxury now dictates that contemporary consumption of commercial hospitality translates into socio-economic expressions of desire, personality and perception (Corrigan, 1997; Gillespie and Morrison, 2001; Luxury Institute, 2009). The emphasis on experiential service and symbolism helps the guests as actors in the structure to emotionally connect and have meaningful experiences.

Because of today's volatile competitive market environment, meaning has become one way for businesses to distinguish among competitors.

Concurrently, the demand for meaningful consumption is growing as consumers seek more dimensions where traditional sources of meaning have lost their authority. Firms have begun to see the systematic design of experiential services (that is, providing compelling customer experiences) as a way to differentiate within the market (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Pine and Gilmore's taxonomy (see Diagram 1) to demonstrate the added value of meaning begins historically with the agrarian economy where the economic offering was *commodities*. With the advent of the industrial revolution came *manufactured goods* to add value. This was followed by *services* in order to differentiate in a service based economy; however, once services became commoditized then *experiences* were the differentiator in a creative economy. Services evoke meaning through experiences. The taxonomy culminates with *transformation* as the value that is the demonstrated outcome the customer demands (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Pine, 2004; Florida, 2002; Currid, 2007). By the early 1980's the idea of branding took off as a way to partition the homogenous mass market into many niche markets and deliver meaning. Consumers became more confident and firms reoriented their questions about innovation away from "How can we make everyone want this?" to "How can we make what people want?" (Diller et al., 2006). Innovation began to be more about a focus on dimensions of identity and emotion as the ultimate success factors in services. But once services were commoditized and experiences were used to differentiate, experience design became key to innovate services, leading to the development of experiential services. In light of the current experience economy where authenticity is the new consumer sensibility (Pine 2004), structure itself has meaning and affects the efficacy and meaning of an experience.

<u>Diagram 2</u>. Adapted from Joseph Pine's Progression of Economic Value (2004)

Customization →

goods
•extract
•make

•deliver

experiences
•stage

commodities

services

← Commoditization
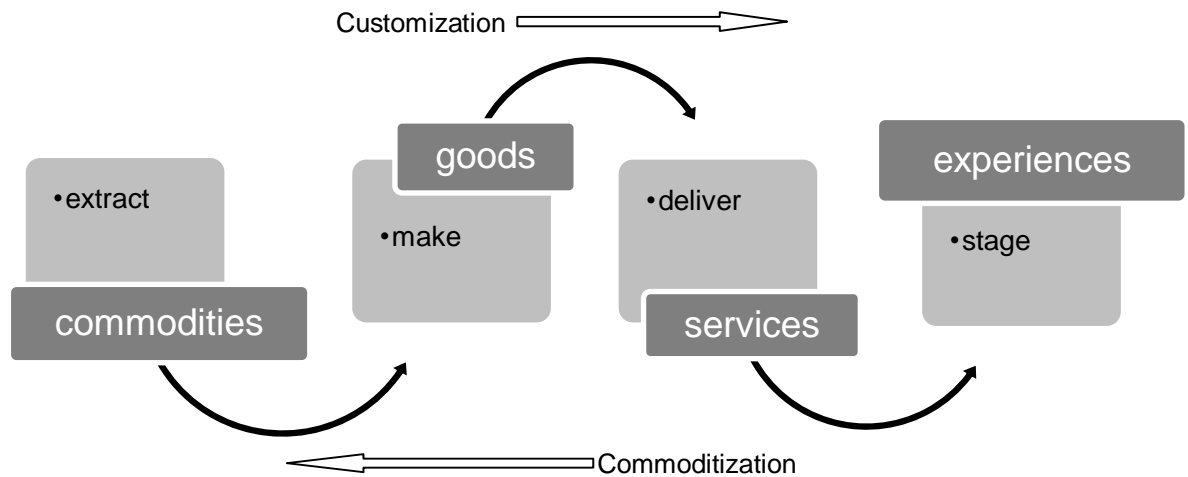
In experiential services, design is the skin, service is the bones, and meaningful experience is the heart and soul. Having stated that services evoke meaning through experience, in order to explain experiential services it is important to define 'meaning' and to define 'experience'. Meaning is defined as our mind's construction of reality (Geertz, 1977). It is an aid to understand complexity and a framework to assess what we value, believe, condone and desire (Diller et al., 2006). Meaning is what makes experiences valuable. Constructions of shared meaning include artefacts which embody meaning, and rituals which transmit meaning.   Experiences and meaning intertwine to create narrative.   The definitions of experience include meaningful interaction that produces a moment of truth (Bitran et al., 2008; Chase, 1981; Heskett et al., 1990 and 1997; Roth et al., 1997; Roth and Menor 2003; Shedroff, 1999) as well as the sensation of change: "any process we are conscious of and involved in as it happens" (Diller, et al., 2006:18).   Pullman and Gross (2004:553) emphasize the emotional component of experience and define experience as "emotional connections (engendered) through engaging, compelling and consistent context."   They elaborate by saying:

> "An experience occurs when a customer has any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider. Successful experiences are those that the customer finds unique, memorable and sustainable over time, would want to repeat and build upon, and enthusiastically promotes via word of mouth."

Other scholars have suggested that experience-centric services go beyond evoking emotion to invoking imagination and provoking the senses (Gupta and Vajic, 1999; Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

Experience is crucial to constructing an understanding about the world and functioning within it; through experiences, individuals confront beliefs and rethink possibilities. Experience creators think about how to exceed the expectations of the audience. There are three critical components to defining an experience: experience first requires an attraction, initiated via the senses; then an engagement, the experience itself; and finally a conclusion, the resolution provided through meaning (Shedroff, 2001). Meaning is derived from experiences and memories are the packaged takeaways of experiences; the distinction of memorable experiences is that they are transformative.

Diagram 3. **The components of experiential service**
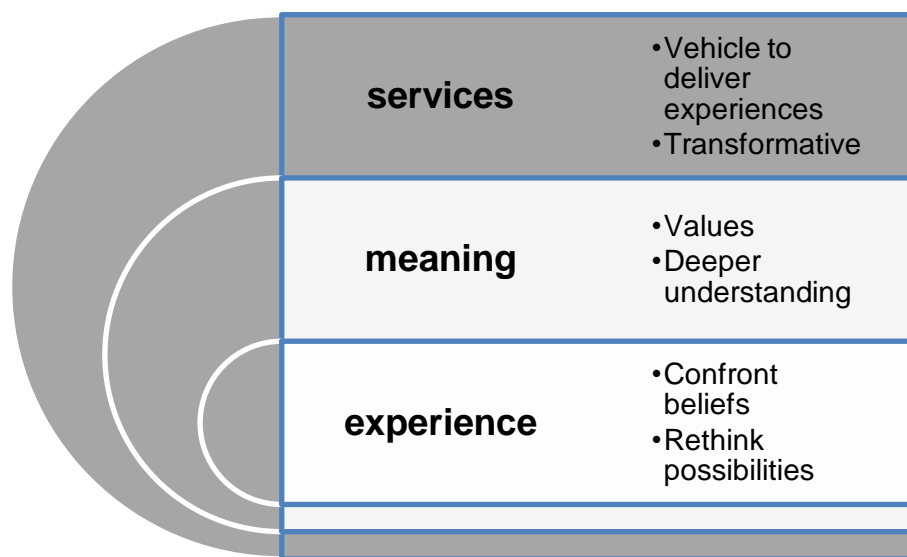
Shedroff (1999) has identified six aspects of experience which make it interactive. Feedback and control are the first two aspects, and typically, experiences with high interactivity offer high levels of feedback and some control. Creativity and productivity are the third and fourth aspects, and these are evident in services where the customers (or co-designers) participate in shaping the experience. Communications is the fifth aspect and refers to opportunities to meet others and share personal stories. The sixth aspect of experience is adaptivity, where the experience can be modified depending on

the user's point of view. While Shedroff explained these aspects of experience from the user's perspective, my intent is to identify how and where some of these aspects of experience reveal themselves in the operationalizing of experiential services in the improvisational lens.

The management literature has emphasized both the tangible and intangible attributes of experience. For example, Pine and Gilmore (1999) discussed experience in terms of active or passive customer participation; Schmitt (1999) outlined five components of experience (sense, feel, think, relate and act); Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) focused on the flow of fantasy, feeling and fun stemming from experiences; and Csikszentmihalyi (1997) looked at how optimal experience resulted from multiple attributes such as values, joy, spontaneity and newness of perception. More recently, the intangible components of service design- notably emotion- have been explored, with some scholars arguing that the emotional role of design is more critical to product and service design than the tangible elements (Norman, 2004). What these views reflect is that experience-centric service design is multifaceted and its intangible elements lend some unpredictability to the service delivery. While traditional service delivery advocates reducing variance, in experience-centric service design, spontaneity and unpredictability is welcomed and intentional. These tenets of spontaneity and unpredictability are mirrored in improvisation. Delivering meaningful service that is emotionally charged depends upon staff training so that relationship bonding between customer and staff can be established. But there is a gap in the literature regarding the design of that delivery from the operators' perspective. This research study will shorten that gap.

There are two groups of scholars who have written extensively about the application of an improvisational lens to understand organizational dynamics, and whose conceptual models I reference later in Chapters 4 and 5 to inform my methodology and to assess experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe. The first group includes Hatch (1993) whose view of organizational culture is a model of dynamic processes suitable to evaluate experiential service design in the Hotel Luxe. It combines Schein's cultural realist model of culture (Schein, 1992) - that culture exists simultaneously on the levels of assumptions (taken for granted beliefs about reality), values (social principles and philosophies), and artefacts (tangible results of activity grounded in values and assumptions) -

with a symbolic interpretive perspective (Tompkins, 1987). By highlighting the process of cultural change in the dynamic exchange of assumptions, values, artefacts and symbols (a symbol being anything that represents a conscious or an unconscious association with a more abstract meaning), Hatch's model demonstrates how culture creates opportunities for organizational members to exploit and develop ideas and make meaning (Meyer, 2005; Darwin, et al., 2002) the ultimate outcome of designed experience. Hatch's cultural dynamics model also incorporates chaordic principles: that culture is constituted by both change and stability; that all organizational members can be inserted in to the model, not just upper level management; and that emotional processes as well as cognitive processes are at work. This dynamic view traces some of its roots to Giddens' (1979) concept of the duality of structure, where everyday activity produces and reproduces the institutions in which it occurs.

In identifying the links between a culture's artefacts, values, assumptions and symbols (the elements of culture), Hatch proposes four processes that constitute culture: *manifestation*, *realization*, *symbolization* and *interpretation*. The processes are depicted on an interlinking wheel of interdependent, transparent processes. Organizational members cycle back and forth between a prospective mode and a retrospective mode by either challenging meaning or reconstructing feedback. One can start anywhere on the wheel and trace the dynamic process. By incorporating principles from chaordic systems thinking and Giddens' reflexivity, Hatch's model is useful for explaining components of an experiential service design organization viewed through an improvisational lens.

The second group includes the work of Crossan, Lane and White (1999) who mapped out a dynamic theory of organizational learning called the 4I framework. This framework is iterative, non-linear, and demonstrates how learning occurs in a feedback and feed-forward way. It is a helpful way to assess the art of anticipation in the context of experiential service design. The 4I framework traces four processes- intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing- occurring over three levels (the individual, the group and the organization) and is a helpful way to understand how organizational members go from intuiting a need to that need becoming institutionalized in an experience design delivery. Intuiting is the preconscious recognition of pattern and

possibilities inherent in a personal stream of experiences (Weick, 1995). Interpreting is explaining an insight to one's self and/or to others. Here, metaphor becomes useful to bridge any gaps between individual intuition and shared interpretation. Integrating is about coherent, collective action. It is the process of developing shared understanding among individuals and making mutual adjustments through coordinated activity. Making these adjustments leads to emergent strategy (Mintzburg, 1994). Institutionalizing is the process of ensuring that actions will become routine and helps organizations to leverage the learning of individuals so that "structures, systems and procedures provide a context for interactions" (Crossan et al., 1999:529).

The Design of Experiential Services

My chief research goal is to use the improvisational lens to understand the design of experiential services. Design is a collaborative and deliberative process which includes short term and long term goals. Ideally in an organization, design is pervasive, and not relegated to a list of rules. The design process begins with identifying an opportunity for new or improved connections to meaning and concludes with the expression and ongoing support of that meaning through multiple touchpoints. It can map the progression of an experience over time through its initiation, immersion, conclusion and continuation.

Design can be viewed in multiple ways: as a discrete practice, as a total process or in terms of tangible outcomes. It has been defined as "a multi-disciplinary, creative problem-solving and planning process, linking the needs of the market to the potentials of production, producing goods and services and consumers' desire" (Cooper and Press, 1995:5). Generally, the creative process of design is divided into stages involving problem identification, understanding the problem, emergence of new ideas, and then idea development and testing (Cooper and Press, 1995; Diller et al., 2006). This research focuses on the design of experiential services at the Hotel Luxe, and the improvisational lens highlights the combination of design as problem solving and design as process. Design viewed as problem solving in this context has to

do with how experiences fulfil a specified function; design as process can be used to inform innovation.

Idea transfer exemplifies absorption of tacit knowledge, not explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge can't be codified, it is based on experience and is revealed through its application; explicit knowledge can be articulated (Goh, 2002; Grant, 1996; Spender and Grant, 1996; Polanyi, 1967). Such experience-centric knowledge infuses services with meaning beyond their function. The network of meaning that experiential services comprise has innovation as one of its deliverables. Thus, a brief foray into ideas about the diffusion of innovation is fitting at this point since innovation is one of the outcomes of experiential service design through the improvisational lens. Design contributes to the act of innovation and creativity; while creativity is the generation of novel association, innovation is concerned with the implementation of creative ideas (Cooper and Press, 1995:172). An innovation is a new idea applied to initiate or enhance a service or product (Hivner and Hopkins, 2003; Martinez, Polo and Flavian, 1998; Troshani and Doolin, 2007). Rogers (1994; 2004) discussed five stages to adopt an innovation: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. These stages of innovation adoption have parallels to stages of design development that involve problem identification, idea development and testing. Innovation diffusion has been viewed as an organization's ability to spread an innovation practice via a group of stakeholders' social networks (Muzzi + Kautz, 2004; Dosi, 1988; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through specific channels over time among members of a social system that are linked via networks (Rogers, 2004). Diffusion is influenced by communication between adopters and potential adopters, change agents, and the degree of transference from one social system to another. This last characteristic is most intriguing for how it might apply to the experiential design process as a means for innovation. The innovation diffusion literature has focused mainly on three questions (Abrahamson, 1991): 1) what processes and contextual factors affect the rates of diffusion of an innovation? 2) what differentiates early adopters of an innovation versus late adopters? and 3) how does the structure of adopters' networks affect the sequence in which adoption occurs? In my exploration of experiential service design, the third question which focuses on the structure of

the adopters' networks is most relevant. As in my original pilot study, this research acknowledges lateral or heterophilous diffusion patterns, across industries and across various stakeholders within an organization, rather than those that are homophilous, occurring within the same industry or within the same organization. This focus is distinctive from those scholars that have focused on the role of higher social orders to lesser status (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971) in the diffusion of innovations, or those that have focused on the role of leadership and planning in the diffusion process (Grabher, 2002). That same body of literature also describes diffusion processes as systematic and planned (Sproles, 1994). Of more relevance to viewing experiential service design through the improvisational lens is the work on networks and other relational structures, which discuss a more random and unplanned process of innovation diffusion within an organization (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985).

The two streams of design that I am concerned with, service design and experience design, are relatively new, having emerged as practices and disciplines in the past fifteen years. Experience design and service design are examples of sensemaking processes that develop from whatever resources are available. In this view, *bricolage* occurs in the experiential service design process and organizational members are bricoleurs. A French word meaning "to use whatever resources and repertoire one has to perform whatever task one faces", bricolage was introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his 1966 work, *The Savage Mind*. Bricolage, which is also a characteristic of organizational improvising, consists of reconstructing events and meaning and requires the spontaneity and order inherent to improvisation. As such, it is a useful way to understand how organizational members reconstruct meaning through the minimal structures in their particular organization. Retrospective bricolage, at the hub of the chaordic view, creates order from chaos. The bricolage concept is a reminder that there are many more resources in an organization than might be immediately obvious.

Resourcefulness is essential to improvisation and to bricolage. Bricoleurs utilize whatever materials and resources are at hand, and improvise new designs and solutions from the available stock of materials (Lévi-Strauss, 1962; Pina e Cunha et al., 2002). Bricolage skills enable organizational members to be resourceful, simultaneously engaging in reflection, action and rule creation

(Mangham and Pye, 1991; Weick, 1998). Bricoleurs are concerned with organizations in the same way that artists are concerned with flow. The designer is a combination of structured scientist and improvising bricoleur (Levi-Strauss, 1962) who must know her resources, engage in careful observation, trust, intuition, listen, and have confidence that structures can be self-correcting (Weick, 2001). The structured-scientific aspect of the bricoleur comes from their bounded knowledge of skills. Those same skills of observing, intuiting, and listening are critical to the design of experiential services and to improvising.

Given this expansive thinking, bricolage should be more apparent in experiential service design organizations that favour generalists rather than in those experiential service design organizations favouring specialists (Weick, 1995). Complexity increases with the increased potential of customization and life's accelerated rhythm; thus, more democratic design and generalists are needed. Explaining improvisation in terms of bricolage means that control can be diffused throughout the organization and design can be initiated in a wider variety of places from within the organization. Because design is stimulated by trial and error, experiments and failures, the irony of a successful experiential service organization is that its very effectiveness makes redesign and learning more challenging. Continuous redesign requires crisis, stimulating learning and reinterpretation.

Service Design

Services are produced and consumed simultaneously because they are manufactured at the point of consumption (Gronroos, 1984; Langeard et al., 1981; Zeithaml, Parasuranam and Berry, 1985). Consider examples such as: prompt pizza delivery; an intriguing learning experience in a college classroom; or indulging in a spa treatment after a long day of business travel. A service is any activity that one party can give to another, but is essentially intangible as it does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may be tied to a physical product or created by a combination of digital information, products and people; because production and consumption occur simultaneously, customers can readily determine the quality of the service. All of these points contribute to

service design's complexity; this is one of the reasons I operationalize service design in the complexity literature.

While service design is multidisciplinary and has a varied set of perspectives, methodologies, tools and processes, the improvisational lens can further expand how it is understood and applied. The *marketing* of services was first introduced as an independent topic in the 1970's, but the *design* of services did not exist as a concept until the 1990's (Manzini, 1993; Erlhoff et al., 1997). It was mocked when first introduced into the academic field and not taken seriously, thus a lot of its definitions overtly assert a scientific method and structured approach. There is a clear intention in the literature to make service design appear very systematic. Some scholars consider service design to be the evolutionary extension of industrial design (Koskinen, 2009). Scholars contributing to the service design literature assert that a new interpretive framework between business and design is necessary, one that focuses on structures for service delivery and that merges contemporary innovation theory with the contributions and models of the user-design driven approach (Hollins, 2006). On the whole, innovation has been poorly applied to the services sector, but organizational improvisation can enhance that.

The service design literature contains many examples of how services can be improved by applying and managing design thinking. Techniques to develop a picture of the service offering include customer experience mapping, storyboarding processes, touchpoint analysis, identifying brand language and attunement to customer perception. Similarly, the literature on organizations presupposes thought, planning and design first, then action and implementation second. But what happens when the environment is unpredictable and does not allow for such a neat sequence of thought and then action? The improvisational lens supports the unpredictability of long term outcomes and patterns because it highlights emergent interaction where both intention *and* spontaneity co-exist; thus, the improvisational lens can advance the ways that experiential service design is understood.

Service design has both tangible and intangible elements including artefacts, communication, the environment and behaviours and must be consistent, facile and strategically applied. Koskinen's definition of service design, "designing

experiences happening in time and space, which reach people through different touch-points," is an evolutionary extension of Giddens' (1979) emphasis on the space and time dimensions of structure.

Most definitions of service design borrow from the design tradition and emphasize a user-centred approach (Mager, 2008; Bedford et al., 2008; Maffei et al., 2005). For example, this definition from Birgit Mager (2008: 355) not only underscores that user-centred approach but also emphasizes efficiency:

> "Service design addresses the functionality and form of services from the perspective of clients. It aims to ensure that service interfaces are useful, usable and desirable from the client's point of view and effective, efficient, and distinctive from the supplier's point of view."

But this next definition emphasizes idea generation and a functionalist view:

> "… (Service design) consists of the generation of a new idea and its implementation as a new service, leading to the dynamic growth of the enterprise and profit creation" (Tattile et al., 2003).

Other definitions contextualize service design as structured around the delivery of experience flowing across channels, or touch-points, over a period of time:

> "Managing design quality in the service sector is the art of matching people's expectations with an experience that is consistent across all touch-points that make up the service" (Lovlie et al., 2008).

It is this definition that is relevant to experiential service design. The reference to the management of design quality as art connects experiential service design to the improvisational lens, recalling the jazz and theatre artists who improvise, where the process of identifying and delivering experiential services is regarded as artistic.

Services pose inherently interesting design problems and contexts for design thinking (Eckersley, 2008). An ongoing debate in the service design field is whether service design is about the coordination of human and material interfaces or about the design of experience where function and emotion are equally accounted for. The latter interpretation fits more closely to my research focus, where service design is rooted in design culture, product design and interface design and has focused on the interaction between the service dimensions of experience and identity, enabling "the transfer of proven analytical and creative design methods to the world of service" (Mager, 2008).

Service design is more relevant today than twenty years ago. As explained earlier in the taxonomy of meaning, when price was no longer the major differentiator, firms embraced a service model with more human connection. Additionally, as more services became commoditized (Pine, 2004), customer loyalty was developed by establishing an emotional connection between the goods and services a firm provides. That emotional connection underpinning the experience and service design is the vehicle to provide those memorable experiences where memory reflects life experiences and reinforces how we view ourselves (Norman, 2004). Service design's increasing relevance has had a direct correlation to the growth of the service sector in industrialized nations. Today, service firms operate within an experience economy where complexity is ubiquitous. Service design is significant to the business management literature because services are a growth area, and well designed services can be profitable. Starbucks is popularly referred to as an example of service design's value in the way that its business model transitioned coffee from a commodity to an experience by adding value through service and customization (Hollins and Mager, 2008; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The service sector, ironically referred to as a "tertiary sector", has become the most important sector in the OECD economies (Hollins, 2006). In the United States, services represent 76% of the GDP and in both the United States and the European Union they account for just over 70% of the total employment and value added (Mager, 2008; Maffei et al., 2005; Hollins, 2005; Hollins and Mager, 2008; CIA World Fact Book, 2009).

Thus, developing service innovations is a strategic imperative. The growing role of services in OECD economies is due to higher consumer and business demand, growth in franchising, increased outsourcing, deregulation in service markets, technological advances and the fact that service providers have begun to benefit from economies of scale (Grove et al., 1992; Maffei et al., 2005; Alakowski et al., 2007; Hollins and Mager, 2008). While this growth is good, some barriers to service innovation include a lack of support for trade and internationalization and difficulty in assessing valuation. Manufacturing used to be the main source for research and development (R+D) investments in product development; marketing was taken for granted. Assessing valuation has been challenging since most services invest little in R+D and therefore do not qualify to be recipients of R+D grants from the government or from the private sector.

In the movement to prioritize service design, total design surfaced. Total design is a concept where all stages of design are considered and the focus shifts from product design solely, to integrating the design of product, process and service (Hollins, 1991). While total design demonstrates that innovation can occur through all stages of the design process, it is a prescriptive framework and functionalist in nature. Much of the service design literature offers a profusion of tools and practical steps such as "Five fundamentals of good service" and "Six elements of service design" rather than consensual frameworks (Saco and Goncalves, 2008; Hollins and Mager, 2008). This is ironic given that intuition plays a significant role in service development, and the delivery process is not always systematic (Norman, 2004).

The Hollins (2006) text on total design explains how to implement service design in linear steps, borrowing from the sequential mode of explaining product design. Although total design is valuable for the way that it proposes a means to capture costs in service design, it slips into contradictory propositions. It will on the one hand advocate "…producing a rigid structure for the first part of the design process" (Hollins, 1991:131) and then insist that the process is iterative. Hollins embraces a mechanistic inputs-and-outputs approach to depict stages of service design. Even when proposed models are supposed to be organic (for example, his design circles model to represent fluid, lateral communication between organizational members) the image of the model looks mechanistic, like cogs in a wheel (Hollins, 1991:141).

Additionally, this more mechanistic approach to implementing service design does not incorporate how to address service design in the context of turbulence and change within an organization, or how to retain an identity while allowing for innovation. Innovation is advised only when audits are completed, rather than being integrated in order for the organization to evolve. The recommendation for service design specifications is reminiscent of blueprint metaphors and assumes that the designer can manage a static future; this is not part of the postmodern view or the organizational improvisation view, which allows for more fluid considerations.

Efforts in the early service design literature put total design into a modernist framework comparing it to total quality management, and advocating for control

of service design by senior leadership (Hollins, 1993) or de-emphasizing the human and emotional connections in a service experience (Eckersley, 2008). In other cases the elements listed as being part of service design specifications, "reliability, price, safety, ergonomics, aesthetics and people interaction" were not distinct from product design with the exception of "people interaction" (Hollins, 1993). These are proscriptive approaches, emphasizing the linearly-structured ways to go about understanding service design. One example of such a proscriptive approach is SERVQUAL, a method for measuring five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) of customers' and providers' perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Berry et al., 1990; Koskinen, 2009; Mangold and Babakus, 1991). A more relevant aspect of the SERVQUAL method is that it does account for both the tangible and intangible elements of the design of experiential services. Examples of the tangible elements include the appearance of physical facilities, equipment and personnel. The intangible elements are exemplified in the way SERVQUAL accounts for empathy, the caring and individualized attention the firm pays to consumers, as well as assurance, the employees' knowledge and employees' willingness to convey trust and confidence. What is lacking is that this approach does not account for the turbulence that accompanies rapid change. There is opportunity to apply the improvisational lens and expand service design's view of the organization to one that is more iterative and fluid and to one with the capacity for emergent leadership among front line employees.

Service is a system of customer experiences, deployed through touchpoints where multiple elements will change a customer's experience. Less attention has been paid to service innovation or to analyzing service as structure. To incorporate service design in the analysis of organizations is to add dimension beyond the level of the design of a particular product, environment or interaction. In this additional dimension, management and front line employees have to consider how customers exist within a system of experiences and ask how all of these things work together in a dynamic way and in support of one another (Bedford et al., 2008). By extension, customers are moving through a system of minimal structures. Touchpoint analysis examines all of the points of

contact between users and service providers in these structures (Hollins and Mager, 2008).

There has been a gap in the service design literature to capture "the soul of service" and there have only been isolated attempts to draw from "art-similar models"; for example, service dramaturgy makes reference to a front stage and a back stage (Mager and Evenson, 2008; Grove et al., 1992). But even these acknowledgements revert to a systematic, socio-logico methodology (e.g., service scoring). The performing arts have been used as a source of inspiration and modelling in service design to arrive at innovative forms of organization, notation and communication (Grove et al., 1992). The dynamic and metaphorical structure of stage and theatre are used up to a point; for example, the metaphors of the front stage and the back stage have been helpful models for creativity. But improvisation in a theatre or a jazz context as metaphors are noticeably absent from the literature. Additionally, the flexibility and fluidity needed in experience-based service design is mirrored in the attributes of the improvisational, and specifically jazz improvisation, metaphor. Service design scholars acknowledge that there are other dynamics embedded in the theatrical process related to ideas about performance that could be valuable to the work of service design (Mager, 2008:357) such as staff autonomy, which is very important in service design (Hollins and Mager, 2008) because it allows for self-organizing and emergent leadership. The improvisational lens amplifies valuable dynamics such as staff autonomy, self organization and emergent leadership.

The architectural metaphor (e.g., references to blueprints) is common in service design. For example, "blueprinting service journeys" (Lovlie, et al., 2008; Hollins, 2006) and other architectural metaphors used to depict transitions between "hotels, lobbies and rooms" to represent web interface touchpoints for global service firms (Gillespie, 2008) are present in the literature. While it is acknowledged in the literature that the blueprint metaphor could be enhanced by examining the sensory side of the customer's experience, the overall more static, architectural framework of blueprinting is limiting: blueprints rarely account for mistakes. The organizational improvisation view reverses that perspective and views mistakes as opportunities.

Experience Design

While the design of experience is no newer than the recognition of experience, experience design as a discipline is in its infancy (Shedroff, 2001). Experience design is an emerging paradigm and a call for inclusion given its inherently cross-disciplinary nature as an integrative practice. It draws from service design as well as psychology, linguistics, architecture, product design, storytelling and design thinking. The mission of experience design is "to persuade, stimulate, inform, envision, entertain and forecast events, influencing meaning and modifying behaviour" (Jones, 2008). Embedded in this mission is the principle of anticipation, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4. Much of the literature about experience design frames it in the context of graphic design, digital media and information design (Shedroff, 2001; Diller et al., 2006; Jacobson, 2000; Shedroff, 1999). An expansive departure of experience design from service design is that experience design refers to the experience of the employees as well as to the experience of the customer. This point is important, as my focus is on how the service providers design and deliver experiential services. Additionally, most of the experience design literature speaks to design practitioners, more than to front line employees executing the service operations. That perspective is a shortcoming that the experience design literature shares with the service design literature.

Pullman and Gross (2004) defined experience design as an approach to create an emotional connection with customers through the careful planning of tangible and intangible events. Experience design results in experiential services and is applied in a wide range of industries including banking, health care, retail, hospitality and tourism, transportation and traditional manufacturing. Since services are essentially intangible processes where often the only tangible cues available are the facility and the employees, the design of experiential services focus has been on the facility and training of employees. As in service design, experience design posits an experience as an engagement delivered to the customer through an integrated system of touchpoints such as product, packaging, message and customer service. Through the designing of experiences, companies can evoke meaning with less of an attachment to

objects and more to the relationship, meaning and feelings that the objects represent (Norman, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981); "designing experiences that evoke meaning is the heart and soul of innovation" (Diller et al., 2006). It is important to clarify that companies do not actually design experiences or create meaning; rather, they design the conditions and contexts to evoke meaningful experience:

Experience design is about making meaning in the consumption and transaction of services and products where usability and functionality are key components. The word experience has spread through the business community with frequency as branding and design have evolved over the past decade (Diller et al., 2006). References to experience design have begun to proliferate in practice and in the management literature reflecting that customers relate to services in ways beyond their functional value. Customers bond with experiences based on how they evoke meaning. The process of designing meaning into experiential services is an iterative one. Experience-centric services can drive customer value thus deliberate design choices are required in order to engage customers in memorable and meaningful ways that are central to the service offering (Voss et al., 2008). Novelty, memorability and sustainability of experiential content contribute to customer engagement. Creating an engaging experience is a means to support the brand, differentiate service offerings and build new types of business models (Voss et al., 2008).

The design of experiential services occurs in four areas (see Diagram 3): the physical facility (which is what scenography addressed); the management systems (which gets to how people are organized and trained); the touchpoints (where customers interact with the delivery service system); and the integration of systems and processes (seen in organizational structures which become vehicles for delivering experiential services). Evoking emotion is central to the experience-centric paradigm of services; in turn, experience based encounters can be drivers of customer value (Voss et al., 2008). Given the collaborative nature of designing meaningful experience, all staff members become an experience designer or "consumer champion" (Diller et al., 2006) in terms of thinking about, participating in, or delivering meaningful experiences. Several scholars have discussed at length the need to address language used for and how organizational members are thought of in the design of experience

(Norman, 2004; Mootee, 2008). Diller et al. have declared a democratic and egalitarian definition, that "anyone who builds value based on customer understanding is, in effect, a designer" (2006:60). Norman (2004) has pointed out that when designers describe people only as customers, consumers and users, they risk diminishing their ability to do good design. There is an irony in designing subjective and personal experiences, but then approaching the people in the process – both staff and clients- as cogs in a wheel. Alternatively, the improvisational lens helps us to view the staff and customers as participants and co-creators. To this end, Mootee (2008) has recommended that organizations stop calling employees "service designers" and instead refer to them as experience architects or experience co-creators. What these discussions point out is the significance of staff identifying themselves as designers and creators rather than as only executing operations, because this shifts the paradigm to their viewing themselves as creating meaning.

Diagram 4. **Four areas of the design of experiential services**
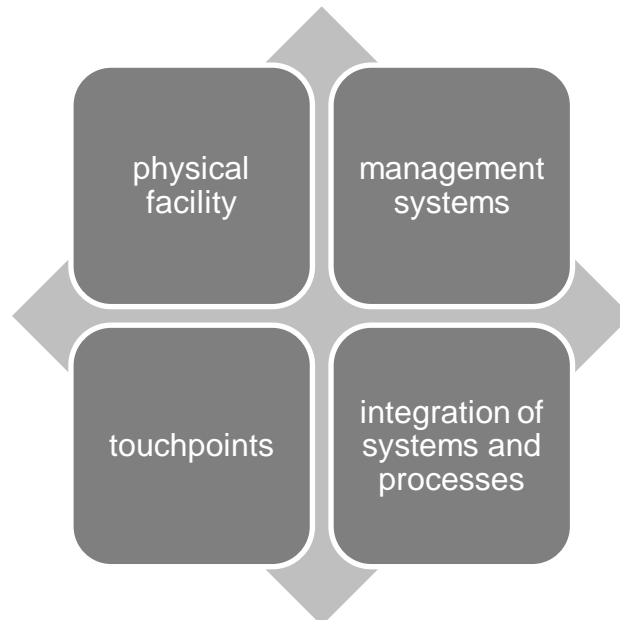
Creating engaging experiences can be elusive because of the intangibility of services and the heterogeneity of services (Voss + Zomerdijk, 2007; Salter + Tether, 2006; Parasuraman et al., 1988). As stated earlier, services and

experiences are made up of both tangible and intangible elements and while firms typically have distinct design departments working specifically on tangible design for the physical product, there are no dedicated design departments in organizations for the design of intangible elements. The design of intangible elements tends to reside in the operational departments, resembling arenas for "silent design" (Gorb and Dumas, 1987) that design carried out by individuals who are not called designers and would not consider themselves designers.

Experiential services are heterogeneous because customer experiences are inherently unique and personal. The types of research that drive this design process include traditional market research, empathic research, trend watching and learning from others. Organizations embarking upon experience design employ either tight methodologies or loose methodologies (Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007). Tight methodologies require a fixed set of steps, activities, tools and techniques in the design process. The steps are known ahead of time and do not vary greatly between projects. Some organizations fear that tight methodologies can inhibit the creativity required for experiential service design and unnecessarily increase the time to market. In loose methodologies, the steps, activities and tools required in the design process are determined individually for each project along the way. Loose methodologies account for a diverse customer base and are thus amenable to the heterogeneous nature of services. Experiential service providers have stressed the importance of flexibility in the design process because sticking to fixed routines inhibits creativity. The identification of loose versus tight methodologies in the experiential design process will be pointed out in the exploration of my data in Chapter 4.

Experiential services, designed to evoke emotional responses and engage customers, are defined as those experiences which focus on the experience of the customer when interacting with the organization, rather than just the functional benefits stemming from the products and services delivered (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). The experiential service design model is a complex bundle of tangible and intangible offerings, designed with the intention of evoking a "Wow!" response (Voss et al., 2008). Key to experience-centric services is excellence in execution and authenticity in evoking the intended emotional response. The design of experience-centric services is multi-faceted

which results in some unpredictability in the service offering. In line with design thinking, the service delivery process in experience design is contextualized in terms of service encounters (Shostack, 1985), client journeys, prototyping, and storyboards (Mager, 2008; Lovlie et al., 2008); Gillespie, 2008). While services are essentially intangible processes, the encounters and journeys highlight the tangible points of interaction between the consumer, the service, the personnel and the physical facility (Bitner, 1990). Central to discussions about experience design is the metaphor of the service journey, where the customer experience is built over an extended period of time. A key tenet to this metaphor is that it is customer-centric. What is lacking in the literature is a metaphorical approach that examines the design of experiential services from the producers' perspective and this is where the metaphor of jazz improvisation adds value.

Client journeys are a means of capturing and illustrating the emotional, procedural and material components of the service process. Origins of the journey model can be traced to service blueprinting and service mapping (Shostack, 1984; Kingman-Brundage, 1992; and Bitner, 1993). The journey metaphor works as a tool to analyze and design memorable customer experiences. Service is deployed via touchpoints along the client journey. Key aspects of the customer journey metaphor are that the journey is built over an extended period of time and is often cyclical; it consists of numerous touchpoints, and each touchpoint has the potential for innovation. These touchpoints include virtual interfaces, physical interfaces and people, which either has to be carefully designed or managed; each touchpoint has the potential for innovation. The management of touchpoints is related to the earlier observation made that experiences cannot be designed, but rather the favourable conditions for the experience *can* be designed.

Touchpoints are those points of engagement that the customer can have, typically in five main areas, often referred to in theatrical terms in the literature (Grove et al., 1992): the physical environment (the stage); the service employees (the actors); through the service delivery process (the script); with fellow customers (the audience); and with back office support (the back stage area) (Voss, et al., 2007). Touchpoints need to be carefully designed and managed. Innovation can take place at each touchpoint, and some scholars have argued that each touchpoint the customer has with the organization is an

experience no matter how mundane the service that is being delivered (Voss, et al., 2007). Storyboards illustrate new service processes from the client's perspective and use scripts, scenery and props.

There are four noteworthy tools and techniques in the experiential services design process: simulation, prototyping, experimentation and knowledge transfer. In simulation, tools are used that can simulate aspects of an experience, for example, sounds of nature piped through the stereo system in a spa. In prototyping, a representation of a design is made before the final product or experience exists. Prototyping can be difficult given the intangible nature of services but it assists in idea development and decision making. In experimentation, an idea is tried out on a small scale before actually launching it; and in knowledge transfer, opportunities are found to learn from across the organization and from across industries.

The people who are included in the design of experiential services are important to note. There is a broad base for creativity because in the experience design view, creativity can come from anywhere in the organization, including the tangible and intangible representations of design. For example, the front line employees have detailed insight into current customer experiences and see opportunities for improvement. Cross functional teams tend to be an inherent part of experiential service design because these teams consist of organizational actors whose affiliation or job title does not refer specifically to innovation or to design, and consequently a broader base of creativity is a resource.

The experience design process recognizes design as "both the intent and the process of integrating functional, economic, emotional or social benefits within a meaningful context," (Diller et al., 2006: 57); the process involves creating a blueprint of what the company should provide from a customer's perspective. When designing an experience, breadth, duration and intensity guide interpretation of an experience's meaning. The experience must consistently connect with the consumer and that connection requires two dimensions: 1) interactivity between the customer and the service, and 2) aesthetic details (Diller et al., 2006). Interactivity is a two-way engagement occurring through the experience. Interactivity can be either controlled or be more adaptive, designed

to change in response to specific conditions. The second dimension, aesthetic details, has to do with the sensory expression of an experience. To this end, triggers such as physical artefacts, language, symbol and sensations are key. Implementing an experience is a non-linear process characterized by a network of interconnected and overlapping decisions. Some scholars have likened it to a loose movie script with various organizational members acting "in concert" (Diller, et al., 2006). To this end, employee selection becomes very important because everyone has to be trained to convey and support the goal of delivering meaningful experience. Consistency, stemming from a shared vision and a spirit of collaboration among employees, is required within an environment of bounded instability (Stacey, 1992), managing chaos. This point will be developed later in Chapter 4.

Organizational Improvisation

Two commonalities between literature written about organizational improvisation and experience design are that they both are relatively new fields, having surfaced in the past fifteen years and they both can reveal more about postmodern organizations managed in conditions of turbulence and drastic change. These connections make the use of the improvisational lens more relevant to my research purpose of understanding how organizational members design experiential services.

Unlike the orientation of experiential service design, modernist perspectives on organizational design have tended to focus on outcomes rather than process. Modernism asserts that universal, scientific truths can lead to legitimate, authoritative statements of the truth within a cultural context; postmodernism acknowledges ambiguity and multiple interpretations. The old assumption about the organization is that systems are designed from a hierarchically organized, singular structure (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). But an alternative proposition about organizational design is the post-modernist view, that organizations have multiple designs; that the distribution of resources determines the design; and that designs are amplified small structures (Weick, 2001). Experience design and service design are compatible with this postmodernist view. When organizational design is mapped out in the

modernist view of the organization, organizational charts, written standard operating procedures and job specifications are emphasized. But it is the intangible, continuous and emergent features of organizations, such as those seen through experiential service design, that reveal deeper layers of an organization. An emphasis on order and control in organizational theory is a handicap if the goal is to understand creativity and innovation.

Myths of management from the modernist perspective (that change is top-down, orderly and planned) are compounded by the functionalist approach. The functionalist approach has been problematic in its treatment of what management does as a list of functions without describing how the function contributes to the needs of the system (Giddens, 1979). While some scholars criticize the myths that have evolved from the modernist view of the organization, they still tend to focus on the management and leadership tiers of the organization, neglecting a more holistic view that acknowledges how emergent leadership comes from many parts of the organization, namely from those working on the frontline. A case in point would be Peter Vaill's *Managing as a Performing Art* (1989); while his seven myths of management are useful, they are limited in their hierarchical focus. But his performing arts framework is useful given the fact that management is regularly confronted with a variety of phenomena and variables with which to deal.

The improvisational lens can shed light on an emergent process from the producers' perspective. Emergence is another commonality between organizational improvisation and literature on the post-modern organization. Total quality management (TQM) is an example of a deliberate, systematic view of change management that is top-down and executive driven. But emergent strategy (as opposed to deliberate strategy) is an important contribution to critiquing total rational planning; restoring a sense of proactivity and experimentation among organizational members because it is more spontaneous, intuitive, action oriented and bottom up (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Mintzberg, 1988). Intended, or deliberate, strategy is more future oriented, analytical, planned and top-down. Emergent strategies evolve organically as new realities unfold.

Literature on organizational improvisation posits that improvisation is a central feature of organizational reality (Kamouche et al., 2002). The customer-centric stance in the service design literature and experience design literature (Alakowski et al., 2007) engenders questions about innovative, flexible and dynamic organizational structures and processes that are initiated from the producers. Organizational improvisation is one such example of a flexible and dynamic process initiated by organizational members. Significantly, the Hotel Luxe understands the value of improvisation:

> "The Hotel Luxe management philosophy is to select the right people, orient them to desired outcomes, train and certify operational skills, and support staff members as they improvise and create the guest experiences in the moment-by-moment interactions with the guest." (Michelli, 2008:108)

Today, constant reinvention, adaptation and continuous change are realistic descriptions of organizational conditions especially given the turbulent global economy (Stacey and Griffin, 2008; Weick, 2001; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Where there is time pressure, ambiguity and uncertainty in organizational activity, the improvisational lens is useful because it highlights emergence and challenges assumed realities about organizational design. Literature on organizational improvisation coincides with societal concerns about coping with discontinuity, interruptions and turbulence (Luxury Institute, 2009; Weick, 1998). The improvisational lens is also a useful perspective because it highlights bifurcation points in an organization and looks beyond traditional points of competitive advantage. It has also contributed to an understanding of creativity, innovation and structure (Crossan, 1998; Weick, 2001; Hatch, 2002). My research efforts will demonstrate how it can also extend the value of experience design: as organizations' environments become more complex, perspectives that reveal an organization's capacity to change are necessary. The organizational improvisation literature is a newer body of work (i.e., in the past twenty years) that offers novel interpretations of organizational action.

A basic principle of organizational improvisation is that improvisation is not an organizational dysfunction, an unintended outcome or a design failure, but rather an organizational attribute because it contributes to and is an outcome of the organization's absorptive capacity for new knowledge, structural flexibility, operational flexibility and adaptation (Lewin, 1998; Weick, 1998). For example,

learning a new process in the midst of changing the sequence of operations in a procedure to adapt to a customer's need; or extending the boundaries of organizational rules in order to accommodate a new market demand. Applying organizational improvisation as a lens helps the researcher to understand creativity and innovation, and is a view on how to cope with discontinuity and interruptions. As a mixture of the pre-composed and the spontaneous, improvising is close to those root processes in designing, which embellish small structures.

There are three contributions of the improvisational lens to current literature on experience design and service design. First, there are few linkages between literature about service and experience design and discussions on viewing those processes through the improvisational lens. Thus, new metaphors are contributed. The previous section has made clear that the theatrical stage metaphor has been employed to describe the service journey in experience design but by introducing the improvisational lens to understand experiential service design, a new metaphor is contributed. A second contribution that the improvisational lens brings to the discussion on experiential services is to view services as structure. Such a perspective expands our understanding of experiential services in terms of stability and change, and in terms of how design outcomes might be reproduced and transformed. Third, the literature in experience design tends to focus either on how the designer can create meaningful experience, or how the user might receive an experience. The experience design literature uses language similar to that used in service design, notably the blueprint metaphor and highlighting the design process in terms of the consumer perspective (Desmet et al., 2009). The improvisational lens helps to explore organizational members' design and delivery of meaningful experiential services.

Since the mid-1990's, improvisational activity has gained recognition as a strategic competence in the business management literature. The fact that improvisational activity has been an undercurrent in the organizational behaviour literature is made clear in this statement by Barrett (1998:617):

> "Managers often attempt to create the impression that improvisation does not happen in organizations, that tightly designed control systems minimize unnecessary idiosyncratic actions and deviations from formal

plans. People in organizations are often jumping into action without clear plans, making up reasons as they proceed, discovering new routes once action is initiated, proposing multiple interpretations, navigating through discrepancies, combining disparate and incomplete materials and then discovering what their original purpose was. To pretend that improvisation is not happening in organizations is to not understand the nature of improvisation."

A commonly agreed-upon definition of improvisation is lacking in the literature; more research is needed about what it is and what is required to do it well. Nonetheless, an extensive list of adjectives describes organizational improvisation. A general consensus is that it is a dynamic principle operating in many different spheres; an independent and transformative way of being and knowing. I incorporate the definitions of improvisation in business contexts as put forth by Crossan and Sorrenti (1997:156): "intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way"; and Vera and Crossan (2004:733): "the spontaneous and creative process of attempting to achieve an objective in a new way"; and Kamoche et al. (2003): "the conception of action as it unfolds, drawing on available cognitive, affective, social and material resources". Improvisation is more an act of interpretation than of decision making because one needs to make sense of unexpected events that emerge (Weick 2001; Meyer, 2005). It is an open-ended and ongoing process that is about continuously reconstructed design, its "elapsed patterns" discovered retrospectively (Weick, 1998).

Improvisation's etymology is noteworthy. It is rooted in the Latin 'proviso' which means to make a stipulation beforehand or to do something that is premeditated. The prefix "im" negates proviso, so 'improvisation' works with the unexpected. Berliner (1994) is credited with having created the best definition in his treatise on jazz improvisation:

> "Improvisation involves reworking pre-composed material and designs in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to every creation" (Berliner, 1994:241).

I like this definition because of its reference to design and anticipation, a theme in my research findings. Crossan (1998) mapped out areas where improvisation applies to the management context, several of which are relevant to this case study including the ability to interpret the environment, craft strategy and cultivate leadership. With regard to interpreting the environment, Mintzberg

(1973) documented several ways that managerial activity is spontaneous; and Stacey's work in chaos and organizations (Stacey, 1991) reminds us that we can know but we cannot predict, and thus need the capacity to respond in spontaneous ways. With regard to crafting strategy, Mintzberg's concept of emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 1988) versus intended strategy is relevant because the improvisational lens illuminates emergent activity. With regard to cultivating leadership, members take on a variety of roles on an as-needed basis, incorporating trust and kinship, two elements in jazz improvisation.

The acknowledgement of structure in improvisation is as important as exploring its spontaneous, intuitive and creative aspects. Popular accounts underestimate the pivotal role of structure in improvisation given that improvisation is grounded in form, practice and memory. Structuration is an underpinning in my research discussions in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Because organizational improvisation as well as complexity and chaordic systems thinking in the discussion to follow are characterized by both stability and change, it is important that I briefly devote some discussion to the relevant tenets of structuration as well as to its limitations for my research purposes. Structuration is a major body of theory proposed by Anthony Giddens (1976; 1979; 1984); it examines stability and change and how structure and agency (or human action) are inextricably linked. Scholars such as Willmott (1987) and Barley and Tolbert (1997) have applied structuration theory to organizational studies. Giddens' purpose was to transcend the separation between structure and action, positing structure and agency (or human action) as reciprocally related, as a mutually dependent duality. Agency can lead to the reproduction and transformation of society because agents can reproduce structure through action and transform it. Giddens viewed agency as human action, and structure as rules and resources organized as properties of social systems. He attempted to treat influences of structure and agency equally. Giddens' structuration helps the researcher to understand the process by which structures emerge.

The aspect of structuration that I find most relevant to my work is its principle of "the duality of structure", where structure is both a means and an end: "the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices they recursively organize" (Giddens, 1984:25). Giddens' idea that

structure is both the medium and the outcome of -or the product of and constraint on (Barley and Tolbert, 1997) - practices which constitute social systems is helpful to this study. In other words, social structures are the medium of human activity as well as the result of those activities. Systems are reproduced through the duality of structure in the context of bounded conditions. Giddens' work on structure contextualizes the dualities and paradox that the literature on complexity and organizational improvisation expound upon. For example, Stacey (1992) explained systems as a set of interactions that were self-controlling and self-organizing. There is a reflexive component to the complexity approach and this is valuable because it is one more example of the place complexity has along the continuum rooted in Giddens (1979). This is a relevant tenet of structuration that surfaces in subsequent discussions in this dissertation.

Viewing organizational dynamics through the improvisational lens does not reject structure and using it as a metaphorical lens makes other minimal structures more visible (Kamouche, 2002). Minimal structures are coordinating devices that allow for maximum flexibility (Barrett + Peplowski, 1998). Organizations consist of embellished minimal structures; for example, credos or mission statements. Minimal structure is important in turbulent environments because the structural elements of trust, leadership, competence and creativity become more important and relied upon when formally constituted structures fall apart.

Organizational memory and stories are structures of stored knowledge, reservoirs of resources for organizational members to access retrospectively in order to improvise solutions. Organizational memory serves to interpret new information and guide the action of new product routines, created in the form of collective beliefs, values, norms, routines and artefacts which vary in content level and accessibility (Moorman and Miner, 1997). To identify improvisation in these forms is to gain retrospective access to a large number of resources in the organization. Interaction around these forms leads to the redesign of the structure. Organizational redesign is a continuous activity where responsibility for initiating the redesign gets dispersed throughout the organization: interpretation of issues and resourcefulness are crucial because an action's meaning is known after the fact and minimal structures have profound impact.

What Weick calls sensemaking, Giddens (1979) referred to as reflexive self-monitoring of action. The sensemaking concept reveals how organizational members have the raw materials of narrative to construct new organizational sense. It calls interpretive schemes into question and provides guidance for action toward change. Such reflexivity gives organizational members permission to embrace ambiguity and paradox (Fleming, 2001). Giddens' reflexivity was having the ability to both constitute structures as co-actors (so that organizational members could interact with structure) and also work through the structures. Integrating Giddens' duality of structure is a way of understanding how organizational members interact with structure, consciously or unconsciously: when improvising, one cannot analyze the past because one is engaged in a constant process of evaluating and monitoring present action. Thus, improvisation, sensemaking and reflexive self-monitoring are bridges between the past and the future.

Storytelling is a tool for sensemaking. While the modernist view made truth the objective and characterized the organization as top-down, categorized and non-contradictory, in the narrative mode, story, aesthetics and intuition are part of the theorist's methodology and the organization is characterized as bottom up, experiential and contradictory. Boje (2008) has refined explications about storytelling organizations by distinguishing between a narrative mode and a story mode of sensemaking in an organization. Narrative is a centring force of order and control, linear in sequence, with one plot changing little over time. Narrative's challenge is that it does not reflect shifts in the environment or in innovation. It is static in nature. In contrast, where narrative is centripetal, story is centrifugal, unravelling coherence and asserting differences. The story mode in the organization is useful because it gives new understanding of the organic, spontaneous and improvisational nature of experiential service design.

Weick and Roberts (1993:368) have extolled the significance of organizational members developing storytelling skills because,

> "Stories organize know-how, tacit-knowledge, nuance, sequence, multiple causation, means-ends relations and consequences into a memorable plot."

Storytelling helps organizational members understand where they are in the ambiguity-opportunity cycle and which qualities will be necessary to undertake

the journey (Fleming, 2001). The stories give a sense of "Where are we?" and "Where are we headed?" and are recursive in nature in the way that they help the organization to make sense of their own narrative. In this way, the storytelling mode complements the improvisational lens. It is plot driven and plots give meaning as they contextualize. The system becomes the character (e.g., delivery of service design) and the disruptor is a situation or antagonist (e.g., new competitors, or an economic recession.)

Complexity, sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and the storytelling mode of the organization, are all products of the postmodernist view of the organization, and are key components for viewing the design of experiential services through the improvisational lens. The fundamental principles of complexity thinking are not new, but what is new is that the complexity view requires awareness and reflection about organizational members' interaction in terms of dynamic processes such as unpredictability, novelty and emergence (Stacey, 1996); this is its linkage to organizational improvisation. Experience-based intuition and creativity are encouraged more than sequential, logical analysis; this is its linkage to the design of experiential services. These spur innovation among organizational members because they allow for the repetition of ideas in new situations and contexts.

Experiential services are complex and can be described as a dynamic dance. That the improvisational lens highlights behaviour that is self-organizing, emergent and comfortable in unpredictable contexts, are primary reasons to discuss it (Mager and Evenson, 2008). Complexity is the science of systems consisting of many agents interacting with one another to produce adaptive survival strategies for themselves and the system where they interact (Stacey, 1996; Giddens, 1979). The forward and backward interloping between actors and their own system characterizes the recursive nature of complexity; complexity thinking is spiral in form while systems thinking is linear (Boje, 2008). The complexity view highlights how organizational members cope with the unknown. Theory on complex adaptive systems characterizes multiple agents in those systems as diverse, local, interacting with multiple actors at once, and adhering to their own rules of interaction (Stacey and Griffin, 2008). Complexity can be used to explore systems where many independent agents interact in diverse ways leading to spontaneous self-organization and to learning that

occurs through feedback. This multi-dimensional and dynamic view embellishes upon ways to understand design in organizations. In a complex self-organizing adaptive system, learning and innovation occur at the edge of chaos. Self-organizing is a spontaneous process where agents organize themselves to produce new patterns without a blueprint. This is mirrored in the improvisational lens. It becomes apparent that actors adapt to new conditions based on a combination of intuiting and accessing resources as bricoleurs. As Dee Hock (developer of the chaord concept) noted,

> "There is something about the nature of complex connectivity that allows spontaneous order to arise… characteristics emerge that cannot be explained by [the] knowledge of parts" (Hock, 10).

Complexity provides a context for exploring innovation in organizations because discovery occurs in spaces of novelty or in "bounded instability" (Stacey, 1992). Bounded instability is a space of paradox, of simultaneous stability and instability; it is chaos. The paradox in bounded instability is that information flows and is also retained, behaviour is predictable and also unpredictable, competition and cooperation co-exist, as do order and disorder. The presence of paradox contributes to the complexity and unpredictability of events.

In the paradoxical spaces of bounded instability, which are far from the state of equilibrium, innovation and creativity thrive. For example, when a manager intentionally works in groups along with front line staff to learn new methods, tension is generated producing both recognizable behavioural patterns and new specific behaviours (Stacey, 1992). In the complexity view, bounded instability is to be achieved, not avoided. Complex behaviour in organizations manifests as non-linear feedback systems, operating in bounded instability. A non-linear feedback system exhibits chaotic behaviour, where it is challenging to identify clearly delineated cause and effect. Tiny changes can have massive consequences. Within this instability, new and innovative forms of behaviour are created. From the complexity perspective, stability does not equate with excellence and instability does not equate with failure.

The complexity view is that coherent and creative behaviour is possible *because* the system is messy. Leaders do not determine direction; instead they are participants whose primary role is to contain anxiety while provoking the double-loop learning process (Stacey, 1996). Management's ability to contain

anxiety is related to their ability to empathize with others. Uncertainty and the anxiety it creates leads to creativity in order to overcome challenges. Uncertainty is necessary in order to think dynamically and enhance innovative behaviour (Hallin and Marnburg, 2007; Eijnatten and Galen, 2002; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Stacey, 1996).

Organizational life is full of dilemma and paradox in everyday activities. Initially, paradoxical encounters are viewed as irrational and lacking obvious answers but paradox raises important questions regarding organizational action, the nature of decision making and the challenge of change (Kets de Vries, 1980). It points out the limits to rationality in organizational life. Similarly, the improvisational lens helps theorists to deal with the paradox of spontaneity and order. Human interaction between organizational members is both predictable and unpredictable and the improvisational lens highlights how organizational members "practice with paradox" by illuminating spontaneity, embracing anxious confidence, collective individuality and planned serendipity (Mirvis, 1998). Rehearsing spontaneity involves mastering a skill via repetition. Anxious confidence refers to a need to get comfortable with both anxiety and confidence. Collective individuality is about learning when to act independently as an emergent leader and when it is necessary to follow a group. Planned serendipity is the idea that order arises out of chaos and freedom produces control. Jam sessions serve the function of practicing with paradox in jazz improvisation.

According to the complexity literature, change is a constant to embrace and systems are never in equilibrium. The presence of change, turbulence and bounded instability require organizational members to embrace paradox and ambiguity and engage in an ambiguity-opportunity cycle (Fleming, 2001). Organizations are complex adaptive systems, continuously rearranging and adapting as organizational members gain experience. While the complexity perspective is valuable for the aforementioned reasons, it is noteworthy that complexity theorists such as Stacey have made limited reference to improvisation. Thus, a contribution of my research is to operationalize experiential services in complexity through the improvisational lens.

In the dominant schema of management theory, assumptions are integrated into predictive models and forecasts to identify long term outcomes. Long term outcomes can be identified via research, centralized information gathering, training and development of management. The system can be a preventative aid against bad behaviour. For centuries, scientists worked on the premise that all natural systems tended toward equilibrium. In contrast, the contribution of complexity thinking is that order can produce chaos and chaos can lead to new order (Stacey, 1992). Based on this, learning occurs in real time and actions are designed factoring in intuition, analogous reasoning and reflection.

Complexity is a basic characteristic of a chaordic system where both distinction (variety and heterogeneity) and connection (redundancy and dependency) go hand in hand. A chaord is an organization that blends characteristics of chaos and order. The chaordic concept is present in improvisation: spontaneity and intuition (chaos) as well as practice, study and listening (order) are important dimensions. Intuition is at the core of some definitions of improvisation because it is accepted that intuition is based upon discipline, practice and experience (Crossan, 1998; Stacey, 1991; 1992). This has lead to thinking about improvisation as a skill that can be practiced. Thus, complexity and CST (chaordic systems thinking) are embedded in principles of organizational improvisation and the improvisational lens can advance how we think about the design of experiential services.

While there are no examples in the hospitality literature of applying the improvisational lens, one case does apply CST, a related perspective and one embedded in organizational improvisation. This example prompts one to consider the additional dimension that could be gleaned if the improvisational lens had been applied. Researchers (Hallin and Marnburg, 2007) reviewed a small group of hotels in the Netherlands where they found that the organization's chaordic interior had been ignored. The interior, the system's internal essence, is comprised of thoughts, beliefs, values, assumptions and images that are commonly neglected. The interior is what lies beneath the surface structures and is often referred to as the orgmind. It can be accessed dialogically. A hotel's minimal structures (e.g., stories, aesthetic elements) operate on this interior level and transmit beliefs, values and assumptions. The exterior, the system's perceptible surface, can be described via the senses; it is

the concrete and tangible surface of the system. The improvisational lens engages the exterior and the interior aspects of a system. In contrast, approaches like TQM (total quality management) are externally focused and tend to ignore the interior of an enterprise; thus, the subsequent changes brought about on an organization's surface are rarely sustainable (van Eijnatten et al., 1998). However, the improvisational lens can reveal that experience design processes access both the exterior and interior levels of the orgmind.

In Hallin and Marnburg's Netherlands hotel case study, the organization invested time and effort to develop the system's exterior (i.e., its tasks, aesthetic design, structures, processes and systems) rather than engage the hearts and minds of its people and support them to work in an optimally chaordic system. The exterior had become static over the years, reinforced by a history of success and management had difficulty envisioning a new form. But viewing the organization through a CST lens in this study revealed that it was necessary to destroy the system as it had existed so that an optimally sustainable chaordic system could emerge. The CST approach- with a focus on the orgmind instead of on systems and procedures- brought about a sharper focus on people and the human aspect of the organization. As a result, employees saw their enterprise less as a fixed structure and more as flow. The ramifications of paying attention to the orgmind's interior are present in organizational improvisation and will be explored in Chapter 4 when evaluating how the Hotel Luxe designed experiential services.

Analyzing sensemaking is a way of understanding how organizational members interact with structure- consciously or unconsciously. To that end, sensemaking advances understanding of experiential service design. Weick explains sensemaking as "putting stimuli into frameworks". In his 1995 *Sensemaking in Organizations* Weick states that sensemaking does not equal interpretation, that it is about the ways that individuals generate what they interpret. Later, in his explanations of improvisation in the 2001 *Making Sense of Organizations* he states that improvisation *is* interpretation. The difficulty is that the properties he lists as being unique to sensemaking - retrospective viewing, social contact, understanding how individuals cope with interruptions to the flow of the organization- are very similar to the descriptors he uses for improvisation. He distinguishes the two by saying that improvisation is interpretation and that

sensemaking is about the solutions people generate and invent around what they have interpreted.

The Jazz Metaphor Applied to Organizational Improvisation

I will use characteristics of jazz improvisation as outlined by Frank Barrett (1998) as a heuristic device to operationalize improvisation in the design of experiential services. The jazz improvisation metaphor contributes imaginatively to organizational improvisation, especially when a review of organizational studies shows an emerging vocabulary that incorporates 'ambiguity', 'emotion' and 'time' (Hatch, 2002). In recent years, scholars have noted the dimensions of jazz improvisation that can be associated with organizations (Grove et al., 1992; Hatch, 2002; Weick, 2001; 2002; Barrett, 2002) and the following statement reflects the contribution that studies on improvisation have made to complex services:

> "…more complex services necessitate improvisation by the service actors. Jazz improvisation makes a good analogy here. The best jazz improvisation is not done by novices but by experienced musicians. Service organizations that expect their employees to improvise should invest in considerable training." (Grove et al., 1992:109)

Jazz musicians are storytellers, composing in the moment, thinking while in motion, "creating art on the edge of certainty and surprise" (Weick, 2001; Berliner, 1994). Thus the jazz improvisation metaphor incorporates complexity and the story mode of the organization. By incorporating a metaphorical approach, organizational improvisation invokes a broader experience base. It calls upon not only the analytical but also the emotional and the aesthetic (Hatch, 2002; Rorty, 1989). While emotion has been incorporated into the literature on experience design, it has not been fully incorporated into the literature on organizations, but it can contribute significantly to experiential service design by helping to develop organizational citizenship, commitment and involvement. If, as in jazz improvisation, structures are thought of not as rules but as communication, then emotion can contribute structurally to organizations by organizing relationships. Opening channels of emotional and aesthetic communication is rare in business organizations- but aesthetics have power in organizing. The aesthetic dimension of experience and

communication offers more meaning and more profundity because on subtle levels it gives organizational members the ability to absorb the complexity of an experience. That aesthetic and emotional dimension is alive in jazz improvisation.

Just as organizational structure is more improvised and flexible than is initially recognized, jazz improvisation is actually more structured than may first be apparent (Barrett and Peplowski, 1998). Embracing jazz improvisation as a metaphor for organizations does not make jazz equivalent to organization. The more useful interpretation is that organizational members orient themselves to organizational structures in ways similar to how jazz musicians orient themselves to structures while performing jazz (Hatch, 2002). The jazz metaphor has informed the development of the improvisational lens because it emphasizes process and emergence. This is useful when attempting to understand an organization as organic and as balancing the dynamic of chaos and order, not as linear or static.

The spontaneous and intuitive nature of improvisation has been emphasized. But the improvisational discipline in jazz and theatre is also based on practice and processes; it is a "rule bound activity" framed by structural properties (Barrett + Peplowski, 1998; Vera and Crossan, 2005). Jazz's structures provide a safety net in case something goes wrong because "…jazz is designed and intended to allow maximum flexibility within a minimum framework of commonality" (Pasmore, 1998:564). The essence of jazz is the tension which is created when improvising on "something" while keeping the improvisation fresh and new; it requires embellishment of something and that something is usually a melody. Charlie Mingus once remarked, "…you can't improvise on nothin'. You gotta improvise on somethin'". That "somethin'" is the structure of jazz; its chords and scales are roadmaps.

Structure in jazz is dynamic, not sacred, and it has emotional and analytical qualities that allow the musicians to communicate (Hatch, 2002). This connects to work done in organizational studies about ambiguity in the organization (Eisenberg, 1986) which is really about the ambiguity of structure. The jazz metaphor in organizational improvisation extends the discussion of ambiguity of

structure in organizational studies and makes ambiguity easier for theorists to apply.

The aim of jazz playing is to integrate ideas and free up attention, so that players think strategically (Barrett in Kamouche, 2002:141). Neither organizational members nor jazz musicians can be complacent and rely on past successes or stock phrases. Gioia (1988) highlighted jazz musicians' methodology by distinguishing them from the way architects work, emphasizing that intention, creation, interpretation and sensemaking are embodied in improvisation. While architects work from blueprints, jazz musicians create their forms retrospectively. Weick (1995; 1998; 2002) made a similar distinction when describing organizational design as improvisational.

The use of song and of retrospective bricolage- using what is available based upon cumulative knowledge- are themes common to jazz, organizations and experience design (Weick, 2002). Songs represent a mutual equivalence (Wallace, 1961); if organizational members are allowed to be diverse in equivalent ways, then their actions can be meshed. Songs in jazz are parallel to credos in organizations. Thinking of jazz musicians as storytellers can be extended to organizational members. In jazz, songs are minimal structures producing cohesion amidst diversity and are organizing devices; they are crucial for improvisation. Other organizational melodies include credos, mission statements, core values, rules of engagement, and basic know-how; organizational melodies invite novel and practiced actions (Weick, 1998), something which will be further examined in Chapter 4.

Limitations to the Improvisational Lens

There are epistemological limitations to viewing experiential service design in improvisational terms. For example, a part of the organization where the improvisational lens fails to explain behaviour is in the area of routine, an essential practice to deliver consistent quality, but which does not require improvisation at all. There are organizational situations where an orchestral metaphor (Drucker, 1954) - for example, a leader striking an even tempo - fits and then other situations where creativity and flexibility are required making the jazz metaphor in the improvisational lens more appropriate. There are still other

cases where mistakes, welcome in improvisation, are intolerable in a business organization.

The table on the following two pages summarizes the literature that I have reviewed, dividing the review into "major works" and themes. In the next Chapter 3 I discuss the research methodology I incorporated to more fully understand experiential service design process by using the heuristic device of the jazz improvisation metaphor.

Diagram 5. **Literature Review Summary**

Major Work	Themes	Authors
Meaning	Typology of meaningful experiences	Diller et al., 2006
	Experience economy	Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 1999; Pine, 2004; Florida, 2002; Currid, 2007
	Meaning: the mind's construction of reality	Geertz, 1977
	Emotional component of experience	Pullman and Gross, 2004
	Meaning is derived from experiences;	Shedroff, 2001
	Knowledge: tacit and explicit	Goh, 2002; Grant, 1996; Spender and Grant, 1996; Polanyi, 1967
Design	Multi-disciplinary, problem-solving process	Cooper and Press, 1995;
	Total design	Hollins, 1991; 2006
	Silent design (staff create meaning and are therefore designers)	Gorb and Dumas, 1987; Diller et al., 2006; Norman 2004; Mootee, 2008
Service Design	Services are intangible and are simultaneously produced and consumed	Gronroos, 1984; Langeard et al, 1981; Zeithaml, Parasuranam and Berry, 1985; Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007; Salter and Thether, 2006.
	Service blueprint metaphor	Shostack, 1984; Gioia, 1988;Lovlie, et al., 2008; Hollins, 2006.
	Intangible elements (e.g.: emotion)	Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Norman, 2004
	Services are systems of customer services deployed via touchpoints	Koskinen, 2009; Bedford, et al., 2008; Hollins and Mager, 2008
	Proscriptive approaches (e.g., SERVQUAL)	Parasuraman et al, 1988; Berry et al., 1990; Koskinen, 2009.
Bricolage		Lévi-Strauss, 1962
Experience Design	A discipline in its infancy; cross-disciplinary and integrative	Hollins and Mager, 2008; Alakowski et al., 2007; Voss, 2007; Shedroff, 1999; 2001; Press and Cooper, 2003; Diller et al., 2006
	Experience results from multiple attributes of values, joy and spontaneity	Csikszentmihalyi, 1997
	An approach to create an emotional connection with customers via tangible and intangible events	Pullman and Gross, 2004; Voss et al., 2008
	Taxonomies of experience	Shedroff, 2001; Schmitt, 1999
	Tight methodologies and loose methodologies	Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007
Experiential service design	Invoke imagination and the senses	Gupta and Vajic, 1999;Pine and

<u>Diagram 5.</u> Literature Review Summary

Major Work	Themes	Authors
		Gilmore, 1998
	Complex bundle of tangible and intangible offerings	Voss et al., 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004
	Customer journey metaphor; touchpoints	Shostack, 1984; Kingman-Brundage, 1992; Bitner, 1993; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Grove et al., 1992
Organizational Improvisation	Improvisation as methodology; as an organizational design failure;	Crossan, Lane and White, 1999; MacKenzie, 1986
	Draws upon organizational memory	Lewin, 1998; Cohen and Levinthal, 1990; 1994; Moorman and Miner, 1997; 1998;
	Improvisation is intuition guiding action spontaneously	Crossan, 1998; Crossan and Sorrenti,1997; Vera and Crossan, 2004; Weick, 2001; Meyer, 2005; Stacey, 1991 and 1992
	Improvisational lens as methodology	Hatch, 1993; Crossan, Lane and White, 1999;
	Improvisation is central feature of organizational reality; an organizational attribute	Kamouche et al., 2002; Lewin, 1998; Weick, 1998
	Emergence: emergent strategy, emergent leadership	Mintzburg, 1988; 1994; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Vaill, 1989
	Bricolage	Levi-Strauss, 1966; Pina e Cunha et al., 2002
	Designs are amplified small structures	Weick, 2001
Sensemaking	organizational actors use storytelling to construct new organizational sense	Weick, 2001; Weick, 1995; Fleming, 2001; Boje, 2008
	Putting stimuli into frameworks	Weick, 1995
	Storytelling is tool for sensemaking	Boje, 2008
	Create forms retrospectively	Weick, 1995; 1998; 2002
Innovation	Innovation diffusion	Muzzi and Kautz, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Dosi, 1988; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971.
Complexity	Chaordic systems thinking	Hock, 2005; van Eijnatten, 2001
	Exterior and interior levels of the orgmind	Hallin and Marnburg, 2007
	Recursive and spiral; highlights how organizational actors cope with the unkown	Boje, 2008; Stacey, 1996; Mager and Evenson, 2008
	Systems are self-controlling and self-organizing	Stacey, 1992; 1996
	Bounded instability- a space of paradox where stability and instability exist simultaneously	Stacey, 1992
	Uncertainty, paradox and turbulence	Hallin and Marnburg, 2007; Mirvis, 1998; Kets de Vries, 1980; van Eijnatten and Galen, 2002; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Stacey, 1996
	Ambiguity-opportunity cycle	Fleming, 2001
Structuration	Duality of structure- structure is both a means and an end	Giddens, 1976; 1979; 1984
	Minimal structures are coordinating devices	Barrett and Peplowski, 1998
Jazz improvisation metaphor	A heuristic device to operationalize improvisation	Barrett, 1998; Grove et al., 1992; Hatch, 2002; Weick, 2001; 2002; Barrett, 2002
	Rule bound activity framed by structural properties	Barrett and Peplowski, 1998; Vera and Crossan, 2005; Pasmore, 1998;
	Leads us to think of structures are	

Diagram 5. Literature Review Summary

Major Work	Themes	Authors
	modes of communication	
	Ambiguity in the organization	Eisenberg, 1986

Introduction to Chapter 3

As I have established in the previous two chapters, my research interest is to explore the design of experiential services through the improvisational lens. In this chapter I present a detailed explication of this epistemological framework operationalized in seven characteristics of jazz improvisation (Barrett, 1998), my heuristic device. Karl Weick remarked,

> "If you want to understand organizations, study something else. Part of the rationale for that prescription is that if you understand something, almost anything, in some depth, you will have learned something about the chaos and order in the human condition. And once you begin to understand order and chaos, you begin to understand something about large scale human organizations" (Weick, 2002:166).

My interest in the Hotel Luxe evolved from my pilot study in 2007 where I examined idea transfer from the fashion realm to the consumer product realms (notably hospitality) and effects on innovation (see Diagram 6). In my 2007 pilot study I selected a range of companies across industries that appeared to engage in idea transfer with the fashion and style realms. The pilot study consisted of fifteen interviews with design and trend practitioners in a range of consumer products companies: hospitality, specialty chocolates, automotive, telecommunications, package design, fragrance forecasting, textile design and architecture. I wanted to understand from the practitioners' point of view whether or not the infusion of ideas about style was occurring and *why* those practitioners thought style infusion was occurring. I also wanted to understand if the style infusion process was deliberate or emergent. I sampled from diverse industries in order to gain an understanding of style infusion's breadth. My selection process of who to contact for those interviews came from readings I completed in current events journals such as *Business Week*, *Fast Company*, *Vogue* and *The Economist* as well as my initial observations about consumer products that were embedded with fashion and style elements. Key texts such as *Trading Up* (Silverstein + Fiske, 2003), *Emotional Branding* (Gobé, 2001), *Fashion Brands* (Tungate, 2004), *Wikinomics* (Tapscott and Williams, 2006), *The Substance of Style* (Postrel, 2004) and *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in*

Fashion and Architecture (Hodge, Mears, and Sidlauskas, 2006) helped me to understand current thinking on style's broader applications in society. I learned that style infusion does indeed occur, and that its process is heterogeneous, emergent and in fact improvisational: influences come from a number of different sources including industry colleagues, social peers, suppliers, and from both the design and non-design fields.

Diagram 6. **A map of my research process**
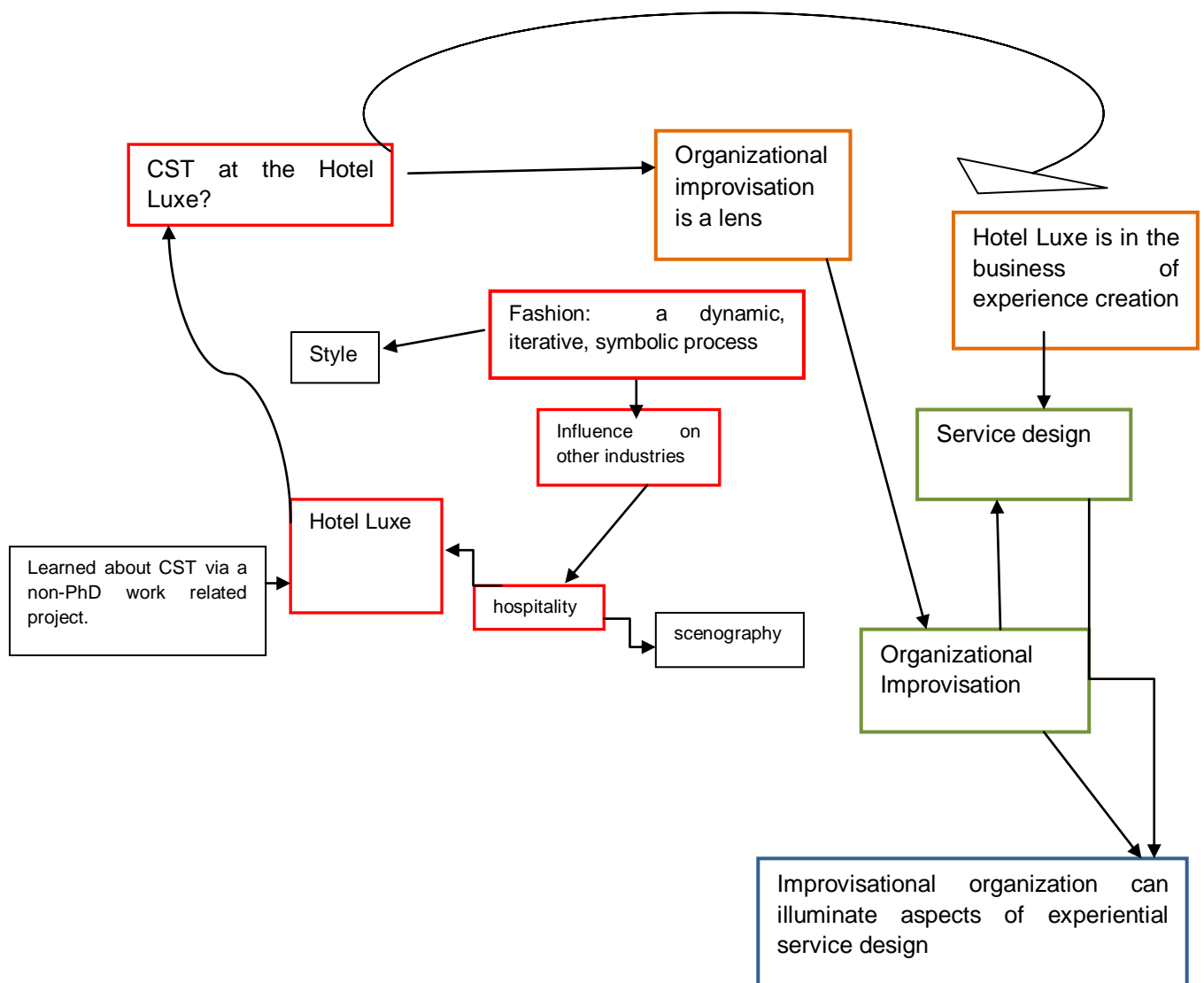
The pilot study significantly expanded my focus from fashion diffusion to style diffusion and then to broader considerations about meaning. Some interviewees pointed out the broader applications of fashion and style, and that while fashion was an important source of inspiration and innovation for product design and branding, it was not the sole source. Products and services today have to resonate with customers beyond their functionality to deliver meaning, and style elements are one vehicle to do that. This point led me to do a more in depth investigation of the hospitality industry, one of the sectors in my pilot study, to see how meaning in the form of memory and experience creation was designed. Luxury hotels are proficient in manipulating the semiotics of elitism, design, fashion and hospitality via explicit and implicit symbols and signifiers (Corrigan, 1997; Gillespie, 1999). Hotel consumption is a means for individuals to express how connected they are to a particular lifestyle, a means for expressing group identity, and in post-modern society, one explanation of how to live out multiple identities. This helps to explain why my initial pilot study's foray into idea transfer from the fashion and style realm ultimately led to an exploration of hospitality.

Initially, I was intrigued with the Hotel Luxe's use of scenography as a tool for staff to design a stylized and sensory-filled staged environment at each property to enhance the customer's experience and deliver more meaning. Scenography, which the Hotel Luxe borrowed from the world of theatre and retail, was an example of the idea transfer process that I explored in my original pilot study.

Data Collection Method

A motivation for using an improvisational lens as methodology is to fill a gap in the literature: improvisation has been discussed as playing a role in understanding the processes of strategic decision making, organizational learning, product development and technology- but it has not been specifically applied in the hospitality, service design or experience design literature. This matters because characteristics of improvisation illuminate outcomes of experience design in new dimensions. One of those new dimensions is organizational outcomes and experiences that allow for change and adaptation,

creating interest and tension. The improvisational lens reveals how organizational members create experience in situ. My ontological perspective as a researcher is that there is more to know and understand about how experiential services are designed by producers from post-modernist and interpretivist theoretical positions. Post-modernism assumes relativism and that there are no absolute truths; interpretivism assumes that meanings are constructed by humans as they engage with the world that they are interpreting. Based on those assumptions I have investigated experiential service design from the staff's perspective at a luxury hotel, incorporating their views on the social reality of delivering meaning and mapping it against the heuristic device of jazz improvisation.

My ontological perspective utilizes participant observation as a research method. In participant observation, the researcher shifts in and out of roles as external observer and internal participant, where internal participation can range from full immersion to partial immersion as an outside-observer. I adopted the latter role of partial immersion over a period of twelve months through my participation in lineup meetings at hotels and properties which I visited. The benefit of this approach for my data collection purposes was that I could often go into more depth in my questions to retrieve a deeper level of story from organizational actors. At other times I was given access to information about internal processes; this access may not have been granted had I not been accepted as a familiar face in their work environment. Conversely, the challenge in the participant observation approach came during the analysis stage where I had to be much more conscientious about any bias I brought to interpreting the data. For example, having been invited to participate in the very rousing and oftentimes emotional lineups where wow stories were shared, I had to be certain to be more critical in assessing the design and delivery of meaningful experiences.

I embarked on developing my research philosophy by first reviewing a survey of qualitative research methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln have put forth thorough critiques of the qualitative research method (for example, the crisis of representation and legitimation) as well as its benefits (that is its quest to understand from the insider's point of view). Qualitative research is more attractive for my purposes because it lends itself to a reporting

method that is rich and in depth with quotes and vignettes to illuminate points. Vignettes, as a form of story, connect the meaningfulness of each point. Since I am studying a "storytelling organization" (Boje, 2008), this approach made sense. There is dimension in qualitative research that is not yielded in quantitative statistical research (Bertolotti, 2004). While the objective of positivist research is to develop an abstract representation of the world, the focus of interpretive research is on the ways in which meaning is attached to experience (Spender, 1996). This study is more than an exploration of organizational improvisation in the design of experiential services; it is a study of the meaning embedded in these systems.

I limited my research to a single organization in order to deeply operationalize improvisation in experiential service design. Such focus lends itself to early, exploratory investigations where variables are still unknown and phenomena are not well understood (Meredith, 1998; Yin, 1994). The phenomena can be studied in their natural setting and relevant models can be generated from the understanding gained through observing actual practice. Observations from this dissertation can point out key issues and characteristics of experiential service design. My decision to develop a focused, interpretive study is a product of 1) my goal to develop detailed and rich data, 2) time constraints and 3) access to data. My sampling strategy was to interview a cross-section of personnel representing executive management as well as 'on-the-ground' staff. I also wanted to gain insights from those stakeholders who were external to the Hotel Luxe but acted as design and branding consultants to the organization. Their perspective not only presented new insights but also directed me to ask different questions of internal stakeholders than I might have normally generated. Sixty interviews were conducted with staff, executive management, consultants to the Hotel Luxe and hotel designers. I met with the front line staff at most of the properties I visited, the general managers at each property, several vice-presidents at the corporate headquarters and ultimately the president of the Hotel Luxe. I also interviewed consultants to the Hotel Luxe in the areas of scenography, brand management and internal data collection. Data was produced by using participatory observations, semi-structured interviews, brainstorming, process mapping, secondary sources and benchmarking. Most interviews were with one person at a time; occasionally

interviews were conducted with two or three persons. Observations of staff meetings (called "lineups") were conducted whenever permission was granted, because lineups were examples of an experiential service design technique where constructs such as story and employee engagement were used. I asked open-ended questions which allowed respondents to relay their stories, followed by my asking probing questions to arrive at richer detail.

I implemented progressive focusing, where I built on interview questions as the research developed. This built-in interpretive method is part of the value of the qualitative research method. Over time I was able to develop skills in reading between the lines and didn't need to transcribe the data myself and thus sent out the remaining interviews to a professional transcriber because I had developed all the coding and the iterative sense. Just as I studied emergence in the Hotel Luxe organization, I looked to see what would emerge from my data, following cues, gathering momentum and working from a basic script regarding organizational improvisation to learn what would surface.

My method of analysis was triangulation and sifting through the data in aggregates. I learned the terms "sifting" and "sorting" as valuable analytical methods in a research methods course I completed in 2007 (Maietta, 2007). Thinking of analysis in terms of sifting and sorting helps the researcher to break out of the structure, reorganize and then circle back. As my interviews were recorded, I developed inventory creation from the transcribed data; that is, I organized quotes from the data that appeared significant. The next stage was to assign labels to those quotes. A result of creating inventory is that certain labels begin to "talk across the data" (Maietta, 2007). My analysis process also included memo generation.

The Improvisational Lens as Methodology

The improvisational lens is an investigative tool which I use to research how meaning is designed into experiential services. Epistemologically, it shines light on how organizations design their systems, and specifically in this study, how organizational actors construct a context for guests to engage in reinterpretation and have meaningful experiences, shedding light on emergent processes and advancing the way we understand the design of experiential services.

Metaphors have been used proactively by researchers to explicate service delivery (Goodwin, 1996) and there is still more opportunity to understand "how metaphors define research agendas and how they may mislead us" (Van den Bulte, 1994:407). Metaphor can be powerful as a descriptive and analytical device, especially when it succeeds at capturing and communicating the experiential or process-oriented characteristics of phenomena that resist comprehension through logic and words alone (Grove et al., 1992:93). The following definition marks the path that metaphor can pave when used as a research methodology:

> "Metaphor is a way of knowing… a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown. It is a way of cognition in which the identifying qualities of one thing are transferred in an instantaneous, almost unconscious flash of insight to some other thing that is, by remoteness or complexity, unknown to us" (Nisbet, 1969:4).

Thus, metaphor influences the researcher's thought process. As it moves beyond the literal to describe and connect unfamiliar topics, it enlightens comprehension in ways that other methods do not (Ortony, 1975). Many metaphors have been used in the service and experience design literature- for example "journeys" (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990), "dramas" (Grove and Fisk, 1983), "factories" (Goodwin and Radford, 1993; Taylor, 1994) "blueprints" (Shostack, 1987; Kingman-Brundage, 1989), and "encounters" (Bitner, 1990) -most likely because of the intangible nature of services which can make them more difficult to understand than the design of tangible products. Notably, jazz improvisation is not a metaphor that has been used in the literature, but like these other metaphors jazz improvisation represents an attempt to make the researcher comfortable with the intangible aspects of experiential services. Geertz (1983) suggested that metaphors be applied to less obvious targets (for example, using a game metaphor to understand religious ritual); the jazz improvisation metaphor represents a bit of a metaphorical shift for examining experiential service design. This "genre stretching" (Brown, 1990) can enrich services research.

In the arena of improvisational metaphors, jazz improvisation and theatre improvisation are popularly used as methodological devices in the organization literature and I ultimately settled on jazz improvisation as my principal metaphor because of the allusions to jazz in my interview data. Crossan (1998: 593)

asserted that improvisation is more than a metaphor, but that it is also "an orientation and a technique which enhances the strategic renewal of an organization". Her point expands the influence of the jazz metaphor for developing theory and comprehension of the dynamics of organizational development. But Crossan has also contributed to the organizational improvisation literature by using theatre as an improvisational metaphor instead of jazz. Her work links improvisation and innovation and emphasizes collective improvisation (improvisation in teams), thus bridging a gap in the literature that has focused primarily on individual employee innovation; teams within organizations, like individuals, can facilitate or inhibit innovation (Vera and Crossan, 2005). Collective improvisation from the world of theatre adds to what jazz improvisation has illuminated. There are varying degrees of improvisation: improvisation in crisis situations as well as improvisation in everyday situations of discovery. Teams improvise to incremental degrees when they are making changes to standard operating procedures. Improvisation builds on the cognitive and affective (trust, respect, mutual support) aspects of collaboration. Improvisation thrives in the presence of these affective aspects because organizational members feel safe to take risks. Consistent with the post-modernist perspective, improvisational theatre focuses on processes more than on outcomes. The unpredictable and equivocal nature of improvisation is what makes "good improvisation" possible. Other scholars have pointed out how the culture of design could well benefit from the competence of, for example, drama professionals (Koskinen, 2009). Explications of scenography benefit from the theatre metaphor in organizational improvisation.

Scholars have debated the appropriateness of the jazz metaphor versus the theatre metaphor. The critical resistance to the jazz metaphor has been mapped out by Hatch and Weick (1998), who explain how jazz improvisation's dynamic between structure and creativity is a great metaphor for the type of emergence and innovation that organizations engage in. But Crossan and other critics (Meyer, 2005) of the jazz metaphor assert that it has elitist overtones, since skills for jazz improvisation (knowledge and mastery of music theory, scales and chords) are inaccessible to the majority of people.

Possibly one of the more attractive aspects of the jazz improvisation metaphor for my research purposes is its principle of adaptation:

> "Adaptation takes place within real time as the performance is underway, and later when rehearsal tries to recapture what worked and build upon it. Time for learning and reflection is critical both to the current performance and to continuing development… A high level of listening and interaction exists between the producers and the audience, both during the actual delivery of the 'product' and afterwards." (Neilson, 1992:5-6)

Adaptation also has a real presence in the design of experiential services. It is the essence of engaging clients in order to anticipate their needs, what the Hotel Luxe calls "the art of anticipation". By asking where the improvisation and adaptation in experiential services design is, the researcher can obtain creative insights into service phenomena that would not be as apparent through (for example) a factory metaphor or a packaged good metaphor (Goodwin, 1996). The researcher, then, is encouraged to search for new metaphors or to combine existing metaphors in new ways. The jazz improvisation metaphor also presents an element of aesthetic appreciation that tends to be absent in business metaphors such as "well oiled machines".

It is important to remember that ultimately, all metaphors are incomplete. Using only one metaphor has its limits, much like the fabled blind man touching the elephant: depending on which part of the elephant he touched, he felt different textures and qualities of the elephant. Similarly, each metaphor can reflect some aspect of service delivery more effectively than others. Also, follow-up research will draw attention to aspects of a topic that were neglected by previous metaphors. For my purposes, using the metaphor of jazz improvisation as the methodology to evaluate the design outcomes of experiential services at the Hotel Luxe can reveal how experiences modify: "experiences should ultimately change and modify themselves to be more appropriate for users" (Shedroff, 2001:116).

There are two parallels between the jazz improvisation metaphor and the design of experiential services. First, both have elements of structure (i.e., the song in jazz improvisation, and story in the design of experiential services) which strike a balance between memories of past experience and the pursuit of new discoveries. References to the past are especially noteworthy for the Hotel

Luxe as it is a heritage brand. Second, both jazz improvisation and the design of experiential services consist of social groups (Meyer, 2005). As socially constructed realities, both jazz ensembles and organizations are generated from the assumptions, beliefs and behaviours of their participants. The improvisational lens helps us to see the employees and guests as co-creators. This is significant given many experience design scholars' (Mootee, 2008; Norman, 2004) concern that since experience is subjective, affective and personal, that the people involved- both the organizational members as well as the customers- not be seen as cogs in the wheel, but as experience co-creators and co-designers who are designing "experience architecture". The jazz improvisation metaphor as methodology equalizes and democratizes the experience design context. Such characteristics of jazz improvisation form the basis of rationale to utilize it heuristically in my analysis.

Dimensions of the Jazz Improvisation Metaphor

The improvisational lens contributes an integrative view of experience design. In this study, I propose that jazz improvisation serves as a latent construct, a higher order abstraction underlying multiple dimensions which define a specific domain of content (Vera and Crossan, 2004; Law et al., 1994). Complexity, chaordic elements, story and holonic elements are four of the underlying multiple dimensions of the jazz improvisation metaphor.

Principles of chaordic systems thinking (CST) and complexity are ever-present in improvisation. Viewing the organization as an improvising entity operationalizes complexity and the CST view in such a way where the dynamic between chaos and order is manifest in phenomena such as self-organizing and bifurcation points.

Complexity, the first dimension of the jazz improvisation metaphor, informs my methodology. From the complexity perspective, industrial age organizations are problematic because procedure has become more important than purpose and method has become more important than results (Hock, 2005). The industrial age conceptualization of the organization positions the organization in a Newtonian context using analytical methodologies where behaviours are

predicted based on discrete building blocks to reorganize, restructure, downsize, centralize and decentralize. It tends to spend more time attempting to change the organizational mindset- the "orgmind"- so that a new enterprise will be thought into existence (Fitzgerald, 1996). But neither the complexity view nor the CST view is so predictive or prescriptive; the enterprise is recognized not as fixed but as flow (Eijnatten and Fitzgerald, 1998; Eijnatten, 2001).

The complexity of the Hotel Luxe is evident in the way that the organization simultaneously serves a large and diverse number of customers; there are many independent actors interacting with one another (for example, over eighty properties around the world employing thousands of people, communicating in more than twenty languages); and interaction often leads the system to spontaneous self-organization and learning takes place via feedback. The chaordic elements are tools for the researcher to see the organization as an emergent, complex, dynamic, non-linear entity where order (structure and framework) and chaos (creative self-organizing among employees for example) co-exist (Wafler, 2004; van Eijnatten and van Galen, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2002). That co-existence of order and chaos are embedded in jazz improvisation. The Hotel Luxe's adaptation to the new luxury landscape, balancing order and chaos in turbulent times, has compelled it to develop systems and structures which have elements of improvisation and can be analyzed by researchers via the improvisational lens.

CST (chaordic systems thinking) the second dimension of the jazz improvisation metaphor, stems from a view of the organization that is cybernetic-systemic in orientation, rooted in chaos theory from mathematics. The word "chaord" evolved out of Dee Hock's (founder and former president of VISA International) observations that self-organizing and adaptive systems in nature were able to emerge on the edge of chaos with just enough coherence and structure to result in order. The chaord is defined as "Any self-organizing, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organization or community whether physical, biological or social, the behaviour of which harmoniously blends characteristics of chaos and order." (Hock, 1996:13; van Eijnatten and van Galen, 2002): an improvisational organization is a chaordic system.

CST informs my methodology of the improvisational lens because it illuminates the balance between structure and creativity in an organizational system and lends itself to the dynamics of order and chaos present in organizational improvisation. CST is an outgrowth of the literature on complexity in organizations (Stacey, 1991; 1992) and is a useful way to research experiential services in terms of their processes, systems and behaviours. CST rarely results in generalized knowledge; it is case specific and helpful for understanding the complexity of an organization's particular situation. Thus, it is aligned with single-study research on how organizations deliver experiential services. When companies and their markets are increasingly characterized by hyper-complexity, unpredictability and uncertainty (due to factors such as a depleted supply of natural resources, financial crises and excessive energy consumption) an improvisational lens informed by complexity is useful to understand how the particular firm adapts and innovates (van Eignatten and Putnik, 2004).

The Hotel Luxe's shift to experiential services can be operationalized through the chaordic elements in the improvisational lens. Virtually any system can be regarded as chaordic; the chaordic lens is an approach to assessing a complex organizational system. The workings of a hotel are chaordic: the staffs sometimes works in small groups, at other times individually, and at still other times collectively, across functional areas in larger groups, shifting back and forth between continuous, linear paths and non-linear, spontaneous ones. The chaordic lens enables one to see the organization as an emergent, complex, dynamic, non-linear entity where order (structure and framework) and chaos (creative self-organizing among employees for example) co-exist (Wafler, 2004; van Eijnatten and van Galen, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2002). Attempting to understand the organization as chaordic means that one accepts that chaos and order are two aspects of the same reality (Fitzgerald, 2002). The Hotel Luxe's adaptation to the new luxury landscape has been made possible due to its embrace of adaptive chaordic frameworks. The chaos and order dynamic that the Hotel Luxe finds itself in- between being traditional and being relevant; between adhering to standard operating procedures and establishing systems to enable innovation- illustrates an opportunity to superimpose organizational improvisation thinking. One of the principles in CST mirrored in the

improvisational lens is that of amplified minimal structures, a variation of the butterfly effect (Lorenz, 1993). This idea that minimal structure generates large system designs (Fitzgerald and van Eijnatten, 2002) is a principle outcome of viewing experiential service design through the improvisational lens where new structures are created because designers' expectations alter behaviours.

The third dimension of the jazz improvisation metaphor is the art of story creation in real-time in response to stimuli in the environment (Frost and Yarrow, 1989:1). Stories are navigational tools; by listening to stories, the researcher gains important information about organizational members. The role of stories in organizations is to improve and disperse organizational memory. Storytelling is a key component of experience design as well as the complexity literature on organizations in the form of retrospective sensemaking. In both experience design and retrospective sensemaking, storytelling enables organizational members to interact with information to build personal context and integrate information into previous understanding. The story is a means to make difficult concepts, information or instructions accessible. The stories of organizational members told to me assisted my own sensemaking of the data before me.

This narrative approach to studying organization resonates with the Hotel Luxe's mode of designing experiential service. Structures such as story help staff to build organizational memory and to improvise and therefore deliver better experience design in terms of engagement with the organization and with the clients. As organizational members share stories, they co-create their organization's future and become better equipped to respond to the unexpected and the unplanned. Incorporating the improvisational lens reveals how the core elements of story and improvisation are linked to delivering experiential services.

The fourth dimension of the jazz improvisation metaphor is the incorporation of holonic elements (Koestler, 1967). An example of a holon is the finger which is simultaneously a part of a greater whole, the hand, which is an integral part of an even greater whole, the arm, and so on. Individual jazz musicians who are distinct from the ensemble while simultaneously a part of the greater creative enterprise of jazz improvisation are also examples of holonic systems nested

within each other. On an intangible level, words, ideas, stories and emotions are also holons because they are simultaneously part of a greater whole and can be viewed as having their own parts. People act upon a system of which they are an inseparable part; the observer and the observed belong to the same dynamic system. The improvisational lens reveals that the design of experiential services has holonic characteristics that are simultaneously unpredictable and patterned.

Operationalizing the Improvisational Lens: Barrett's 7

Frank Barrett (1998) elucidated seven characteristics of jazz improvisation which I have chosen to use as a heuristic device: 1)provocative competence (i.e., deliberately creating disruption); 2)embracing errors as learning sources; 3)minimal structures that allow for maximum flexibility; 4)distributed task (i.e., an ongoing give and take); 5)reliance on retrospective sensemaking (organizational members as bricoleurs, making use of whatever is at hand); 6)hanging out (connecting through communities of practice); and 7)alternating between soloing and supporting. I operationalize the improvisational lens in experiential service design transposing these jazz improvisation characteristics on to my data. The improvisational lens highlights these characteristics and reveals an organization capable of the chaordic and complexity elements of expressiveness, artistry, paradox and spontaneity as well as pragmatism, rationale and deliberate strategy.

New dimensions about experiential service design surface when the service delivery and meaning creation of maids and bellmen are viewed through an improvisational lens. In this section I will explain Barrett's seven characteristics of jazz improvisation (Barrett, 1998) - heretofore referred to as Barrett's 7- and why I have decided to use them as a heuristic device to assess experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe.

Barrett explains each of these seven frameworks by defining them in a jazz improvisational context. Explaining some basic jazz terminology illuminates further how the jazz metaphor makes more prominent the sensorial and emotional dynamics evident in experience design. 'Heads' are melodic

sequences; 'soloing' is when any given musician takes the lead; 'comping' is when a fellow musician accompanies the soloist; and 'groove" is when a sense of communion and flow occurs between the musicians and listeners. Barrett was interested in how the jazz metaphor could lead to knowledge development and knowledge creation in organizations and how organizational members were empowered to innovate and improve processes. While Barrett's objective was to use jazz improvisation as a lens to explore organizational learning, I will extend his model to use the seven characteristics of jazz improvisation to explore experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe. In the process of using jazz improvisation as a lens to explicate experience design, certain actions on the part of organizational members will be identified as improvisational.

Several scholars of organizational improvisation have borrowed from jazz and theatre improvisation to develop models to understand various aspects of organizational behaviour such as innovation, learning and emergent leadership (Peplowski, 1998; Weick, 1998; Crossan, 1998; Barrett, 2002). Characteristics from these other models are embedded in and expounded upon in Barrett's 7. For example, Weick's minimization of the role of anticipation, referring to it as more of a distraction in the improvisational act among organizational members, does not correlate to my research data which revealed that anticipating clients' needs was the ultimate tool in experience design at the Hotel Luxe. Additionally, Barrett's 7 assert the notion of "improvisation as design" (1998:606) a point asserting the improvisational lens' relevancy to experience design. The observation that "Improvisation continually nibbles at meaning and nudges toward meanings" (Frost and Yarrow, 2007:221) is that in bending the rules, improvisation produces new combinations of matter and form. By mapping my data to Barrett's 7 characteristics of improvisation, I am moving toward developing a dynamic model, one that offers an added dimension to understanding experience design, focusing on expressions of matter and form.

Barrett reminds us of several aspects in jazz improvisation prior to applying the seven characteristics to organizational learning. The first is that participants must learn the rules, memorize and practice. The second is that there is a metaphorical transferring that occurs when recombining elements, producing novel ideas. And the third aspect is the anticipatory nature of improvising:

> "It is uncertain to what degree improvisers go through unheard, continuous self-editing, an anticipatory, virtual trial and error as they consider different directions and interpretations of the material," (Barrett, 1998:607).

Jazz musicians have only a split second to make choices. This grounding in skills, the rules of engagement, the transference between contexts to produce novel ideas, and the anticipatory nature of improvisation- are themes that I will explore in how the Hotel Luxe staff design experiential services.

Barrett also reminds us of "a delicate paradox that musicians face" (Barrett, 1998:607), namely that if there is too much reliance on learned patterns, then risk taking and creative improvisation become limited; additionally, if there is too much regulation and control, then the interplay of musical ideas gets restricted. Ultimately, in order to "strike a groove" musically (and operationally at the Hotel Luxe), musicians must suspend some control and surrender to the flow of music. At the Hotel Luxe, this paradox was embraced with the acknowledgement in 2006 that the staff had become too robotic in their delivery of service, consequently limiting their ability to design wow experiences.

An explanation of Barrett's seven frameworks follows:

1. *Provocative competence* is defined as making deliberate efforts to create disruptions and incremental re-orientations. Such re-orientation keeps the music fresh and alive, as reflected in this recounting by jazz musician Keith Jarrett:

> "Do you know why I don't play ballads anymore?" Jarrett recalled (Miles) Davis telling him. "Because I like to play ballads so much!" (Carr, 1992:53).

This refers to the fact that it is tempting to do what has always been done; but disruptions and reorientation are vital to learning, sharpening perception and thought processes.

Organizations are also tempted to rely on past successes, routine, conventions and beliefs, otherwise known as the "competency trap", where competence squelches experimentation (Levitt and March, 1988; Baum and Ingram, 1998). Instead, if leadership is encouraged to develop provocative competence, by creating anomalies and unconventional obstacles making it more difficult for

staff members to rely on habit, then organizational members are inspired to create the new.

2. *Embracing errors* as a source of learning is the second characteristic in Barrett's 7.   Errors are viewed as an important source of learning, an opportunity to get feedback, and a way for musicians to become familiar with a wider environment.   Jazz bands see errors as inevitable and something to incorporate into the ultimate performance; they will repeat and amplify mistakes until new patterns develop.   Those organizations which embrace errors and treat mistakes as opportunities, end up with more open environments where leadership is emergent and more daring self-organization occurs.

3. The third characteristic in Barrett's 7 is *minimal structures* that allow for maximum flexibility.   Barrett reminds us that "jazz improvisation is a loosely structured activity in which action is coordinated around songs" (Barrett, 1998:611).   Songs are defined as cognitively held rules for musical innovation (Bastien and Hostager, 1988).   They impose order, create a continuous sense of cohesion and assure everyone that they are oriented toward a common place.   Minimal constraints allow players the freedom to express diversity, transform materials and intervene in the flow of musical events.

The maximum flexibility of minimal structures drives the point that the improvisational lens carries an important property in common with phenomena in chaordic systems thinking (McDaniel, 1996; Stacey, 1992): namely that origins are crucial, because small forms can have large consequences and result in an emerging composition.   This is related to Weick's point that "a little structure goes a long way" (Weick, 1988).   The idea that improvisation materializes around simple melodies can be extended to the organization whose simple melodies include mission statements and credos that have large, reverberating influences on designing experience. Effective design incorporates the intuiting and experimenting that is part of improvisation.

4. *Distributed task*, the fourth characteristic in Barrett's 7, refers to continual negotiation toward dynamic synchronization.   In this improvisational element, there is an ongoing give and take between members, where improvisers "enter a flow of ongoing invention" (Barrett, 1998:613).   They interpret others' playing and anticipate new patterns and rhythmic conventions while simultaneously

shaping their own creations and relating them to what they have just heard. There are three main features of distributed task as outlined by Seifert and Hutchins (1992) which Barrett incorporates into his discussion: 1) shared task knowledge, where members monitor progress on an ongoing basis; 2) horizon of observation, where they are witnesses to each other's performance; and 3) multiple perspectives, where each "musical utterance" can be interpreted from different perspectives. The culmination of these three features is the musicians' "groove", a mutual orientation to the beat, or "a shared feel for the rhythmic thrust" (Barrett, 1998:614). Musicians speak of those moments when a groove is achieved as flow, a type of autotelic experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is a state of transcendence, where players feel that they are being carried away by a current; in the flow of the groove, players can perform beyond their capacity. The paradox in achieving groove is that if musicians try too hard to get to the state of groove, they obstruct it. Skills and regulation are important, but at the moment of playing, one must suspend conscious use of those tools and embrace the flow. Organizational members can achieve an equivalent groove when they work in dynamic interplay, feeding intuitively off of one another's needs to deliver experience. When everything is flowing in an organization the delivery of experience is far removed from robotic operations delivery and the ultimate delivery of a wow experience can have a transcendent effect on clients.

Distributed task is an emergent process where players must develop empathic competence:

> "Players are continuously shaping their statements in anticipation of others' expectation, approximating and predicting what others might say based on what has already happened," (Barrett, 1998: 613).

To do this, jazz band members need to be able to rely on one another, adjust and amend direction. That jazz bands are flexible and self-designed enable them to do this. Traditional models of the organization view disruption as something to avoid, but through the post-modern improvisational lens, there is a dynamic, flexible potential when a group is involved in distributed task. Empathic competence among organizational members is where they optimize their ability to anticipate the needs of colleagues and of guests in order to design experiential services.

5. The fifth characteristic of Barrett's 7 is reliance on *retrospective sensemaking* as form. Improvisation is open to transformation because it borders on the edge of chaos; at that juncture, blueprints are not reliable and improvisation becomes a handier tool. When jazz musicians are improvising with no set score, they cannot look ahead to what they will be playing; thus, form is created retrospectively. Retrospective sensemaking is about making connections between the old and the new. Here the model of the bricoleur becomes relevant. Bricolage is the art of making usage of whatever is at hand (Lévi-Strauss, 1967:17). Lévi-Strauss likened it to a junk man putting together a new tractor from various random parts at his disposal. This is mirrored in the retrospective nature of improvisation (Weick, 1993): the bricoleur surveys the available raw materials and arrives at a new order by creating unique combinations through the process of working through resources he has found. Similarly, the organizational member creates new experiences by sifting through the resources of personal skill base and talent, knowledge and organizational memory.

Organizations typically try to control outcomes by way of standard operating procedures. But most tasks are encountered with limited foresight, so that resourcefulness and cleverness are required to address the problems which make bricolage relevant. This has been revealed in other research, such as the study of repair mechanics for Xerox photocopy machines (Orr, 1990), where organizational members ultimately made sense of anomalies by connecting them to previous stories that they heard from colleagues' experiences. Barrett summarized the utility of retrospective sensemaking in the following statement:

> "Given that many tasks in organizations are indeterminate and people come to them with limited foresight, members often need to apply resourcefulness, cleverness and pragmatism in addressing concerns. They often have to play with various possibilities, re-combining and re-organizing, to find solutions by relating the dilemma they face to the familiar context that preceded it. In spite of the wish for a rational plan of predictable action, they often must take a look around and act without a clear sense of how things will unfold." (Barrett, 1998: 615)

When organizational members find themselves needing to solve problems in situ, they create new interpretations, ultimately creating coherent, composite stories.

6. The sixth characteristic in Barrett's 7 is *hanging out*, which refers to membership in communities of practice (Brown and Duguid, 1991). Barrett points out that in jazz, communities of practice are where knowledge is disseminated, communal practicing occurs and members exchange stories while hanging out. It is critical that organizations develop structures that allow for communities of practice to thrive. Similarly, such structures become vehicles for knowledge dissemination, idea generation, storytelling and practicing operational skills.

7. The seventh characteristic in Barrett's 7 is *alternating between soloing and supporting*. This is the practice of taking turns to support each other. In jazz improvisation this is when leadership rotates. This is an egalitarian idea and one that ensures that each player gets a chance to develop a musical idea, and others create space for this development to occur. In order for this characteristic to develop, jazz musicians need to be good listeners, observant and responsive to current needs as well as to the direction that other players are going. In organizations such alternation can occur between management and staff as well as between colleagues in cross-functional teams.

Data Analysis

I used Barrett's 7 to analyze my data, by incorporating the "sort and sift" methodology I learned in 2007 at a qualitative research workshop I completed. The sort and sift methodology is a multidimensional qualitative analysis method which utilizes aspects of several major qualitative analysis traditions including ethnography, case study, and elements of grounded theory. I analyzed my interviews manually using an iterative process of recording, reflection, brainstorming, memoing and reviewing observations. I used memos to generate and continually update this process in order to understand and then interpret actors' responses. For example, one memo regarding organizational memory led me to map out the Hotel Luxe's Gold Standards in terms of beliefs and knowledge, routine and procedure and artifacts. I then linked those categories to the Barrett principle number five, retrospective sensemaking,

where organizational memory is utilized in the bricoleur role that organizational actors take on. A variation of this discovery based upon this memo was helpful in organizing my thoughts about the ways staff act as bricoleurs and tap into organizational memory to be resourceful. Another memo I generated regarding Hatch's dynamic model of culture (Hatch, 1993) led me to draft the following diagram which I attempted to apply to the Hotel Luxe. I ultimately did not expand on Hatch's dynamic view of culture in this dissertation, but the process of memo generation led me to develop a visual diagram to help me frame some of the minimal structures at the Hotel Luxe:

Diagram 7. Conceptual framing of minimal structures at Hotel Luxe
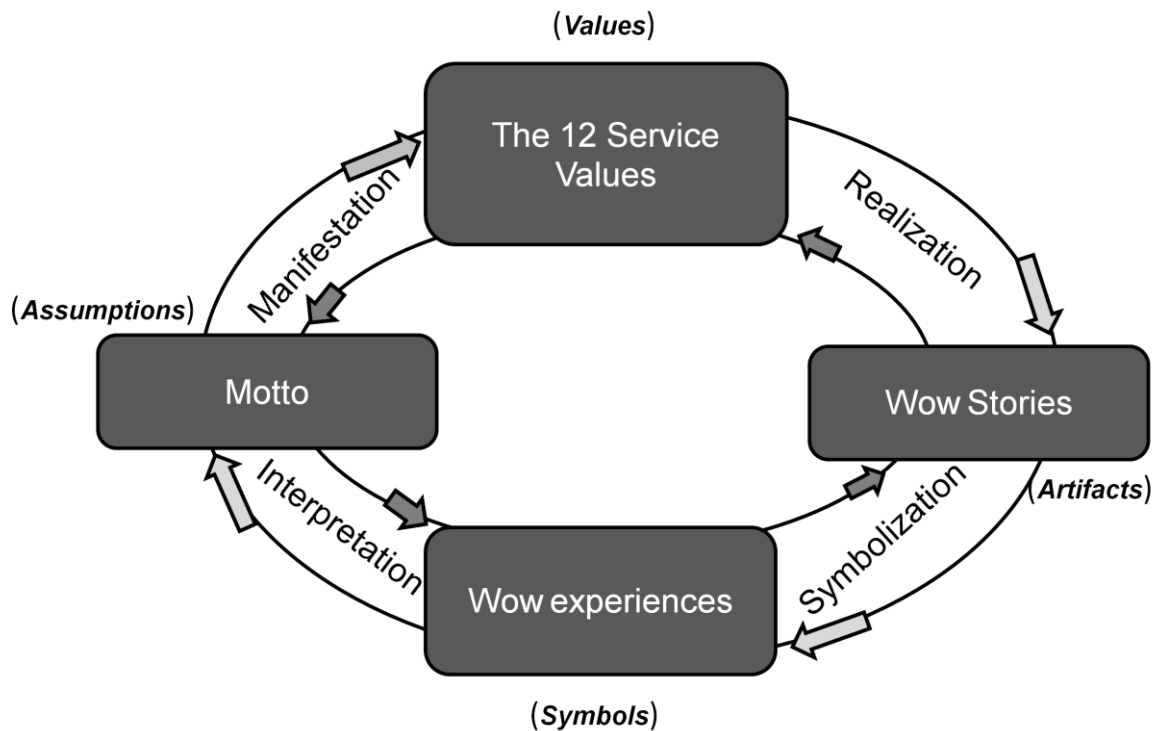
Alternative Approaches

I chose an inductive approach where the researcher can learn from immersion and participation. In this approach, there is a focus on the social construction of things; my focus was on socially constructed notions of experiential service design within the Hotel Luxe context. Drawbacks of an inductive approach are that 1) sometimes there is too much focus on individual results and there is a failure to make connections to larger situations; 2) because research is done in the subject's own setting, a challenge is that participants can respond to the researcher which begs the question of whether or not the qualitative research act interferes with what is researched; 3) because there is a bit of the researcher's own view present, one must critique whether or not situations are represented fairly. I sought to minimize the impact of my own bias through triangulation, specifically with representatives from organizations external to the Hotel Luxe.

Alternatively, had I chosen to use a quantitative method approach, I could have surveyed the hotel staff about what experiential service delivery methods they used and develop a rating system on those methods' effectiveness. I could have then compared my tool to measure effectiveness of experiential service

design delivery with the tools that the Hotel Luxe had developed internally. In a quantitative approach, I could have also surveyed customers to get some numerical measure of their satisfaction with experiential interaction at the Hotel Luxe. While such methodology might have generated clear and powerful results, it would have been deficient in revealing an understanding of *why* participants did what they did.

A second alternative approach could have been to utilize a grounded theory approach solely. While I utilized elements of grounded theory (open-coding and memo generation for example), grounded theory in its purest form asserts that all is data (interviews, conversations, films, group meetings), utilizes qualitative and quantitative methods and its ultimate goal is to generate theory (Borgatti, 1996). I did not conclude this investigative study by generating theory, but a grounded theory approach would have been helpful towards the end of generating a theory by systematically (versus iteratively) analyzing the data. I also conducted a pre-literature review and taped my interviews; grounded theory does not advocate these two methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1999).

In the following Chapter 4, I will map out and analyze the connections between Barrett's 7 and my data findings. In Chapter 5 I will reflect on the emergent process I have had of playing in the empty spaces of experiential service design as a result of using jazz metaphor as an interpretive tool.

Introduction to Chapter 4

Frank Barrett (1998), a scholar contributing to the literature on organizational improvisation, has outlined seven characteristics of jazz improvisation (heretofore referred to as "Barrett's 7"). In this chapter, I will use Barrett's 7 as the heuristic device to examine delivery of experience design at the Hotel Luxe. I will begin by putting the Hotel Luxe into some historical context in order to highlight three important bifurcation points that affected a shift in its delivery of service, and then explain components of Hotel Luxe culture which will be referenced throughout. That will be followed by a detailed explanation of Barrett's 7. The greater part of this chapter will be dedicated to connecting each of Barrett's 7 to my research data.

A Snapshot of the Hotel Luxe

The Hotel Luxe's history is important to summarize because it reveals that maintaining commitments to high standards of quality service while shifting to an experiential service design focus have been part of its evolution. Its history is punctuated by a series of buyouts which at varying times compelled it to adapt to a changing environment. The Hotel Luxe is named after its founder, "the hotelier of kings and king of hoteliers" (Michelli, 2008:1)", of Switzerland who along with his business partner, a chef, renovated a mansion in Paris and re-named it in 1898. He struggled early in his career as an apprentice in the hotel business but quickly developed a signature style of emphasizing diplomacy in his interactions with guests. 'Luxe' innovated the design of service delivery, notably in the ways that he incorporated novel hygienic concepts into serving and in his various techniques for accommodating massive numbers of guests. In 1902 he suffered a nervous breakdown, and while he was involved in planning his next project in London, he never regularly returned to his business.

An American developer, Albert Keller, franchised the Hotel Luxe name for hotels he had developed in the United States and opened the first Hotel Luxe in Boston in 1927. In successive years, five more hotels were opened in the northeast region of the United States. The success of the brand in the first half

of the 20th century was linked to the wealthy leisure traveller and expanded to the business traveller as international business travel grew. In 1983 William B. Johnson, an Atlanta-based real-estate developer known for constructing Waffle Houses and Holiday Inns, bought the rights to use the Hotel Luxe name in the United States and purchased the Hotel Luxe in Boston. The economic downturn in the 1980's caused financial losses for the Hotel Luxe, and by 1995 the Marriott Corporation had acquired a 49% interest in it. By 1998, Marriott increased its interest in the Hotel Luxe to 99%. Despite this buyout, all respondents in my interviews commented on the fact that management and organizational culture at the Hotel Luxe has remained autonomous.

The Hotel Luxe no longer identifies itself as a hotel company, but as an experience and memory creator (Michelli, 2008:256; Personal interviews, 2009). A service values model became more relevant as the Hotel Luxe brand diffused beyond hotels to a range of products including Clubs, Residences and Reserves. In this more complex version of itself, the Hotel Luxe has maintained its tradition to commitment to quality while designing frameworks to enable designed experiences by its personnel, referred to internally as "Ladies and Gentlemen". The Hotel Luxe is an experience-centric services organization (Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007; Voss et al., 2008) where rigorous self-analysis works in tandem with creative customer experience-management. Some have highlighted the Hotel Luxe's orientation to experience creation by naming it "an organization of inquiry" (Michelli, 2008). Using emergent structures and adaptive systems to enable flow and flux, it has redefined itself in the face of change. The Hotel Luxe is a two-time winner (1992 and 1999) of the prestigious Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award which is awarded to "world-class" quality driven companies (Michelli, 2008). The Hotel Luxe achieved this high honour by learning the best practices of other high-quality service organizations. For example, the idea to allow employees to spend up to $2000 per day to resolve guests' needs came from the Zytec Corporation, an electronics design and manufacturing firm. My study focuses on adjustments to frameworks since 2001 which resulted in 1) new modes for designing experiential services and 2) creative employee (and consequently customer) engagement.

The year 2001 marked the beginning of an adaptation to a new luxury landscape. Several bifurcation points served as catalysts prompting the Hotel Luxe to shift from being an organization focused mainly on delivery of consistently high quality operations, to an emergent organization that extended its formal structures to encourage self-organizing among employees and embrace a sense of place design. It began to creatively address the more intangible realm of experience creation. In the chaordic systems view, bifurcation points cause firms to perpetuate and amplify their strengths and assets (e.g., quality, or growth) until they reach extremes and their momentum results in decline; this is an organizational paradox (Miller, 1990; van Eijnatten, 2001). Over the last century, hoteliers have wrestled with how best to appeal to their targeted customers and with how best to adapt to changes- in room rates, in etiquette, even in meal service- in response to changing social and travel practices (Baum and Ingram, 1998). These points of opportunity are also where organizational improvisation works best. The Hotel Luxe's bifurcation points included: a) new leadership; b) changes in the competitive landscape and a corresponding redefinition of their targeted customer; c) adjustments in the mode of service delivery for optimal guest engagement; and d) adapting to a new luxury landscape given the global economic recession of 2008. These moments positioned the Hotel Luxe to embark upon new mapping required for the luxury landscape in order to engage a consumer with new purchasing motivations.

Diagram 8. Bifurcation points for Hotel Luxe. *Adapted from F. M. van Eijnatten's "The fractal dimension of growth", 2004.*
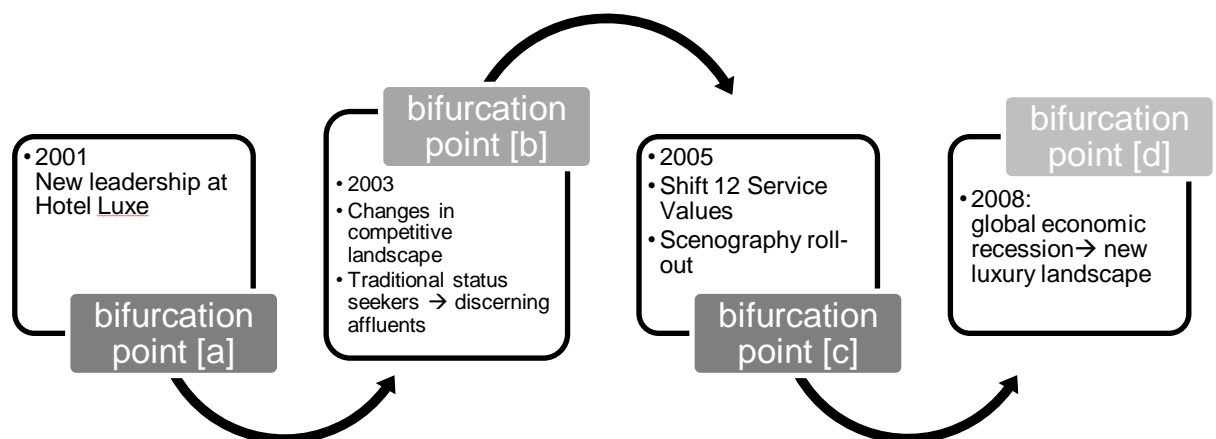
The first bifurcation points were in 2001 and 2003, when there was recognition under the leadership of their new president that while the firm did well with traditional status seekers- typically older men and women of inherited wealth, who gravitated to overt status symbols- they were missing out on the next generation of wealth, as noted to me by the president of the Hotel Luxe:

> "Our guests have changed dramatically. You looked through the lobby of a Hotel Luxe twenty years ago, it was full of white guys like me. Dressed like me. You look at a Hotel Luxe today, it is diverse by gender, it is diverse by families, it is diverse by race, it is diverse by nationalities, it is diverse by age, and it is diverse by dress. So this diversity that we've seen in people, physically displayed diversity, we had not really absorbed. …Fast forward 20 years. The hotels don't look alike but we're still delivering the service with a very proscriptive model, as though we still have a homogeneous guest. …With the greater diversity of guest, you have a greater diversity of what it means to have a sense of well-being and it's very much, you know, how do we entrust our Ladies and Gentlemen to interpret for this family one thing, and for another family another thing?"

They termed that next generation "discerning affluents". This was a luxury consumer who could afford to stay at a Hotel Luxe but was instead choosing the W Hotel or a competitor luxury boutique hotel because the Hotel Luxe did not appear comforting or relevant: static images of robotic butlers following a customer around were not appealing. The goal was to blow the dust off the cobalt-blue lion and crown crest (the logo that had symbolized the Hotel Luxe for decades) without completely alienating the traditional status seekers or vested employees (Michelli, 2008; Interviews with JT and SC, 2009). This new customer had three core values: 1) to lead an interesting life; 2) to be philanthropic; and 3) to tell stories about unique experiences (Interview with NT, 2009). It was very important to remain authentic in this embrace of the discerning affluent without alienating the historically core customer or the loyal employee.

Scenography played a significant role in this effort. Through scenography, a scene unique to each property is created that helps tell a story which is used to motivate employees and engage guests. The idea for scenography came to the Hotel Luxe through a 2005 internal summit of Hotel Luxe leadership who met with various partners to brainstorm and troubleshoot how best to adapt to the new evolving luxury customer. One of those partners, a retailer, recommended that the Hotel Luxe use scenography as a way to customize and invigorate each

property on a visual level. Up to that point, the Hotel Luxe design was very centralized and homogenized. The original Hotel Luxe in Boston was the progenitor of their design aesthetic, so that whether a guest was in Maui, or in Seoul, paintings of 19th century hunting scenes, thick heavy drapes, and opulent chandeliers were the norm. That scene had begun to alienate a customer who could afford a Hotel Luxe, but preferred the experience that the more contemporary design of the W hotels and other boutique hotels gave. In 2007 various Hotel Luxe hotels began to develop their own scenography themes on a property by property basis, working in cross-functional teams, with the help of the design firm IDEO. Scenography became their methodology to re-design not only the interior aesthetic of Hotel Luxe properties, but to also provide a re-designed platform upon which employees could engage more authentically with customers.

The second bifurcation point, in 2006, was the decision to move beyond just being a service brand, but to also embrace the idea of the art of anticipation for optimal guest engagement, thus embarking on the process of experiential service design. While competitor brands were responsive to their customer, the Hotel Luxe chose to move beyond responsiveness, to master the art of anticipation, meeting guests' needs before they were requested in an unforced and unobtrusive manner. Positioning the staff- maids, doormen and servers- as artists in the work they did was radical in and of itself.

Service design re-designs systems and objects to enhance customer experience. At its best, it "…employs features that include co-creation, constant reframing, multidisciplinary collaboration, capacity building and sustaining change", (Saco and Goncalves, 2008). Historically, the Hotel Luxe's service design strategy focused primarily on improving quality in operations. Less study, research or systems were applied to improving the quality of customer's emotional engagement in their experience of the Hotel Luxe. As recently as June 2009, the *New York Times* applauded the Hotel Luxe's continued focus on high quality operations. Thus, it is an organization that has clearly defined structures in place to deliver high quality service in hospitality, beginning with hiring procedures and evident all the way through to very concrete operational procedures such as timely and cordial room service. But there was a resetting in the mid 1990's when owners of Hotel Luxe properties became more

participatory and in the past five years the organization has moved beyond "guest satisfaction" to invest more in analyzing emotional engagement among employees and guests, (Personal interviews).

The third bifurcation point occurred in late 2008. Its focus was on the challenge of convincing customers of luxury's relevance in the midst of a global economic recession. Consumers' surplus disposable income combined with several successive economic recessions led to a democratization of luxury (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997; Luxury Institute, 2009; Thomas, 2007). It had become gauche to talk about an expensive vacation one had just taken. So the Hotel Luxe upped the ante by focusing on value, meaning and the memorable stories that were created from the experiences. One solution was to actually encourage customers to travel less and to make those fewer occasions count for more, as seen in a Hotel Luxe advertisement which asserted that the organization was selling "7 Memory Stays". In marketing the Hotel Luxe, the company deliberately did not try to "sell points" as some of its competitors had; instead it tried to sell memories and experiences, and in that process, redesigned the external story delivered to potential guests. These three bifurcation points would not have manifested as they did had it not been for the Hotel Luxe culture. In the next section I discuss the main components of the Hotel Luxe culture.

Components of Hotel Luxe Culture: The Gold Standards

Before exploring what the improvisational lens reveals about experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe, it is useful to outline structures in the Hotel Luxe culture which are embedded in the organization's Gold Standards. These structures are tools for designing experiential services and delivering meaning and will be referenced throughout the following exegesis. Every staff member who is employed by the Hotel Luxe must carry on their person a Credo Card, an organizational artefact (Hatch, 1993) which reinforces standards. The Credo Card is a 5mm x 8mm card folded in to four sections which has inscribed on it The Credo, The 12 Service Values, The Three Steps of Service, The Motto, The Employee Promise and Mystique as outlined in the following section. Inscribed on the back of this Credo Card are the following:

1. **The Credo**

The Hotel Luxe Credo consists of three points:

a. "The Hotel Luxe is a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission.

b. "We pledge to provide the finest personal service and facilities for our guests who will always enjoy a warm, relaxed, yet refined ambience.

c. "The Hotel Luxe experience enlivens the senses, instils well-being, and fulfils even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests."

A true test of the credo is whether or not it produces experiences causing guests to enjoy enlivened senses, well-being, and fulfilment of unstated needs and desires. The Credo is the principal belief of the company and it is expected that the credo is owned and "energized" by all. The fact that the staff use the verb energize in relation to many of the cultural elements of their organization (as in "energizing Service Value #3" or "energize the 3 Steps of Service") underscores a dynamic interplay between cultural elements at work in the organization.

2. **The Three Steps of Service**

The three steps of service are:

a) "A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest's name;

b) "Anticipation and fulfilment of each guest's needs;

c) "Fond farewell. Give a warm goodbye and use the guest's name."

Personally connecting to each guest by using their name brackets the critical and most significant task at hand: to embark on the art of anticipation. Fulfilling guests' needs by anticipating what they want is at the crux of designing experiential services at the Hotel Luxe.

3. **The Motto**   The Hotel Luxe motto is "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen". Within the hospitality industry there have been critical remarks about this Motto, where people question whether the Hotel Luxe has a culture or is a cult (Personal Interviews). Staffs regularly

and consistently refer to each other as "Ladies" or as "Gentlemen". Even current employees admit to having had been suspicious of "what really goes on at that hotel" before being employed by the Hotel Luxe. Some also remarked that the language is dated, but when staff was internally surveyed, they preferred that The Motto remain unchanged.

4. The Employee Promise

The Employee Promise is as follows:

"At The Hotel Luxe, our Ladies and Gentlemen are the most important resource in our service commitment to our guests. By applying the principles of trust, honesty, respect, integrity and commitment, we nurture and maximize talent to the benefit of each individual and the company. The Hotel Luxe fosters a work environment where diversity is valued, quality of life is enhanced, individual aspirations are fulfilled, and The Hotel Luxe Mystique is strengthened."

This commitment to employees serves to energize them by emphasizing how they are valued. The Mystique is explained in the following pages.

5. The 12 Service Values

The 12 Service Values are a guideline to staff of articulated values that give meaning to what otherwise might be considered mundane work; they have become one of the most visible experiential service design tools. In 2006 The 12 Service Values replaced the more extensive and prescriptive "20 Basics". The 20 Basics had degenerated into a more obtuse role, much like thick rule books which do not inspire creativity but rigidity:

> "Thick rule books serve customers no better than employees. They produce regimented, "by-the-book" service when a flexible, "by-the-customer" one is needed. While managers are demanding that employees be "robot servers" customers are demanding that they be "thinking servers". (Berry et al., 1990)

And in fact, even front line employees had acknowledged that the 20 Basics were more of a detriment (Personal interview, 2009). Organizational members have The 12 Service Values committed to memory. The values have a

progressive structure, beginning with a focus on emotional engagement and culminating in values that emphasize function and operations. The 12 Service Values function as a way to encourage the staff to customize each guest experience and think on their feet, to improvise. A staff is thus empowered to deliver service in their own unique way.

Note that The 12 Service Values listed below go from the intangible and interpretive realm in numbers one through six to the more functional and tangible realm in numbers seven through twelve:

The 12 Service Values

The intangible and interpretive realm:

1. I build strong relationships and create Hotel Luxe guests for life.
2. I am always responsive to the expressed and unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests.
3. I am empowered to create unique, memorable and personal experiences for our guests.
4. I understand my role in achieving the Key Success Factors and creating The Hotel Luxe Mystique.
5. I continuously seek opportunities to innovate and improve The Hotel Luxe experience.
6. I own and immediately resolve guest problems.

The tangible and functional realm:

7. I create a work environment of teamwork and lateral service so that the needs of our guests and each other are met.
8. I have the opportunity to continuously learn and grow.
9. I am involved in the planning of the work that affects me.
10. I am proud of my professional appearance, language, and behaviour.
11. I protect the privacy and security of our guests, my fellow employees and the company's confidential information and assets.
12. I am responsible for uncompromising levels of cleanliness and creating a safe and accident-free environment.

6. The Mystique

Mystique has two connotations within the organization. The first meaning of Mystique refers to the intangible design cues that staff use to engage guests and mysteriously and unexpectedly deliver a wow experience that gives a guest pause and delivers meaning to their life. On the Credo Card, Mystique and functional skills are depicted as combining to deliver emotional engagement. The other connotation of Mystique is the name of the database that contains details about guest preferences and proclivities. Staff are trained to closely observe all details about a guest (e.g., room temperature preference; radio stations that a room's stereo system is left on; food allergies). The data is collected by the staff on "preference pads" and entered in to a larger data base. Thus throughout a guest's stay and on repeat visits, the unexpressed needs of a guest materialize. Mystique is pivotal to delivering the art of anticipation- that experiential service mode which delivers emotional engagement.

In the following sections I will explain the outcome of each of Barrett's 7 (1)provocative competence, 2) embracing errors, 3) minimal structures, 4) distributed task, 5) retrospective sensemaking, 6) hanging out and 7) alternating between soloing and supporting) at the Hotel Luxe in terms of experiential service design.

Analysis

PROVOCATIVE COMPETENCE

Provocative competence, the deliberate effort to interrupt habitual patterns, goes beyond what is comfortable and creates something distinctive. It requires re-orientation to the new beyond past routines. In turbulent and stressful environments it is tempting for organizations to rely on past success; however, innovation actually occurs at the edge of chaos (Stacey, 1991; 1996; van Eijnatten and Putnick, 2004; Hock, 2005), at the juncture of the unknown. Given the turbulence that the Hotel Luxe experienced as a result of adapting to a new luxury landscape, evidence of provocative competence is interesting for what it means for experience design: it pushes designed experience to new levels with each provocation. I will elaborate on how scenography is an example of provocative competence, a reorientation to something new which affected the design of experience in fresh ways.

Scenography was introduced to Hotel Luxe hotels in 2004 by the design firm IDEO and first integrated into the hotels by 2006 in order to help the Hotel Luxe differentiate from competitors and connect to guests based on visual cues. The scholarly literature on the potential importance of the physical environment for defining and facilitating service exchange goes back more than twenty years: Grove et al., 1992; Baker, 1987; Booms and Bitner, 1982; Grove and Fisk, 1983; Sherowski, 1983; Shostack, 1977; Upah and Fulton, 1985; Zeithaml, 1981; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985; Biggers and Pryor, 1982; and Maslow and Mintz, 1956. Scenography uses sense of place design and subtle aesthetic cues to arrive at theme-maps which tell a story for each property. Sense of place design is the idea that the interior design and ambient design elements reflect the local geography and culture. Others in experiential service design have framed customer experiences within servicescapes, which are man-made physical settings (Grove et al., 1998). Scenography is another way of framing customer experience; setting can play a large role in influencing the "reality" of a service in a consumer's mind (Shostack, 1977).

The following explanation from a consultant to the Hotel Luxe summarizes scenography:

"Scenography at its best is about a unique experience at every property, that would be delivered through a blend of design, of service delivery, of physical product, operations, marketing- everyone would come together to deliver the signature experiences." (NT)

Scenography was incorporated at the properties by putting together cross-functional teams consisting of the Hotel Luxe's frontline staff and general managers who were tasked with integrating the emotional aspects of service via sensorial design and style cues that reflected a sense of place. Atmospherics, those tangible cues that help to determine a service's reality, come into play, including use of space, style and comfort of furnishings, the setting's design and cleanliness (Kotler, 1973; Koskinen, 2009).

For guests, scenography is a subtle means for them to feel that they walked into an environment that taps into all five senses and helps them to engage with the place. Physical cues in a setting tangibilize, simplify and communicate information about offerings (Berry, 1980; Grove et al., 1992). For staff, scenography acts as a back story to use as an improvisational tool as they decide on a case by case basis how to engage with guests. This staff member described scenography as a process complementing the property's aesthetic design cues:

"We've actually designed a complementary process for our properties' physical design to use to then take the fully integrated design product that is delivered to them and then create integrated experiences that match. …Taking the stage, if you will, and then putting together a service experience, that also brings in that sense of play." [L.W.]

Not every Hotel Luxe hotel has embraced scenography to the same extent. Because the scenography process is led by the general manager of each hotel, the extent of scenography's integration is dependent upon the awareness of that general manager. This highlights the fact that provocative competence is not come by easily:

"I'll be honest with you, and say that some hotels do a fantastic job, some hotels are okay, still contending with it; and some hotels don't get it that well. It does take a manager of a team to go in with a mindset and a creative mind and different ideas to come up with some of these things." [B.B.]

A great example of provocative competence through scenography is the Hotel Luxe hotel in Georgetown, Washington, D.C, where the scenography theme is fire. The building was once the old incinerator for the city of Washington, D.C.

Colour hues of deep reds and orange run throughout the lobby; a bowl of cinnamon-spiced candies are at the reservation desk; open fireplaces are lit throughout the cooler season months; indigenous art has been developed from old paper bags left over in the incinerator; the huge chimney stack has become an intimate space to hold meetings and romantic dinners. These tangible cues are used by the staff to engage customers and deliver various moments of experience: spiritual moments, sensuous moments and family moments. At any point an experience can be created resulting in an incredible "wow story" and a one of a kind memory can result. With scenography, each property can paint its own picture with its own palette. This description of the ways that scenography allows for both structured interaction and spontaneous flow exemplifies emergent leadership. Staff are both the designers of experience on the front end as well as brokers and actors in the interim process. An example of structured interaction is that after checking in, guests are escorted to their rooms, since the elevators are not near the front desk, and one must walk, down a set of stairs passing an interesting wall-hanging evoking fire, and through hallways with original art that has integrated the history and textile materials of the building. In this short walk to the elevator, guests get an immediate sense of unique tangible aesthetic cues that make this particular Hotel Luxe hotel unlike others they may have visited. An example of spontaneous flow is that as jazz musicians play around the fireplace, guests are drawn in to sit and relax, and conversations are spontaneously started between people who may not otherwise have interacted, but were drawn in by the fire and the live music. These settings provoke organizational members to be competent and alert to deliver meaningful experiences. In the process of allowing for maximum flexibility minimal structures amplify opportunities for fluidity providing organizational members with the freedom to transform materials and intervene in the flow of events (Barrett, 2002). Such freedom is another manifestation of power related to Foucault's concept of discipline where forms of normative behaviour are supported by claims of knowledge (Foucault, 1977). This is evident in the ongoing-learning processes at the Hotel Luxe, where learning is used as a means to emancipate. Hence, experiential service design organizations can lend new ideas about how structures are used to emancipate as a form of power.

There are four elements to provocative competence that I will now explore as demonstrated through scenography. The first element of Barrett's explanation of provocative competence is that it is a *deliberate effort to create disruption*. This is true in the Hotel Luxe's case because scenography was introduced as a way to purposefully distinguish properties in the marketplace and make them relevant to clients. In the process of integrating scenography at a property, assumptions among staff and guests about the way a Hotel Luxe should look and feel were disrupted. As several interviewees pointed out to me, the design strategy was to be, "consistently inconsistent". The phrase "consistently inconsistent" is one that the Hotel Luxe president used often after hearing the phrase as advice given to him by Keith Bellows, Editor-in-Chief of *National Geographic Traveler,* during an inter-industry brainstorming meeting. This phrase alone caused some discomfort, given the heritage of the very consistent design aesthetic in the tradition of the grand hotel (Denby, 1998) for which the Hotel Luxe had been known. In some cases, this disruption pushed employees past their comfort level. For example, when the Hotel Luxe in Boston changed location one mile away to a new property at Boston Common that used a contemporary interior design rather than the old elegance of the original Boston property, some Hotel Luxe employees resigned rather than deal with the change, which they found too disconcerting and uncomfortable:

> "That hotel opened in 1927, and a lot of the employees had been there thirty plus years. So like, banquet servers, or our doorman, were there for over 60 years… I think a lot of people, guests and employees, were very used to that traditional service, the traditional lobby, very formal. And now moving to Boston Common it was more contemporary. … Some employees didn't make the move because they were attached to the building itself. …One of the managers didn't want to go because she had been twenty plus years in that one hotel and she didn't want to make this move because she loved the building. A lot of the guests still remained going to the Boston property just because they loved the hotel and a lot of the employees stayed so they continued to go because of the employees that are there. …Sometimes change is hard." [S.W.]

The difficulty to adapt to change is a component of provocative competence vis-à-vis scenography. The planning process to roll out scenography involved a cross section of leaders and on the ground staff and required soul searching

questions to disturb the status quo and to question what was commonly taken for granted:

> "We involved everybody. Our Ladies and Gentlemen are our workforce. We took a cross section of our leaders… What is our position statement? What do we represent? What does it mean to you? What does it mean to the customer? What do we want to be? We were going through a transformation. …We got into teams and did brainstorming." [P.S.]

The process of developing scenography was never dictated, but "incentivized". It came from the bottom up, and gave the general managers of each hotel full leverage to guide and lead their teams. In this way there could be multiple interpretations within each property and on a property by property basis while still maintaining the common goal to consistently deliver meaning and experience.

The second element of provocative competence that Barrett explains is *incremental re-orientation,* where one does not want to fall for the competency trap but provide new and innovative experiences by consistently pushing boundaries beyond what is expected. The most potent illustration of this were the repeated reminders by those I interviewed that scenography is meant to be subtle. As BC, general manager of the hotel in Palm Beach said, "We don't want the customer to say "Oh! That's your scenography!" We want them to *feel* it." It should not come across as a gimmick, but should subtly, incrementally, affect the experience of guests, and of employees' delivery of meaningful experiences as outlined by this employee:

> "Rather than overtly walk up to people and say what we want them to repeat, they are gonna walk into something that feels like a play, have an experience and walk out and perpetuate it." [M.M.]

That perpetuation can only come about because the experience has penetrated through to the guest's identity, and has become a meaningful part of them. Another illustration of scenography's incremental re-orientation is that it should help to contribute to the design's sense of place. Scenography has a formal structure with just enough script and cues to allow each property to reiterate and orient itself around its scenography in a customized way. Scenography settled into the collective awareness of staff and guests incrementally:

"You want to focus on getting rid of the dissident parts of the guest experience- the harpist in the lobby, if you will- and then focus on making things incrementally better and then, you know, finally create things that were truly special.

"As part of the process each hotel really did some back research into their hotel. They talked to the designers of their hotel. What was your intent for how this was put together? What are the stories behind our hotel, so that people can bring it to life?" [L.W.]

The third element of Barrett's provocative competence is the idea that scenography will *sharpen perspectives and thought processes*. This is evident in the way that various people I spoke with referred to the clarity that scenography brought to identity both within and outside of the organization. As N.T. commented, "Scenography well done would always be our best asset because it will have a clear positioning in experience for each hotel." The process of creating scenography provided a wonderful connective thread for the decisions each team had to make, so that the process itself was not generic, but very specific and special to each location. For example, the decision to incorporate the natural environment of mist and ocean would only work at the Half Moon Bay property in California and not at the more urban Buckhead-Atlanta property. The process of developing scenography for each hotel involved all of the staff using the lineup meetings as the forum to hear new ideas and develop ongoing ones. Brainstorming sessions were held:

"We'd all get together in these rooms with flip charts and throw out questions: 'What sets us apart from the competition? What makes us unique? Why do you love working here? Why do you hear your guests love to stay here?' And we're asking these questions to this diverse group and asked various departments throughout the hotel." [P.S.]

Those various departments were challenged to tie in what they did daily on a practical operations level (calling upon tangible cues) as well as on the level of engaging guests (calling upon intangible cues) to the scenography theme. So for example, one of the restaurants at the Georgetown property, whose scenography is fire, re-designed the bar, the style of the menu and even menu items (all tangible cues) to reflect the scenography story about fire. Local jazz musicians were brought in for weekly jam sessions around the fireplace in the main lobby. In this way, guests were able to settle in and absorb the experience through the ambience affecting their sense of sight, sound, and smell (intangible cues).

The process of developing scenography at each property was iterative and interactive and challenged the teams to articulate connections between disparate concepts:

> "…our front line Ladies and Gentlemen, mid-level managers and senior leaders had to answer, 'If we were a car, what kind of car would we be? If we were a flower, what kind of flower would we be? If we were music , what kind of music would we be?' And really going through that, it took a lot of time …when you only have a few words to really capture your essence…". [J.M.]

Many people I spoke with about developing scenography referred to the crafting of story as being the soul of the process. Story, central to scenography, is an element that will be discussed in more depth in the section regarding Barrett's fifth characteristic, retrospective sensemaking. L.W. described the role of story in scenography:

> "The first thing they do in the template is called the soul of the theme, where they write the story: 'What are you trying to create for the guest? Do you know what they are thinking about before they come upon this area in the hotel? What do you want them to experience when they're there, when they leave afterwards?' So even just by going through and just writing that, so many things can start to fall out."

This commentary touches upon how developing touchpoints is a key operative in experiential service design.

P.S., manager of the front of the house at the downtown Battery Park property in New York City referenced that necessary clarity of thought when he described what the scenography process brought to his hotel when the team had to articulate what made them distinct from their sister hotel in midtown Manhattan:

> "We said, 'Well, what's the difference between downtown and midtown?' And people said, 'Well there's families; and there's trees. And there's parks all around us. And there's the water.' And when you talk about the difference in the elements and the difference in the themes between midtown and downtown it made it very clear to say, what set us apart and made us special was, 'You're in Manhattan but you are in this downtown oasis'. That you are someplace special. You are in Manhattan but you will never get this any place else."

They were forced to think definitively and creatively about what ultimately made their property unique. "Downtown Oasis" became the scenography for the Battery Park hotel.

The fourth element of Barrett's provocative competence is that organizational members *do not rely on past conventions* making it harder for members to rely on habits. This was a real issue for the Hotel Luxe, as the impetus for much of the change in the past ten years, came from market research that service delivery had become robotic. To this end, scenography should be re-evaluated regularly to ensure that it is still a relevant tool to sharpen perception and enliven identity and to ensure that the competency trap does not happen:

> "I think the hotels that are sticking to scenography and re-evaluating it yearly, quarterly, are probably the ones that are delivering the better guest experience. Put more experience in place that may not have been there otherwise. Like when it is a live, organic thing and flows through the organization and changes as the customer changes." [J.T.O]

Several participants in the scenography process commented to me that they were urged to forget everything in the past, and embrace the results of the scenography process as brand new.

> "…We realized that we would need to pull back a little bit on some of the things we had defined as brand standards for the guest experience, because, you know, it didn't have to be a harp player – were we just looking for live entertainment? It didn't have to be high British tea… In South Beach maybe (the equivalent) is some kind of a cocktail tea. What's an afternoon tea in South Beach? Margaritas, Mojitos or Mai Tai's or something." [L.W.]

The improvisational lens illuminates scenography as a design tool for experiential services because it promotes provocative competence. There are five significant outcomes of provocative competence in terms of experiential service design.

1. The self-organizing nature of new meaning creation is the first outcome of provocative competence. Scenography does this well:

> "That's the premise of scenography… You set up everything so the actors can complete it. It is not about delivering a package but setting it up with the right situation around it and letting people discover it." [D.C]

This quote references back to earlier mention of the fact that experiences themselves cannot be designed, but rather the conditions and situations to create the experiences can be designed. The postmodernist perspective that change cannot be directed is echoed here; the organizational members create their own interpretive schema, which is in itself a negotiated outcome (Darwin et

al., 2002). While scenography is subtle and not universally acknowledged as critical at all properties (because different properties use it to different extents), it is a reminder that the improvisational lens illuminates scenography as a deliverable for transformation.

2. The second outcome of provocative competence is that the natural strengths that are already embedded in the organization, surface to the top and often new traditions are created. Scenography accelerates the core competency of design and of experience. New guest experiences are created that reflect the uniqueness of each location, and it is done in a very integrated way so that each decision is built upon the last. This is evident in a ritual that resulted from the Philadelphia property's scenography, where the notion of high tea was reinterpreted with a candlelight service to mark the passing of an hour for the "Time and Currency" scenography in Philadelphia:

> "We'd have the servers parade out with candles (to music). It was a parade of candles that would come out and they were synchronized and they'd go through… and I mean literally people would stop and watch and cheer!" [G.D.]

In this example, the disturbance of the ordinary not only provoked servers to interact differently, it had a carryover effect on to guests.

3. The third outcome is that exceptional memories are created, moments in time are captured. The president of Hotel Luxe likes to remark that "feelings are facts", and this mantra was repeated to me several times by members whom I interviewed. The mantra means that the less tangible but visceral experience that members have when connecting via experience are material and tangible enough to create a bond to the hotel, to the people working there, to the brand, and enough to "build customers for life":

> "Feelings are facts, and our goal is to create exceptional memories. If we want to do that, we have got to get to the emotional side of our customers. What can we do to help bring that to life? Scenography is one way- we got an artist to, nightly, sit in the lobby and capture a moment in time of a couple. We'd actually put the easel with the picture in their doorway- we wanted them to see how we captured that moment in time. …The scenography helps us to enhance the experience by

bringing to life scenes that will impact customers to be fully engaged- and can't imagine life without us." [B.C.]

This example demonstrates how organizational members are required to intuit, to probe into recognizing the possibilities of guest experience (Crossan, 1999).

4. Provocative competence, as evidenced by scenography, creates new tools for engagement, because it is a subtle way of suggesting a feeling or a thought.

> "Scenography is really a point of engagement. It really plays into our Mystique. And the way that we are able to utilize that is that during our interactions with our guests, we are able to talk about and play up our surroundings." [P.S.]

The staff pointed out that renewed life and identity for the property was created through these new design and aesthetic details:

> "We wanted to create life in the space of our rotunda and lobby. So we started talking to the designers and we wanted to add freshness, we wanted to add colour, because the style we had before was we had busts, bronze busts, we had old couches, big pillows with velvets…" [M.W.]

In this way, scenography institutionalized new meaning not only by bringing out tangible aesthetic cues but also by capturing patterns of interaction and making them routine (Crossan, 1999):

5. The fifth outcome has to do with the sense of place design that characterizes each property. The sense of place design is an expression of dialectics, the multiple identities that are allowed to exist within an organization (Boje, 2008). As the Hotel Luxe evolved, sense of place design became a strategy to distinguish each property in the marketplace. Disavowing a singular design aesthetic, and embracing multiple ones led to designed experience on a property by property basis.

Barrett asserts that it is important for organizations to welcome and adapt to aesthetics of imperfection (Gioia, 1988) and forgiveness. In this way, breakdowns will not be viewed as unacceptable and learning is something that will happen through welcomed trial and error. Distinguishing between errors that are results of carelessness versus errors that are results of deeply caring about a project is important in order to encourage experimentation.

Making sense of mistakes is a theme from jazz improvisation and is relevant to experience design. In jazz, mistakes provide a platform for musical reinvention leading to innovations that would not otherwise have been developed. One of the ways that the Hotel Luxe embraces this notion is through their daily practice of reviewing mistakes at employee lineups and embracing MR BIVS, an acronym for "mistakes, rework, breakdowns, inefficiencies and variations". The MR BIVS framework turns decisions that employees might ordinarily want to hide, into those that are highlighted for their continuous learning properties. The following explanation of service recovery underscores the notion that mistakes are opportunities:

> "Service recovery means that when you have a guest that has experienced an opportunity, well then, how do you handle that guest opportunity? How do you take that guest that's experienced a challenge, turn that into an opportunity, and let them walk away from this property saying 'I can't imagine a world without Hotel Luxe'?" [P.S.]

Embracing errors underscores a willingness to acknowledge mistakes in order to promote learning and growth. At the Hotel Luxe, staff are coached on how to turn mistakes into learning opportunities through ongoing learning workshops and mentoring.

There are four elements in the embracing errors characteristic that I will now explore as demonstrated through the learning frameworks at the Hotel Luxe. The first element of Barrett's explanation of embracing errors is that it is a *source of learning*. An experimental culture promotes and supports mistakes that come from novel ideas- not just from flawed execution. Such an orientation provides an opportunity to learn from mistakes, honour defects and take the stigma out of guest complaints rather than shrink from them. The daily discussions of MR BIVS are a tracking mechanism for mistakes, defects and

complaints and liberate the staff to meet true stated and unstated guest needs without fear of repercussions if a mistake is made. In an experience-centric services firm, acknowledging that mistakes will occur, requires an environment of trust:

> "[This is] also where trust comes into play. …First we encourage our Ladies and Gentlemen to record any defect that occurs. Now our goal is to get at least 20 defects recorded per day. …That's the goal. We'd like to get more, now that's a lot of defects but it includes internal defects, because ideally you don't want them to reach the customer. But it could be little things such as when I arrived in the kitchen this morning I didn't have all my dishes according to the par levels as a chef that I needed to start the morning- I had to ask for them. It never affects a customer. But then it could be that a guest expresses, 'I did not get the type of room that I expected to get'- the view. And then, how was that handled by our empowered Ladies and Gentlemen? It starts with trust and the more trust you have, the more empowered you are, and it builds on itself. It creates a positive momentum." [E.S.]

There are two interesting points to be made from this quote. The first point is that the mistakes that affect a task operationally behind the scenes are just as important to deal with as those that directly and obviously impact a guest experience. In fact, those mistakes invisible to a guest, no matter how minor, will ultimately affect the tangible and intangible aspects of the designed experience. The second point is that trust creates a sense of empowerment within the employee and that creates a feedback loop of momentum to spur more ownership of mistakes and opportunities to learn:

> "This is the kind of service we give to the guest, to make sure the guest is coming back. And then they say 'Oh! You are an engineer?! Someone from engineering brought me a bottle of wine!' This is not the key. The key is that we resolve the problem. We make sure the guest is satisfied with the resolution, given the inconvenience for the toilet repair or the light bulb that went out, or a problem with the phone, or with the air conditioning. This is the key to our success... from my point of view. The management gives you the power to ask, to engage the guest." [S.R.]

While trust may threaten control and power in insecure management, it is essential to spur innovatively designed experience (Berry et al., 1990).

This next quote also reveals the ways that MR BIVS are used as a source for learning. MR BIVS are often discussed during lineups, daily departmental staff meetings that occur at every property and include all levels of staff.

> "Yesterday in my lineup with my team, I went around the room and I asked them on a scale from 1 to 10 how comfortable are you in using and exercising your empowerment? We had some high results and a few low ones. We are digging a little deeper on that. We've talked about it. But we need you to feel comfortable. You have this $2000, given to you to resolve every guest opportunity. Now $2000 is just a tangible figure, it's something we could look at, right? But it's about moving heaven and earth and making sure it happens for the guest; it's about turning it around." [M.S.B.]

In this discussion about anticipating guests' needs, the manager is reminding staff of their empowerment to reignite the momentum needed to "move heaven and earth" for guests and wholeheartedly jump into the design of experiential services without hesitation.

The second element of Barrett's explanation of embracing errors is that mistakes are an o*pportunity for feedback.* Lineups were a formalized place where feedback about inefficiencies and breakdowns was given. At the lineups that I attended, feedback was given to individual members, as well as to specific departments as attendees volunteered ideas about how to improve upon processes. This next example shows how feedback was used as a source of encouragement to deliver better results on the operational goal of arrival scores:

> "The one area where I would really like for us all to work on, where our score is not as high as it should be, is recognizing our guests' names. Still not as high as we want to have it, and quite frankly, that's where everybody plays a role. …As a team, as a hotel, the score is too low. …But that should be an easy one for us to get out. And it's huge because for most people, the most beautiful word they hear, is their own name! (*Laughter*) It is very powerful- so thank you for the hard work and for getting our arrival scores so high. Let's continue on that name usage- have a great Saturday afternoon everyone!" [M.S.B.]

After reviewing the area of improvement, the group is sent off with a loud rallying cry, akin to a musical director giving final notes to his jazz ensemble before a performance. Another less structured and more informal area where feedback is given is on a one-to-one basis between new-hires and their mentors. In these interactions new hires can ask questions, get advice and observe innovative service delivery occurring. The other area where feedback occurs is immediately with guests if service is *not* delivered appropriately. Rapid prototyping can be initiated when the staff member can quickly think on their feet to resolve an issue.

Barrett's third element of embracing errors, that e*rrors are inevitable and a way to incorporate into ultimate performance* is also evident. In jazz, any bad situation can be converted into a positively brilliant situation: "There's no such thing as a bad note, it's where you take the note" (Dizzie Gillespie) and "Don't worry about making mistakes because there aren't any" (Miles Davis) are comments by jazz musicians which reflect this point (Barrett + Peplowski, 1998: 559-560). This is the purpose of the MR BIVS framework at the Hotel Luxe as evidenced in these remarks:

> "…And sometimes it's out of your control. As an example, there was this woman from this past week where the guest had an opportunity; it was an upgrade to a suite based on availability. And when the guest came, we didn't have any suites, we were sold out. …Even though we tried to turn the experience around, there were points we couldn't get past because they just had this certain expectation." [G.M.]

It is important that staff are accustomed to open forums to discuss problems that colleagues have encountered, to expect that errors will occur and to be comfortable with that inevitability. In jazz, musicians have a common vocabulary, share the same scales, know the same chords and have listened to the same harmonies for years. This is why jazz musicians who are meeting together as an ensemble for the first time on stage can play together. The ability to listen and be attuned to one another is important in jazz improvisation. Similarly, Hotel Luxe staff have a common Credo Card and are vested in the organization's standard operating procedures. In any given moment, staff may be called upon to come together and resolve a guest issue, or create an experience. By being attuned to one another and drawing upon any number of structures, such as one of the Service Values, errors can be converted into opportunities.

The following is an example of turning a guest's bad impression into something positive and "creating guests for life" (a Hotel Luxe expression):

> "We have these guests, their last name is Morgan, they stay with us every year, and this time they had a pretty bad experience with us. It was when times were rough, I mean this time last year when the economy was pretty poor. So the Morgans came to our hotel and their kids said, 'Well it's our parents' anniversary, and they are celebrating their anniversary with us.' And he also said that his dad loved X-Box. …I spoke to my friend who knows a lot about X-Box, he used to work here, he worked in housekeeping, and I said to him, 'When they go into their room I want them to have the X-Box playing so they see it. And also,

since they are celebrating their anniversary, I want all the Ladies and Gentlemen, we'll all come to the bar, and I want everyone to surprise them, to say "Happy anniversary!", and we'll have two bottles of champagne.' No problem. It happened, and it was just amazing. It turned the whole situation around, and they returned the following year, and they said, "Where else could this happen?" [L.O.]

The output of cost for the X-Box was more than made up for in the repeat business the following year. This quote brings out the role of using colleagues to ensure the best design delivery of an experience. Most importantly, it reflects a willingness to participate in an "aesthetic of imperfection" (Weick, 2002) and to not fear the outcome.

The fourth element of embracing errors and one that leads to innovation is to *repeat and amplify mistakes until new patterns develop.* It was interesting to learn that general managers consciously and deliberately set goals to collect a certain number of reports on mistakes made on weekly and monthly bases. Management led by encouraging their staff to admit when they were wrong; repeated mistakes contributed to internal data as learning tools and were used to amplify the mistake. Mistake-making became a goal with the objective to learn from errors.

The concept of amplifying mistakes to translate them into new solutions was evident in various ways. For example, when the general manager of the Boston property described the back and forth, painstaking way shortage on silverware was dealt with it became apparent that by involving not only the staff directly affected by the silverware shortage, but also their colleagues, the amplification of the mistake made it easier to embrace, deal with, and work toward solutions. More evidence of the amplification of mistakes was the subsequent recognition when an organizational member later revisited the problem, and made an improvement resulting in an engaged guest with a memorable experience:

> "We have a case that happened recently. Our Ladies in housekeeping reported that we didn't have enough linen in a timely fashion for some of the floors that they were working on. I attended a meeting with the housekeeping lineup one morning. One said 'Yes, about the linen shortages.' Linen shortages? Tell me about that. And once one Lady speaks up, others chime in. And they said 'Yes, we are short these 2 items, and we mentioned to the housekeeping director, we mentioned it to the operations director, and they both said, 'Yea, we'll look into it, we will take care of it- and that was two weeks ago. We don't know where it stands.' So, that's where I get concerned because as leaders it's now a

matter of trust for me. The whole purpose of defects is to see the frequency of breakdowns. Is it a special case? Somebody called out sick? So that's a common cause and [there are] special costs." [E.S.]

This example also points out a mistake amplified by the fact that the manager was not as responsive as was necessary to his staff. By allowing the housekeeping staff to interpret the issues, a new process was institutionalized. When management revisits problems, staff have a sense that they are being heard and their capacity to trust management increases as does their capacity to improvise solutions (see Diagram 9).

<u>Diagram 9.</u> An aesthetic of imperfection is encouraged at Hotel Luxe.
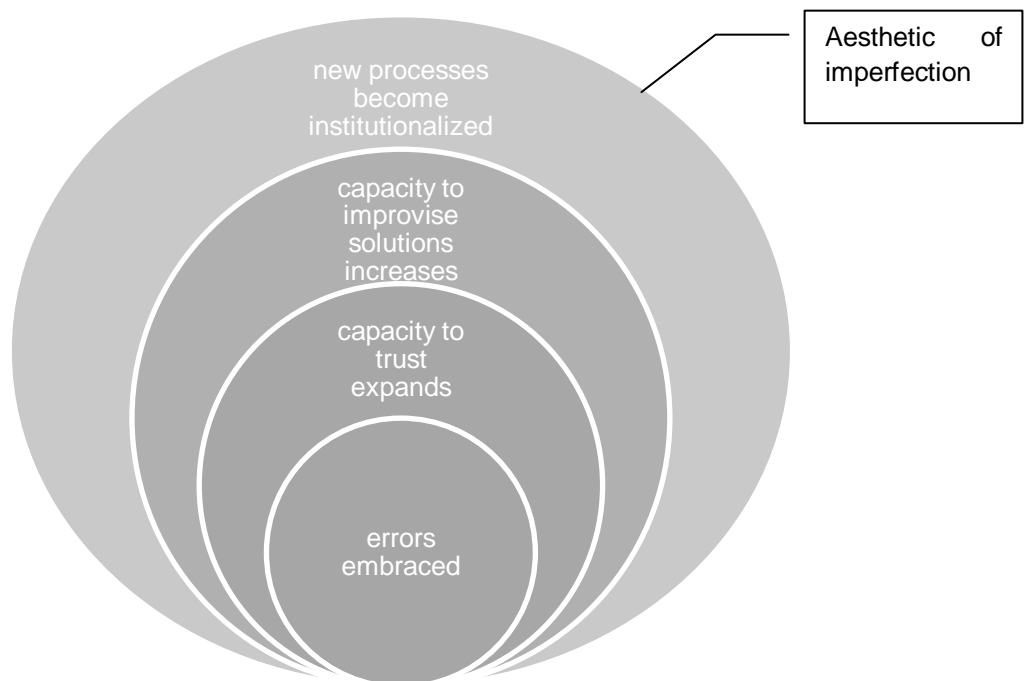
The jazz improvisation metaphor illuminates through the concept of embracing errors, how organizations can be developed for learning and innovation. It offers an "aesthetics of imperfection" (Weick, 2002) view where the stigma of failure is removed and opportunities to learn from mistakes and unexpected turns abound. An aesthetics of imperfection environment is cultivated daily at the Hotel Luxe.

> "So there's this fear of making decisions. And when people come into the organization they don't even believe that it's true. And they have to truly, they have to get comfortable with the trust from the organization and there's not going to be ramifications from someone, a leader above them with regard to how they handle a situation.

> "Listen, they don't always handle it the right way, but the thing about it is that after it happens, number one when they handle it and they handle it well, then we recognize them for the handling of it. If they didn't handle it well we go back and say, 'Okay, thank you so much, we're empowered to try to take care of the guest, let's look at it and learn to see what we can do better next time.'" [G.D.]

There are three outcomes of embracing errors as they relate to experience design at the Hotel Luxe.

1. The first is that trust is nurtured and developed as a result of repeatedly being exposed to the mistakes of one's colleagues and having one's own mistakes exposed- and seeing that the ramifications are not punitive, but rather growth-oriented. The existence of trust has implications for how daring an employee will be in engaging with a guest and attempting to design an innovative experience. One example of this trust being enacted was an employee who early in their tenure made attempts to rectify a guest stay and engage his colleagues. Trust also serves as fodder to cultivate intuiting, the preconscious recognition of possibilities. Intuiting becomes an important design skill for anticipating needs and is articulated within the Hotel Luxe culture as "the art of anticipation".

> "We are actors, we are on stage. ...It must be an interaction and not a transaction. We must be in seconds able to capture their attention. ...You are a service professional and if someone visiting the resort is there for business and does not want any small talk, then you need to put that hat on... (We) need to be actors to meet the needs of the customer, to be expressive and to be the penultimate service professional." [D.S.]

2. The second outcome of embracing errors is that more opportunities to engage with guests are identified as a result of the aforementioned trust and the encouragement to look upon guest engagement as a learning opportunity. The final evidence of the amplification of mistakes is when "memories of a lifetime" and "guests for life" are created. There are more opportunities to engage with guests in the experience design paradigm. One staff member shared an experience where a mistake she made about the date for scheduling an anniversary dinner, became an opportunity "to create a memory for a lifetime" based on the way she called on the support of her colleagues and created an even more creative and interesting alternative dining experience:

> "I told them, I'm sorry, you know the restaurant will be closed on that day. … But now they will actually have a really nice romantic dinner in The Chimney". …I think they will be very happy." [E.G.T.]

The Chimney is an alternative space on the property, separate from the restaurant the guests had originally requested. Her manager then explained to the group:

> "That investment is going to create a memory of a lifetime and those guests are going to talk to every one of their friends about how special the Hotel Luxe Georgetown was, and how they went above and beyond."

Institutionalizing occurred both internally at the Hotel Luxe as well as within the experience realm of the guest, as they leave with a lifelong memory. The impact of the design reverberated far beyond the organizational context to the guest's own life.

3. The third outcome of embracing errors is that the staff are orienting themselves- albeit unconsciously- as designers. That is, they are implementing design thinking by embracing errors, because they are not afraid to engage in rapid prototyping (the updating and changing of design prototypes in situ) to create experiential services. Even if the designed experiences fail or do not turn out as planned, organizational members approach the design of experience and memory creation as a novel and interesting process that could present itself at various and unexpected turns when interacting with clients.

I explore Barrett's explanation of minimal structures in jazz improvisation by examining one of the organizational equivalents of song (Weick, 1990) at the Hotel Luxe, The 12 Service Values, which are written on every Credo Card and memorized by every staff member. The 12 Service Values are minimal structures that remind organizational members to embellish on rote operations, the organizational equivalent of melody, and initiate unusual actions to satisfy the customer.

There are three elements of minimal structures that are demonstrated through The 12 Service Values. These minimal structures are enlivened when organizational members embellish and elaborate upon them based on the experience design activity in which they are engaged. The first element in Barrett's minimal structure is that it allows for *maximum flexibility*. Prior to 2006, the back of the Credo Card was inscribed with "The 20 Basics", a scripted list of prompts to encourage staff to break out of their routine modes of interaction and engage guests creatively. For example the Basics Value number 10 ("Each employee is empowered. For example, when a guest has a problem or needs something special, you should break away from your regular duties, address and resolve the issue") and Basics Value number 13 ("Never lose a guest. Instant guest pacification is the responsibility of each employee. Whoever receives a complaint will own it, resolve it to the guest's satisfaction and record it.") are now encompassed within Service Value number 3 ("I am empowered to create unique, memorable and personal experiences for our guests").

Despite the organization's high standards of quality service, The 20 Basics did not optimize the creation of best designed experience, and the Hotel Luxe gained a reputation of having robotic service:

> "I was at the Four Seasons for eleven years. We accused the Hotel Luxe of being robots. You know, like the guys who worked at Buckingham Palace. …And we literally said, 'Yeah, they're gonna smile and say, "My pleasure, my pleasure, my pleasure."' That wasn't true when I joined, but I did tell them that's how I perceived them." [G.D.]

This perception was due in part to the very scripted nature of The 20 Basics, which paradoxically stifled the amount of desired creativity staff generated in

designing experiential services. This prompted the development of The 12 Service Values, an experiential service design change which resulted in more fluid, script-less service, maximizing organizational members' flexibility:

> "[Our consultants] gave us a lot of research on engagement, and what customers from an emotional standpoint are looking for. And we wanted to give a more genuine feel… For instance, we had a story that some guests were checking in and they were having a terrible day. And they were in Chicago and they are from Texas. Nothing is going right. But the Lady behind the front desk has got a little hint of a Southern drawl and so it comes out –and then they were like laughing and joking! So some people years ago, would think, 'Oh my God, what are you doing?!' You are always professional, you know? And so we want to see that woven throughout that structure that allows us to be more genuine. And I think Service Values or at least the transition from The Basics to The Service Values, that was one of the major intents of that." [B.C.]

The shift to The 12 Service Values made it difficult for organizational members to rely on habit in designing wow experiences because the focus was on outcomes instead of prescribing the delivery mode of experience design. This example of an experience design tool shows how the Hotel Luxe has evolved to allow for more localized innovation and decision making because expectations vary from one guest to the next and from one property to the next.

Another organizational member had the following remark about the shift to the 12 Service Values:

> "Well, I think that one of the things that occurred as we made the move from what we called our 20 Basics to our 12 Service Values was that we realized that it would require also a change in how we thought about terms and ideas like standard operating procedures and brand standards. That, where in the past they were very prescriptive in saying this is how the napkin will be folded, this is where the napkin will be placed, if you're for example drinking in the lounge, to allow the hotels to understand there was a desired outcome associated with that experience and that we needed to help them understand where the guardrails were. And if the guardrail was that the napkin needed to be a cloth napkin versus paper, but that what they did with it, with the colour of it, or how they folded it or placed it was more about the unique experience they were trying to create than 'At Hotel Luxe we do it this way.'" [L.W.]

This quote reflects how maximizing flexibility in how, for example, a restaurant server might fold a napkin, led to broader thinking about changing the more tangible experiential service design cues such as standard operating procedures and brand standards. This is interesting because of the phenomenon that it points out: less structure allowed for more fluid design,

resulting in more meaningful experience; less structure allows for more customization and minimal structures allow for maximum flexibility.

Initially some staff resisted the change, but it forced them to be comfortable with discomfort and to embrace being "consistently inconsistent" (Michelli, 2008; Personal interviews), through sense of place design and through designing customized interaction with guests. As the phrase has become integrated into the parlance of how experiential services are delivered at the Hotel Luxe, consistently inconsistent experiences have become the rewarded norm. The *consistency* refers to the high level of quality and operational excellence that accompanies every experience. The *inconsistency* refers to the various interpretations of how staff anticipate needs, the organizational members' creative interpretation on a case by case basis when interacting with guests. For example, afternoon tea service at the South Beach property in Miami, Florida does not include classical music, scones and Earl Grey tea; instead, acid jazz lounge music and mojitos are the norm, blending in well with the MiMo (Miami Modern) architectural style for which that South Beach neighbourhood is known. This expanded and opened the interpretation that delivery of experiential services could be consistently inconsistent, embodying the idea that minimal structures allow for maximum flexibility because they guide rather than constrain action. Improvisation is more assured by the presence of minimal structure because ambiguity and paradox are valued over clarity. Organizational members are encouraged to depart from the canonical practice, that is, those scripted operations of a service organization.

The second element in Barrett's minimal structure is that minimal structures *impose order and create a sense of cohesion.* In doing so, they orient organizational members toward a common place. Just as structure is critically important to jazz improvisation, structure is equally important in improvisational behaviour in organizations (Weick, 1998). The Hotel Luxe, an organization embedded with lots of structure, process and framework, with an historical orientation and focus on operations and excellent quality control, has ironically had to plan and organize just as carefully for chaos and freedom.

> "Hotel Luxe does have a lot of process and framework. And over the last say five to eight years we've been evolving to have more creativity, more in-the-moment decision making which in some ways has always been a

part of our culture- but because our guests are changing and they're more unique…they're more individuals, there are less things in common from one guest to the next that, you know, even rules of thumb that helped in the moment, you know, take more of a back seat to truly deciding for this guest here in front of me what is it that I will do." [L.W.]

New thinking and new planning has had to occur to orient staff to embrace the edge of chaos where minimal structures can flourish and where true innovation can take place. The comment above also speaks to the first bifurcation point explained earlier in this chapter: the discerning affluent, that new targeted luxury consumer who influenced the shift to design experiences rather than solely focus on high quality operations and excellent service, was essentially requiring that meaning be delivered at the edge of chaos.

A meaningful, creatively designed experience cannot be overburdened by structure and rules, and yet an organization won't gain flexibility or innovation simply by removing structure or managerial control. This is a paradox that the improvisational lens reveals. Ironically, firms that appear to be less controlling and more fluid than others actually exercise, practice and implement control consistently (Pasmore, 1998:563):

> "The minimal structures are enabling platforms that allow the engagement, the experience design, to occur, and to occur efficiently, as if the Ladies and Gentlemen magically conjured up meaningful experiences. This is what Hotel Luxe refers to as their "mystique". [B.D.]

The organizational management carefully identified where structure and process enable engagement and the art of anticipation, and where it bogs down the ultimate goal- to create exceptional memories and experiences as noted by this consultant to the Hotel Luxe:

> "The Hotel Luxe makes processes of things that should be made into processes but they have this huge component that is discretionary, because they recognize that the experience that guests are looking for is predicated on a couple of key things: 'Do you anticipate my needs? My unspoken wishes and desires?' How do you do that? You can't do that through a process. You can *enable* that through a process. But you can't *do* it through a process. So the bottom line is the more stuff you free up, the more time and resources you free up by getting it right the first time, on the things that can be made a process, the more time you have to do all that other fun stuff.
>
> "And they're really good at that. So their whole lineup thing, their MR BIVS, all of those things free up time so that their front of the house experience is as potent as it can be." [J.F.]

This comment speaks to how experiences are not designed, but the *conditions* to create memorable experiences *are* designed. The balance struck between structures that impose order and those structures that allow for more flexibility is essential. This consultant made a point of acknowledging to me that service organizations who know how to strike that balance are rare; but when the balance *is* struck, due to best practices and talented staff, then the "fun stuff", the experiential services that result in wow experiences are made possible.

The third element in Barrett's minimal structure is that it allows players *freedom to express diversity, transform materials and intervene in the flow of events.* Among organizational members this freedom comes about when management trusts organizational members to interpret, adapt and self-organize*.* The president of the Hotel Luxe summed up how the increasingly diverse customer profile of the discerning affluent propelled the formation of a looser structure that would allow for more diverse outcomes:

> "…With the greater diversity of guests, you have a greater diversity of what it means to have a sense of well-being and it's very much, you know, how do we entrust our Ladies and Gentlemen to interpret for this family one thing, and for another family another thing; and for this guest, 'This is how I'm gonna treat them.'" [S.C.]

One way to promote this third element of minimal structure- to express diversity and transform materials- is through rapid prototyping, the updating and changing of design prototypes in situ. Sometimes rapid prototyping simultaneously requires organizational members to embrace errors as in this example:

> "So in one situation I explain to the guest that unfortunately we have 100% occupancy and ask if he is here for a couple of nights and he goes 'No, I am here just for one night.' So you know he is not happy with this room. That is the first thing. Then you say, 'Please allow me a couple of minutes, can I call the front desk and find out if we have any other room or cancellation.' I call the front desk and find out there is nothing. So I explain to the guest, but he is like, 'No, I am not staying here because I don't come to the Hotel Luxe to look out my window and see a construction site!' So I calm down the guest and say, 'Sir, if you give me a couple of minutes, let me go down and find something or let me call the concierge again.' And they told me again, there are no rooms. That happened!" [A.R.]

Rapid prototyping requires and allows for cross-functional communication so that organizational members can create while knowing how and where their

ideas fit into the whole, evolving system as experiential services. For example, it is evoked in the minimal structure Service Value Number 5, "I continuously seek opportunities to innovate and improve the Hotel Luxe experience" and again alluded to in the following description of practicing role play during learning workshops:

> "…The leaders have no problem throwing themselves into a role play first. We'll go do it. You know? You need to break the ice, 'Ok, let's go!' We're gonna go and do it, you know we're gonna laugh about it. We let the Ladies and Gentlemen critique us and say what would you have done differently? What did you like? What would you have changed? And then we give them a chance to go on, and then we critique each other. …It's much easier to laugh about it, joke about it and do it with your peers, practice it before you go and you deliver it with your guests. …So it's a very healthy dance of back and forth about the performance of the Ladies and Gentlemen here." [P.S.]

This "healthy dance" of engagement promotes rapid prototyping of experience creation in situ. Experiential service prototyping can go beyond the prototypes of tangible design cues- in that way the goal can be to develop an organizational tradition of testing out new routines, new protocol, and new interactions. Sometimes at the Hotel Luxe, experience prototype testing happens in the middle of responding to an issue. An example is when a manager responded to a very important guest's request, who was occupying 550 out of 580 rooms in the resort, to set up movie queue styled stanchions. They had never had such a request or challenge before, but the manager brainstormed with six other staff members and built a concierge and bell desk away from the lobby, and turned the bell desk into the front desk, essentially creating two check-in desks in the lobby and minimizing any herding effect of customers in the lobby. The team won an award for this adaptation and this became an innovation that could be replicated throughout the company. That particular customer now requests that process whenever they stay at the hotel. This manager reflected on the ability to adapt to new requests in the following way:

> "I think that in our departments there are standard operating procedures, there are brand standards to be upheld, but again, our employees have the ability to either tailor their hotel to act in the moment in a way that may be outside of standard operating procedures or brand standard, but fulfils the need of the guest at that moment." [L.W.]

This comment speaks to the freedom described in the third element of minimal structure, to push the boundary of a standard operating procedure in order to fulfil the need of a guest- by designing an experiential service.

There are three outcomes of minimal structure as they relate to experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe, epitomized in shifting the experiential service design process from an idea to an articulated reality, and finally to an institutionalized tool (Crossan et al., 1999).

1. The first outcome of minimal structure is to cultivate intuiting a need via the art of anticipation. Intuiting and art of anticipation are principal tools for experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe. In the following example, intuiting and anticipating a need evolved into implementing a practice:

"The front desk would notice guests would go out and jog... the front desk agent said 'What if we create a map of jogging trails?' When joggers would come back we would have jogging station- water, fruit, a towel...rather than have them ask, we would have it present. It was anticipating needs, based on individual requests. Taking the one individual, and now that is implemented throughout all the hotels." [J.D.]

2. The second outcome of minimal structure is that new ideas are articulated to oneself and to colleagues and then the conditions for a memorable experience are delivered for customer engagement. Such articulation has been referred to as "interpreting" as well, when an insight is explained to oneself and to others. Metaphor often plays an important role and at the Hotel Luxe the medium is often wow stories. This outcome is important for raising the bar of individual contributions and achieving fluid coordination without sacrificing creativity.

3. The third outcome is to ultimately institutionalize the experience, so that it becomes part of the organizational culture. A principal example is the shift from The 20 Basics to The 12 Service Values where minimal structures became a platform for emergent strategy. Another example is described here:

> "So this new idea is that when an elite guest comes to the hotel- and this was actually my co-worker's idea, from the front of the house - …since they are using the same credit card, they won't have to stop at the front desk, because (the information is) already here. So let's move on: make their key, check their name, have the key with the doorman outside, so that when they come in with the cab you have the doorman pass them the key to "Mr. Rodgers". …so you really are making them feel like they

are at home. So you just give them the key, welcome them back, and they can go from the cab, straight up to the room." [A.R.]

Minimal structure generates large system designs because new behaviours consequently produce new experiences and results. A small action or idea born in the form of an expectation can emerge into a complex structure of interdependent people. Emergent design from minimal structures is a characteristic of this newer, dynamic vision of the improvisational organization. Emergent designs come to the surface when capabilities change, interdependent actors become self-organizing, there is power in retrospect, and action generates its own meaning (Weick, 2001).

I explore Barrett's explanation of distributed task in jazz improvisation by examining how the art of anticipation is delivered at the Hotel Luxe. In this section I will first operationalize the three elements of distributed task (Seifert and Hutchins, 1992; Barrett, 1998) followed by an explanation of how groove, a jazz concept and component of distributed task, is manifest at the Hotel Luxe. First, it is important to qualify that evidence of distributed task occurs on two planes: between the staff members themselves; and between the staff and the guests. In experiential service design, interaction on both planes is necessary to produce meaningful experience. Thus, examples illustrating distributed task will reflect both the employee and the customer perspective as explained to me by organizational members.

The first element of distributed task, *shared task knowledge*, is when members monitor progress on an ongoing basis and is seen in the way that the organization collects metrics on customer engagement monthly and on employee engagement annually. This general manager in Seoul describes the emotional contagion and internal competition that is set up through regularly held inter-departmental quality meetings:

> "We learn from each other. This meeting is the most important meeting we have for months. Because the other team members present something and the Rooms, and the Housekeeping and the Engineering will sit there and say, 'Wow! This is what these guys are actually doing! Wow, that's good.' And when they have their own meetings they say 'I better come up with some good ideas because the other teams in the hotel are working...' And so it's you know like a, not an avalanche, but people are infected…" [F.R.]

Progress is also monitored vis-à-vis the daily and weekly reports managers make to their teams at the lineups. In this way, staff are regularly made aware of how they are measuring up in terms of engagement on everything from greeting guests by name to making guests feel that the Hotel Luxe is integral to contributing meaning to guests' lives.

The second element is *horizon of observation*, which is being a witness to each other's performance. This is evident by the fact that staff do not work in isolated silos. Their interactions are on display for all to see, as they take centre stage

and step up to the role of engaging guests. The horizon of observation is broadened as various colleagues' interactions with guests are reported on through the telling and publication of wow stories, allowing staff to witness one another's creative improvisational acts. Wow stories are local accounts of designed experiential service and staff get to hear these accounts occurring at their own property as well as those occurring at properties around the world. This bellman describes relishing reading wow stories to inform his work:

> "That's the first thing I do! I come to work, I usually come early and sit in the cafeteria, and the first thing I do is say 'Now let's find a wow story!' And then another thing I like is MR BIVS. I love to read them because that's how I learn." [A.R.]

The horizon of observation was also evident when staff participated in interdepartmental creations of SWOT analyses:

> "…Right now we are in a goal setting process for 2010, and we start with a SWOT analysis- strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. And each department has their own SWOT analysis. So the culinary team and housekeeping team and the front office- they all come up with their own set of SWOTs, and from there they build up their own departmental goals. But it's the employees- it's not coming from the top, down. It is a bottom-up approach to come up with the actual topics and goals. It's your goals, it's my goals, so I have a vested interest in making them happen. I am being listened to… We have, I think, a culture where our Ladies and Gentlemen want to be part of the solution." [E.S.]

In this team activity of reflecting on organizational competencies and challenges and contributing to organizational goal setting, staff had one more opportunity to witness each other's performance and consequently reflect on how to enhance their own performance.

The third element of distributed task is that there are *multiple perspectives*. In musical terms, each musical utterance can be interpreted from different perspectives. In experiential service design terms, at the Hotel Luxe, staff are encouraged to deliver their own interpretation of engagement through their unique "talent". The talent is viewed as the particular perspective and creative skill that an organizational member can cultivate while working for the Hotel Luxe. The encouragement to develop multiple perspectives is seen in Service Value Number 3, "I am empowered to create unique, memorable and personal experiences for our guests"; and in Service Value Number 5 "I continuously seek opportunities to innovate and improve the Hotel Luxe experience."

When these three elements of distributed task- shared task knowledge, horizon of observation and multiple perspectives- operate in tandem they culminate in a *groove,* which is a mutual orientation of all players. Groove consists of two components: the *ongoing give and take between members* and *empathic competence.* At the Hotel Luxe, organizational members with whom I spoke intermittently used the words 'flow' and 'engaging' when describing the elements of the organizational equivalent of groove- as in "I was really engaging the guest!" [MT]. Flow is a condition for engagement. Engaging involves asking the guest lots of questions, observing their actions and reactions, and following up on tips and clues that the guest has given.

> "You get to know them. Without that - you have nothing. You have nothing without engagement. There's no way I will know the guests' needs or what they want or anticipate their needs unless I engage them." [M.T.]

The Mystique database plays a role as well in generating data to translate information about guests into knowledge about them which contributes to flow for meaningful give and take between staff and guests. Interviewees reminded me several times that service is not necessarily engagement; groove and flow distinguish engagement and the art of anticipation from functional, operational service. One front desk manager referred to engagement as "breaking that third wall" a dramaturgical allusion; this is demonstrated physically when a front desk agent does something as simple as walk from behind the front desk, around to a guest, greets them, shakes their hand or embraces them, answers their questions and makes recommendations about, for example, dinner and dancing in the host city. Successful engagement is partly art and partly operational science:

> "I guess anticipation is indeed an art because not everyone has an ability to engage. You can teach certain things about engagement: "Is there anything else I can do for you?"…But whether this comes from the heart, is another thing. …You want to get to the point, if I am a housekeeping employee, who enters your room…I notice you have the in-room dining door menu out and you are getting ready for bed. I offer to take that order for you and place it for you. I may offer to ask if you have anything for dry cleaning or laundry before going to bed- that I would be delighted… So you make recommendations also. We have some Ladies and Gentlemen where it is easy for them to do that, and for others, we have to create processes to assist them to be good at engagement." [E.S.]

This remark speaks to the interplay between minimal structures (the process and frameworks that assist staff to be good at engagement) and groove, the fluid, mutual orientation among organizational members. One of the ways that the first component of groove, *ongoing give and take between members* is manifest at the Hotel Luxe is through the organization's continuous learning frameworks. When organizations increase their members' knowledge, encourage experimentation and learning over time, and design the organization to support new approaches to doing things instead of simplistically removing controls, they exercise improvisational techniques. The Hotel Luxe's emphasis on learning throughout the employee's tenure and "Just in time learning" are examples:

> "When we have our just in time training it's essentially [something like] if you work at the front desk, and finding that through our quality team there's a break down in the process, we won't wait for your next month staff meeting, we won't wait for you to be at your Day 365. The front desk manager will call me in HR and say, 'JD, I need you to come next week. We're having a problem with this process, I need you to come over, put something together, and I need you to address something right away with the team.' To me that's learning. We're not waiting to say, 'Well let's email corporate and in a year from now we'll get a training that addresses that.' There's a need here, boom, just in time, bring someone over, address it, give the team feedback on why it's not working and learn together. So we're not necessarily giving them the answers. We're facilitating a group where they're gonna come up with their own answers which, as you know, is many times much more powerful than you bringing the solution to them."   [J.D.]

J.D.'s comment reflects that distributed task brings out a self-organizing orientation for problem solving and independent solution building, with no need to slow down experiential service delivery by getting permission every step of the way.

J.D. and others I spoke with reiterated the point that staff generate solutions on their own and in cross-functional teams continuously, on an as-needed basis. This is that "ongoing give and take between members" referenced in groove. A second way that ongoing give and take between members is manifest is through what the staff referred to as 'flow', as working harmoniously with others throughout the organization; when everything was "clicking", the process flowed. A valuable insight to incorporate into my making sense of the Hotel Luxe's mode of constructing meaning is the point that Weick (2001) makes about flow:

"An interpretation to flow typically induces an emotional response, which then paves the way for emotion to influence sensemaking" (Weick, 2001:45).

This relates back to the second element of minimal structure as well: that minimal structures create a sense of cohesion. Flows are always being interrupted and then rejoined and thus they are inducers of structures and pattern (Eijnatten and Wafler, 2003). While the organization operates in chaos, patterns of behaviour emerge that are a result of human intuition, rather than a result of planned, deliberate intentions. In this way, flow, and not a static state are desirable organizational orientations.

Hotel Luxe staff referenced flow in various ways, referring to "the flow of the hotel" or being "in flow" with fellow employees when creating memorable experiences for guests. They meant this either in terms of the work flowing smoothly in an operational sense, as in:

> "Flow is really important in terms of a whole number of areas of operation. Whether it's from the purchasing of the goods that then head in to the kitchen and that flow specifically from the culinary into the waitside, and that would culminate into the timing of your meal… flow in housekeeping is always a big deal in terms of check-in and check-out and rooms and availability. Flow in laundry is a huge deal.

> "Frankly from an operations point of view a lot of the key disruptions occur when the flow is interrupted. Because you can never get it back. Once you've started something ten minutes late because you were unprepared, let's say a banquet, you never get it back. Those 10 minutes are gone. And they're so important." [S.C.]

…or, "flow" in terms of emotional synchronization with their colleagues to design and deliver meaningful experiences:

> "It's all flow to me. It gives me goose bumps, I swear to you it does. It's all a flow. Everything flows. It's like a well-tuned oiled running engine, if you want to put it that way. Everyone is on the same page. Hopefully they are working together [*snapping his fingers*] and it's flow. And without the structure, it's not like this, but without [the structure] you have no boundaries of where you work. But you do have a field to work in. And it all goes with flow. For me." [M.T.]

Despite this more mechanistic metaphor of a well-tuned oiled engine, this interviewee makes the point that emotional harmony with colleagues is essential for flow to exist. Just as rhythm, harmony and groove create communion between musicians, flow permits an emotional form of communication to occur

between co-workers. In the flow of doing their work to engage guests they distribute task by calling on one another for support and implementation and building that emotional connection with one another as in the outcome of flow for jazz musicians during musical improvisation. This comment also references back to the point that minimal structures amplify opportunity for flexibility and fluidity.

A third way that *ongoing give and take* in distributed task between members is evident is through lateral service. Lateral service is a Hotel Luxe term used often among general managers and front-line staff when explaining how the Hotel Luxe engages in cross-functional teamwork. The statement "That's not my job" is unacceptable; staff are expected to pitch in to do whatever is necessary to get a job done on the operations level, or to deliver an experience on the more emotionally charged customer engagement level, whether they are a housekeeper, a bartender or a general manager. Through many of my visits to properties, I observed hotel managers stopping to pick up litter in the hallway, as well as boiler room engineers assisting guests with questions outside of their departmental domain. This comment from a plumber illustrates the way a log-in system is used to distributed responsibilities of maintenance.

> "If you are facing a problem like the drainage in the sink is getting clogged well then very often we say, 'Guys, one of you can come up with a great idea. How can we address that?' It's not like, OK, I come to do my seven hours and then I go home. No. We have a log-in and in the morning everybody has to sign it. ...if something happens... it's written down in the book...you review it at your shift. And then the person in the morning can go into the computer and order what we need." [S.R.]

Lateral service is an example of a loose boundary, a platform that when viewed through the improvisational lens, elicits improvisational behaviour that helps staff to design experiential services. The way experiential services are designed at the Hotel Luxe require boundaries to be transcended (via department, hotel or region) so that serving a guest's comfort and care takes priority. Because lateral service requires teamwork, every staff member has the full authority to use their own discretion creatively; they are encouraged to break out of traditional department-based or location-based restrictions. Examples of teamwork reported at lineup are catalysts for constructive competition among staff at other properties.

The second component of groove is *empathic competence*, the ability to adjust and amend direction in anticipation of others' expectations; new patterns are anticipated while shaping new creations. This is a form of intuiting, where dynamism and flexibility are required (Crossan et al., 1999). As Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman (1990:31) noted in one of their pivotal studies about improving service quality, "Services are performances and most of the time it is people who render these performances". Therefore, selection of the right people who will be able to design experience is key:

> "Because I oversee front of the house operations, I need to find that person that is going to pick up on those cues. I need to find an engager. And it's difficult to do that; what I am looking for, is I am looking for personality types. But most importantly I am looking for passion. Because I can teach you how to do anything. But I cannot teach you how to be passionate, I cannot teach you how to care, I cannot teach you to act with integrity. So if I can draw out that passion you have for what you do and you can make me believe that you are going to perform with that passion every day, then the rest I can teach you." [P.S.]

Similarly,

> "When we talk about problem resolution, we talk about not falling into your comfort zone of the process. Listen to the whole story so you can anticipate, not assuming that I've already heard this problem. …It's a different person, with different expectations so you want to be actively listening so you can anticipate their different needs and fulfil those." [J.D.]

This passion and active listening are key to cultivating the art of anticipation through empathic competence. Part of the Hotel Luxe's evolution has been to transition to an organization where learning is ongoing and multifaceted, structured and pre-emptive, as well as spontaneous and unplanned. The Hotel Luxe's All Aboard course is an example of the structured learning stream:

> "We also have something called All Aboard which is about going from satisfying our guests, all the way up to engaging them. …We want to engage them to develop that relationship. …In All Aboard we have different stations, where we focus on different areas. So one area is communication. So we focus on body language there, getting the message across; kind of using the 'I statement' if someone is upset when they're talking to you saying 'I understand what you're feeling, I understand that', empathizing with them." [J.D.]

Alternatively, the Radar On, Antenna Up class is an example of the stream of learning that encourages spontaneity. All five senses are utilized as staff learn about and practice empathy using improvisational techniques such as role

playing, as well as observation. Learning occurs in those spaces of bounded instability where there is reasoning by analogy and a reliance on intuition (Stacey, 1992). Boundaries are traversed at the Hotel Luxe because the organizational culture fosters continuous learning through training and practice across functional groups. Such group work is not a one-time occurrence. For example, approximately 250 hours of learning workshops are offered throughout the year to every employee; extended training beyond initial indoctrination is key (Grove et al, 1992). Additionally, this is seen in the SWOT analysis work done by departments or in the ongoing scenography work on a property basis.

There are three major outcomes of distributed task in terms of experiential service design.

1. The first outcome of distributed task is that empathic competence is a desirable stance when designing experiential services. Empathic competence viewed through the improvisational lens at the Hotel Luxe is synonymous with their art of anticipation. The art of anticipation is a holonic feedback loop, both facilitated by and embodied in the people who comprise the brand and is an example of Giddens' duality of structure. Anticipation of needs goes beyond delivering great amenity packages to guests' rooms; it is delivering on guests' unspoken, unrealized needs so that it should feel:

> "…as if by serendipity the world has conspired to deliver the perfect experience for you. And there are a lot of times that it will go unnoticed but that's not failure, I think (the staff) would see that as, as part of them having done their job exactly right. It should feel not forced or intrusive, it should feel natural." [M.M.]

The Mystique database, a systematic catalogue that includes observations about guest preferences and proclivities, collected subtly by staff after observing guests, is an experiential service design tool used to deliver the art of anticipation. Front-line employees are trained to subtly observe guests and artfully eavesdrop to fulfil a need or a desire. This is related to minimal structure, Barrett's 3rd principle, where structures get amplified in experience design.

2. The second outcome of distributed task is that intuiting and engaging the emotions contributes to experiential service design. In the conversations I had with staff about creating these experiences, they discussed accessing the

visceral, intangible places within themselves and of the guests to deliver meaningful services. For example, connecting on an emotional level to the weary traveller so that the hotel feels like home, a place of familiarity. This point connects directly with Barrett's conclusion that distributed task brings out the intuitive and emotional capabilities among organizational members, inspiring deeper levels of committed participation. As this general manager commented:

> "It's all about creating experiences. And it's about emotionally connecting. We no longer just measure customer satisfaction or employee satisfaction. We measure engagement, customer engagement. So it speaks to an emotional tie to this place. …I am tied to a place because of the people foremost, and we don't want to lose sight of that." [E.S.]

Distributed task illustrates the more iterative aspects of designing experiential services.

3. The third outcome of distributed task is that well-designed experience requires an environment of trust among the organizational members. Organizational members must be able to depend on their colleagues in the event of failed attempts. Trust emerges from integrity and the belief that colleagues will do what they say. In a trusting environment, blame is circumvented and problem resolution can occur more constructively and creatively. These points were also reflected in the discussion about *embracing errors*, Barrett's second characteristic. A feedback loop results through distributed task: leadership trusts the staff, and staff consequently entrust each other to carry out whatever is needed to deliver experiential services. This feedback loop is also engendered in the Motto, "Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen". It has been pointed out in the experience design literature that consciously referring to organizational members as designers is key to the co-creation experience. Such feedback loops within the organizational structure are evidence, in this case, of trust. Distributed task highlights the ongoing give and take between members that levels the playing field and reminds us of how the Motto shifts the interaction to a more personable and empowered one.

Barrett's ideas about creating form retrospectively are evident at the Hotel Luxe when staff worked through two activities: the *act of bricolage* and the *creation of coherent composite stories*. The first, the *act of bricolage,* is where organizational members create unique combinations by making connections between resources, and between the old and the new. The second activity, the *creation of coherent composite stories*, occurs when staff create wow experiences culminating in wow stories. Each activity is pivotal to designing meaningful experiences.

Just as Lévi-Strauss' (1967) junk man bricoleur assumed that a tractor could be made from the junk pile in front of him, Barrett's organizational improviser assumes that there must be a melody that can be cultivated from the myriad of organizational rhythms and chords, and the staff of the Hotel Luxe assume that there must be a memorable experience to be created from the guest situation at hand by drawing on past experience, their collective skills and available resources, such as the Mystique database. In the absence of a rational plan, the bricoleur makes connections between the old and the new and retrospective sensemaking makes spontaneous action appear purposeful and coherent. In the middle of a mess, organizational members piece together their own skills with others', drawing on past experience and interweaving concepts to create composite stories out of current situations before them as in the following wow story told to me by a bellman:

> "A guest checked in here from the Sheraton Hotel from the north end of Boston. This guest was going to attend a wedding here. But he left his garment bag with his wedding clothes (at the Sheraton). And he checked in around 4:45. But he didn't realize that he had forgotten it in the closet there. …So it was about time for me to finish that day's duty, between 3:30 and 4. In fact he was the last guest I checked in his room was the presidential suite- I discovered he was a VIP personality. So he told me when I was checking his luggage in that he left his garment bag. …I told him I will take care of it, don't worry. Just let me know where the hotel is. I Googled the directions, jumped into my personal car, went to that Sheraton… and I beat all the rush hour traffic! I came in with his suit bag; he couldn't believe it. I did that before 6:00. …He was like hugging me! I think that wow story even appeared on the internal website." [M.J.}

The service design and experience design literature contains concern that too few organizational members think of themselves as designers and thus miss multiple opportunities for innovation. The staff of the Hotel Luxe don't speak of themselves as designers, but they are bricoleurs in the ways that they creatively problem solve, improvise and deliver solutions to create memorable guest experiences. The ways that they work through the various frameworks such as lineup, scenography, and MR BIV's, are the ultimate manifestation of their bricolage work. The staff practice bricolage each time they attempt to engage guests.

> "We always say, if you encounter a guest with a problem, you own it. You own it, you fix it, and there is no harm in asking for help, there is no harm in asking for advice, but ideally we'd like for you to come up with some solution." [T.S.]

Fixing the problem and asking for advice from colleagues requires a bricoleur's resourcefulness. Lévi-Strauss pointed out that exhaustive observation and systematic cataloguing of relations and connection are necessary for successful bricolage (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). In the process of collecting guest information for the Mystique database, when necessary, staff traverse boundaries that may be intradepartmental, cross-functional and between guests and staff by asking questions in order to utilize all available resources and design conditions to deliver memorable experiences:

> "I was staying with Bill at the Singapore property, and we were in the club level lounge and we were talking about stuff. And I was talking about my kids and how when I travel I like to bring them something back locally because the world is all become the same and it's very difficult to find something unique when you travel. We were just having this conversation between ourselves. And when I got back to my room there were two sacks of Singaporean candies on my bed. That you can't get anywhere else. And it was because the woman in the club level lounge overheard our conversation, and went out of her way to find something that was unique." [J.F.]

The concierge in the club level lounge utilized observation, listening skills and intuition to deliver the art of anticipation and deliver a meaningful experience that seemed to appear out of nowhere. Such loose boundaries (Hatch, 1998) are elements of jazz improvisation and organizational improvisation. At the South Beach Hotel Luxe, staff I spoke with recalled calling on their resources

from all over the world in order to make sure that the best conditions were met to deliver an experience:

> "I have a guest who had to pick up something from a store in New York City. So I had to contact the store in New York, have them arrange a courier, go pick up that coat, and go take it to New Jersey. It's so exciting, because it's not even me, but it's all the Hotel Luxe who are involved. We all help each other. …I can call a concierge in Barcelona and explain I have a problem and we work with each other. …It's all the same training. And it all comes down to "Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen." And we all treat each other with the utmost respect." [A.S.B.]

In this account the concierge recounts a key aspect of bricolage, calling upon resources by tapping into her personal memory and reserve of contacts. She also always has at her disposal the rich catalogue of information that the Mystique database provides. Staff broaden their concept of what constitutes a resource by calling upon one another in the same hotel, tapping into the international network of the organization or their own personal network. Management encourages such loose methodologies (Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007) and resourceful action and thinking by giving each employee a $2000 per diem allowance to use in any way the staff person determines in order to meet a guest's need. One executive shared that staff can actually use an amount greater than $2000 to resolve a guest issue, so the $2000 amount has become symbolic in nature. Rarely do employees use this full amount, but knowing that it exists expands their resourcefulness. Given this expansive thinking, bricolage should be more apparent in organizations that favour generalists rather than in those organizations favouring specialists (Stacey, 1996; Stacey and Griffin, 2008). Such generalist orientation is apparent at the Hotel Luxe in their principle of lateral service discussed in the previous section. Fostering generalists is also evident through the learning workshops which are structured into two streams: one stream reiterates the specific operational tasks, skills and duties of, for example, a maid or an engineer; the second stream consists of ongoing workshops where employees role play guest problem-solving in cross-functional teams and in this way develop generalist skills to be able to respond to guests' needs beyond their own operational capacity.

The Hotel Luxe employees take great pride in saying that they were not hired, but rather selected. One general manager remarked, "The most important thing

in this whole thing is selection. If you hire the right individuals, you are going to have wow stories all the time," [G.M.]. The selection process is intensive and utilizes a software program during the multiple interviews that asks behavioural-based questions to get a sense of how the prospective employee will respond to situations creatively and in situ. While they are looking for persons who are methodical and oriented to exactness, they also want those "Who can do it with a twist!" [J.M.]. The selection software tools try to detect how the person will act spontaneously, what creative solutions they will devise, and how resourceful they will be. They are essentially probing applicants for improvisational behaviour. The goal of the selection process is to discover individuals who will make connections between disparate contexts in order to create- that is, to discover bricoleurs who will be able to make the experiential design equivalent to a tractor out of a junk pile.

Bricolage at the Hotel Luxe requires emotional connection. It is noteworthy how common it was for staff to talk emotionally to me about their experiences as designers of guest experience . Results from customer engagement surveys were used to assist the staff to adjust their behaviour in order to emotionally connect with guests. For example, if a trend in the data was that guests were not responding affirmatively to the question, "Can you imagine a world without Hotel Luxe", then this would be cause to evaluate how staff could better engage guests. Such a means for review is an important component in organizational improvisation. Such reflection requires a culture of listening, since ultimately, all business is personal and it is people, not things, who create connection, experience and engagement (Michelli, 2008:138; Personal interviews). As one hotel manager reflected,

> "Well, in an ideal scenario... if we are successful at energizing the philosophy, then that's kind of the ultimate goal, to have the staff, the Ladies and Gentlemen, be ambassadors of the brand- but at the same time feel the urge to solve things on their own or with the help of their co-workers. …When we look to surprise and delight (guests), it's not just fixing a problem but at the Hotel Luxe it's also about the employee feeling that they have the ability and the responsibility to find ways to surprise and delight. So there is nothing structured, it is nothing scripted. It is very much you know a sense of the situation, a sense of the moment." [T.S.]

This statement reflects the emotional component in the language used referencing employees' feelings about being able "to surprise and delight", for

example, the process of customer engagement goes beyond bricolage activity. Customer engagement requires one to distinguish between purpose and function. For example, the *function* of the front desk is to greet guests, confirm reservations and give directions to rooms; but the *purpose* of the front desk is to create an exceptional experience at check in:

> "…You could have someone with all of the qualifications, technical qualifications. You could have the smartest person, with all the skills to do the job… but they don't have the people skills for the hotel industry- they don't belong here. And they won't make it. They could have all the technical skills but they won't be able to deal with what we deal with every day- which is the people issues. Which requires intuitiveness, innovation, character, you name it." [G.M.]

Such discernment- involving intuition and emotionally connecting- is the critical sensemaking process that is evident through the improvisational lens. Giving beyond functionality and fulfilling purpose is about delivering meaning. While function can be taught, fulfilling the larger purpose cannot always be taught, which is why the Hotel Luxe puts such an emphasis on selection processes.

The second activity of retrospective sensemaking is an extension of the act of bricolage: the *creation of coherent and composite stories*. Such stories are characterized by novelty, spontaneity and improvisation, conceived in the here and now (Boje, 2008). The resulting wow stories, as they are referred to at the Hotel Luxe, are emergent where "the production of global patterns of behaviour by agents in a complex system interact according to their own local rules of behaviour, without intending the global patterns that come about," (Stacey, 1996). In the process of acting as bricoleurs, emergent story arises because of the self-organizing that takes place. Wow stories stem from wow experiences and are examples of extraordinary service exhibited by the staff to be used to reinforce existing service excellence and propel future extraordinary acts (Michelli, 2008:187). They are vehicles and structures that communicate values. Diverse and sometimes epic, they instruct how to dazzle and give stellar performances that result in memory creation such as the following:

> "I was the manager on duty that day and one of our valets lost the car key of a lady that was attending a function. She was living in Toronto at that time; Detroit borders Canada and so Toronto is like four hours from there. She was upset, but she had to get back and we had to rent a car (for her) until we found the keys. So we found the keys and then the next thing was, 'So who's gonna go and drop the car?' ...So I agreed to go on

my day off. I drove from Dearborn to Toronto, I took the car back, returned it to her, and then brought the rental car back." [B.S.]

Stories about these wow experiences are disseminated orally during lineup. Wow stories engage the senses; in fact, staff learn that they must engage all of their senses in order to empathize with guests. This is considered to be an artistic skill, or talent in Hotel Luxe parlance, and not something that can necessarily be taught. Stories are depositories for memory creation. When emotionally charged wow stories are shared during line-up, organizational members are oriented to connect to one another. To this end, a wow story is another example of an amplified minimal structure that enables staff to more fruitfully go about the business of designing experiences.

A collection of wow stories is distributed every day at every property as a guide to ensure coherency and consistency; it is an internal document available on the firm's intranet site. Stories are submitted by staff from all properties around the world. Each staff member has the authority to use her own discretion to produce amazing experiences for guests. Specific guidelines are given regarding what constitutes a wow story and leaders are accountable for collecting these stories- that is, to identify colleagues engaged in experience creation and acknowledging those actions, then integrating and institutionalizing them through wow stories. A bit of competition between properties results with the hope that one's own hotel will have produced the most selected wow stories. Such stories have become resources in the organizational memory to teach the management and the front line staff how to design experience more efficiently and creatively (Michelli, 2008:189).

The duality of narrative and story (Boje, 2008) are at work in the process of experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe, where narrative is that centring force of order and control and story is a de-centring force embracing diversity and disorder, and is present and future shaping. For example, the *narrative* is that "Ladies and Gentlemen move heaven and earth" to deliver exemplary service to guests. However, the *story* is more enlightening and eye-opening, especially those such as this one which highlights the chaordic principle of disorder and diversity: Two staff observed a physically disabled guest who was unable to gain access to the beach in his wheelchair (disorder). The guest stared out at the ocean for the entire afternoon. A bartender at the beach bar

observed this and responded by calling upon two other colleagues (diversity) to help him to build a ramp from the bar area to the water's edge. The next day, the wheelchair bound man was escorted down to the beach via the ramp and the two staff physically supported him and helped him to descend into the water and essentially play for the afternoon. The guest was ecstatic and touched; this was a memorable experience for that guest, and one that was reported back to staff at a lineup that I attended.

The delivery of "Wow" is another example of a chaordic dynamic at work, "buttressed by leadership that offers technology, processes, and training to collect and operationalize knowledge acquired on behalf of guests," (Michelli, 2008:153). Wow is defined as a level of emotional intensity that goes beyond product or service quality to the next dimension of services which consist of experience and meaning. Thus, a service must be delivered that appeals to both the chaordic logico-thinking and emotional-feeling dimensions of the customer (see Diagram 10).

Diagram 10. **Logico-thinking and emotional-feeling dimensions in experiential services**

There are three outcomes of retrospective sensemaking in terms of experience design.

1.   The first outcome of retrospective sensemaking is that a constantly renewable reserve of organizational memory (Moorman and Miner, 1998) is created, to be called upon for more wow story creation. This is important as the creation of wow stories is destabilizing hinging on the next creative, intuitive idea that the staff person thinks of to design a memorable experience for a guest. Memorable experiences are as present-shaping and future-shaping for staff as they are for guests. Story becomes a design tool that gets applied to

the reserve of organizational memory. In this sense, the Hotel Luxe can be viewed as a storytelling organization, where "the performance of stories is a key part of members' sensemaking and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory" (Boje, 1991: 106). Collective memory or organizational memory is a tapestry of group and individual collective memory.

2. The second outcome of retrospective sensemaking in terms of experiential service design is that progressively, steps are taken towards shifting to a democratic orientation among staff because through the telling of story, all organizational members are critical in the process of designing experience. This is dialogism, the diversity of voices expressing a plurality of logics in various ways (Boje, 2008).

3. The third outcome of retrospective sensemaking is that it brings the organizational members one step closer to thinking of themselves as artists and designers. If organizational members take on this nomenclature, their design of experiential services might take on new dimension. This characteristic points out an element to the design process that is more emergent than deliberate and which is not exactly silent design (Gorb and Dumas, 1987), but more emergent than design which is based on blueprints.

Barrett's version of hanging out exists at the Hotel Luxe because there is a community of practice where staff has access to colleagues who are "experienced practitioners" through formal and informal meetings, conversations, stories and rituals. A big part of how experienced practitioners even arise at the Hotel Luxe has to do with the firm's selection process, as analyzed in the previous section when discussing *retrospective sensemaking*. The careful selection of staff- which ensures the foundation for a community of practice in the first place- who have the right mixture of teachable, operational skills as well as a reserve of intuitive, passionate curiosity to engage, positions them to evolve into creative practitioners of experiential service design. At one of the lineups that I observed, the transition to a new software tool to be used in the selection of new hires, was described in the following way:

> "…So one of the biggest strengths of the new selection system is to make sure that we're looking at the whole person, not just a little snippet of the individual. And to make sure that they fit our team. To make sure that we continue the Hotel Luxe Mystique of "Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen"… Making sure that our guests are taken care of." [G.M.]

This description of lineups used to disseminate information about the new selection system makes this a good quote to transition into exploring the first of the three elements that Barrett outlines in his description of community of practice: *knowledge is disseminated, practiced together and stories are exchanged.* Lineup is the most illustrative example of this element. Previously I used lineup as an ancillary example to illustrate minimal structure; in this section, lineup is useful as a primary illustration of hanging out. Community is built up during lineup and tenets of the Hotel Luxe culture are reinforced and reflected back through shared storytelling.

Lineup is a daily twenty minute meeting in each department, at every Hotel Luxe property around the world. It is essentially a forum and vehicle for shared storytelling where the function of story is to inspire members to innovate. Story also functions to contribute to the reserve of organizational memory. At lineup, values are recited and reinforced, a common language is used, visual symbol is referenced, oral tradition is kept alive, positive storytelling occurs and leaders-

from a range of levels throughout the organization- model innovative behaviour. The purpose is to discuss news, lessons and announcements pertinent to a particular department, review mistakes from the prior day, and acknowledge exemplary work of peers from around the world by sharing stories.

> "…On a day to day basis we do daily lineups in every department. We reinforce our philosophy which is again the glue that holds us together. Every day we cover a Service Value or one of our Gold Standards to kind of reinforce what we are here for and what it means to create customers for life- how do we accomplish that? How do we create wow experiences for our customers? And it creates a lot of pride when we succeed.

> "Plus we share stories among our seventy-five hotels worldwide. And knowing that in every place on this earth where there's a Hotel Luxe they go through the same process, it's pretty- you don't think about it often, but when you do, it's pretty amazing, you know?" [E.S.]

The amazement expressed about the synchronization of this communal experience is related to the second element in hanging out, that *community memory is formed*. The staff ultimately feels connected to something larger than themselves (Robison, 2006). Examples of this connection and affirmation are evident in the following account from a lineup session I attended at the Georgetown property:

> "Happy birthday to Sandra in the spa. …Three hundred and twenty eight days without a medical injury- wow, we're coming up on a year. Fantastic! Thank you so much for that service value. I mean in the kitchen they work with knives every day, any accident can happen within the first minute. They'd have to take me to the hospital! …Every day, genuine care. Take care of yourself -which is most important, right? Three hundred and twenty eight days, fantastic." [G.D.]

In this example, the contributions of this staff member become part of the collective memory of the group; recognition of her presence has meaning extending beyond her personally to the larger group.

One of the general managers relayed the following story which illustrates that one of the outcomes of having community memory, is commitment and loyalty to an organization:

> "We closed the doors in July 2006 to do the renovations. We had 125 Ladies and Gentlemen go and work in other hotels. And that was great for them. New experiences. We had a 175 or so that still worked here. So security, sales, engineering, basically all worked here. And then another 150 that couldn't go anywhere, they had families, kids in school, they had you know whatever that they were supporting. So we got the

owner to say that if they worked voluntarily at a charitable organization, that we would pay them. A million dollars in payroll we paid out for them to volunteer in the community. Huge impact in the community for those eight months but when we opened the doors in March, we had 85% of our Ladies and Gentlemen come back!"

This high retention rate is virtually unheard of in an industry where the average employee turnover is over 50% (Mehta, 2005).

Community memory through lineup also energizes the Hotel Luxe philosophy and culture:

"That's one of the reasons why we do the lineup. To re-energize the philosophy over and over and over again. To make sure we keep it alive, we keep it relevant. We don't let up and especially for the newer employees and even the newer leaders; it's a great opportunity to get acquainted to how we want to do things. So in the best world, the best scenario you have workers who are very independent as it relates to problem solving but you will find that there are various degrees of that throughout an organization. I think that is just part of being…organic, being human." [T.S.]

So, despite the independent drive of individual employees, the energized philosophy through hanging out contributes to an organic whole, moving in concert. The organic nature and diversity of a community of practice is one of the reasons why *access to a range of experienced practitioners,* the third element of hanging out, is so important. Such access to experienced practitioners through lineup and through everyday working interactions is where the inspiration to grow and learn occurs as told by this bellman, an immigrant from Sierra Leone:

*"…*This [is] my first job so far here (in the United States). I was working in the housekeeping department as a houseman, assisting the Ladies with cleaning or getting their supplies, what they need and helping them clean the rooms. Then one time I said to myself, 'Well during our lineup meetings everyday our director always told us that at Hotel Luxe you always have opportunities to learn and grow. You're not going to stay in one department in job specification all the time throughout your stay.' And he said once we are working here… to choose what you can do. They are not going to hold on to you so that you have to stay in one department." [M.J.]

Despite the encouragement and inspiration that this man felt, sometimes lineup can fail because it feels repetitive; at other times it serves as a comforting and safe place. For example, during the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans in the United States, a time of crisis, the lineup framework transitioned into

being a vehicle for creative healing energy providing connection and communion.

Another example of when community memory is exercised and the other elements of hanging out surface are when new hotels are opened. This is a big event at the Hotel Luxe and illustrates a pivotal time when cross-functional team work comes into play. It is considered an honour to be selected to participate in a hotel opening. It also puts organizational members into new environments where they must work together with colleagues whom they have not met before. This example of participation in hotel openings shows how hanging out is a catalyst for the development of another characteristic of Barrett's 7, *provocative competence* where disruption of the routine and reorientation to something new is vital to learning and to developing community. Thus, there is continuous interconnectedness between the principles of Barrett's 7.

Additionally, hanging out occurs regularly through the process of creating wow experiences. In that process of anticipating guests' needs, learning from more experienced peers or from peers in other departments, the first element of hanging out- *knowledge is practiced together*- occurs as people work together. At the end, staff are left with the memory of having worked with other colleagues and these memories spur them on to anticipate needs and be of service to their colleagues. Thus, another intended feedback loop is created.

There are two significant outcomes of hanging out in terms of experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe.

1. The first outcome is that where there is hanging out, there is a feedback loop that informs the design process. Well-designed teamwork within a community of practice is built upon by the multiple individuals involved in behind-the-scenes work to deliver the resulting meaningful service (Berry et al., 1990).

> *"There is this sort of panache about having been selected to be one of, you know, one of the Ladies and Gentlemen. And it's special and it's important and they take great pride in that. They also take great pride in sort of protecting the brand. And so there's this psychological dimension that comes along as owners of the hotel. So you mix it up with empowerment, with selection, with processes that support them and you have a platform that allows them to really do what they do best - to get in there and really be ambassadors for the Hotel Luxe, rather than cogs in a process driven machine."* [J.F.]

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The confidence that is present in the community of practice is a result of a symbiotic relationship between perceptions of power, trust and dependence (Hilton and French, 2007) among organizational members. Such perceptions go a long way in building a cohesive design platform from which to engage customers.

2. The second outcome is that hanging out informs the development of bricolage. It contributes to the resources organizational members can use in retrospective sensemaking, enabling staff to make connections between the old and the new. Experience design can be heightened by organizational memory (Moorman and Miner, 1998). Any boredom that could be felt in doing an otherwise mundane task, such as changing bed sheets, greeting and checking in guests or repairing a plumbing breakdown is alleviated by the communal orientation and connection that is a result of the emotional contagion for hanging out. The capacity to be inventive occurs through the personal, operational and organizational resources available.

For effective alternating between soloing and accompanying to occur, attentive listening and observation among staff are required, and these skills in turn create exceptional performance. When organizations reward not only individual performance, but also supportive behaviours, organizational members are more likely to surrender the self and ego in order to support and enhance the development of another's idea, resulting in better designed experience. At the Hotel Luxe these elements of alternating between soloing and accompanying are components of experiential service design and evident through the Hotel Luxe value of "lateral service". There are three elements in this seventh characteristic of Barrett's that I will explore in this section: 1) *taking turns in supporting one another*; 2) *being observant and responsive to the direction others are going*; and 3) *surrendering self and ego to support others*.

Lateral service involves cross-functional team work and is the principle that a staff member will jump in and assist with all work he sees his colleagues needing help.

> "…If I see anything unusual, I take care of it. I don't have my boss telling me to go do it; I go do it on my own because I don't want to let the guests or the Ladies and Gentlemen down. …That comes from the heart; it comes freely, because they have chosen us as if we owned the place." (Michelli, 2008:77)

Assistance could be given to an operational task, such as helping out at the front desk in the event of sudden overflow of guests checking in and checking out, or with the delivery of a wow experience that could involve delivering a misplaced plane ticket to a guest anxiously waiting at an airport which was a wow story reported to me in my visit to the Seoul, South Korea property.

At the Hotel Luxe, cross functional teams begin in the first year of learning workshops, where new employees are taught to work through levels and across departments. These cross functional teams might consist of a housekeeper, an in room dining server and one executive director of human resources: "You are hoping to break down those silos between people"(JD). The rationale behind using cross functional teams is that the *guest* experience is a cross functional one:

> "(Guests) don't just come in and categorize their experience into different departments! From the guest perspective, we are all one silo…" [J.D.]

Taking the guest perspective into account is a common step in the experiential service design process. Lateral service requires the staff to occasionally surrender their own virtuosity in order to allow others to excel:

> "We have trainers, and we call them team learning coaches now. But they are line employees, they are Ladies and Gentlemen working in a functional role department but become de facto leaders when it comes to teaching, coaching, passing on knowledge to their peers, and looked at as informal leaders in their department. Because they are supposed to be the best at what they do. Technically the best. They have pride in what they do, they have more initiative. They get involved. And it primes them because they will get involved with more meetings and presentations and have to work on projects. They are going to make the transition into leadership; they have some of that training or exposure and they have to do presentations at times, in front of groups. Confidence is enhanced and self worth and deciding is enhanced." [E.S.]

Learning coaches are leading by submitting to the process of accompanying those who are less experienced. In this way, the practice of taking turns and accompanying creates a fluid environment that encourages participation and shared ownership. The first element of soloing and accompanying, *taking turns in supporting one another*, calls to mind that improvisational acts are time based forms of group interaction, grounded in organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1933; Sharron, 1983). This phrase, "organic solidarity", is an interesting one that calls to mind the chaordic nature of improvisational jazz musicians, playing leader and follower in this Barrett principle. This is essentially what occurs in lateral service when a mechanic fulfils a room service request because he happens to be asked a question about dinner that evening.

The second element of Barrett's explanation of accompanying and soloing that is relevant to this discussion of experience design is *being observant and responsive to the direction others are going*. Attentive listening and observation create exceptional performance. Staff are taught to practice observation and listening through the workshops offered in their first year of employment. It is notable that active listening is reinforced daily during lineup, where shared storytelling is only as powerful and significant as the amount of interpretation that is going on. Lineup provides an active arena for listening to one another, and this translates into listening skills that the staff bring to their daily interactions with guests. Listening and observing are critical to subtly collecting

information about guests that will be entered as data into the Mystique database, using a "preference pad":

> "So a preference pad is something that should be carried around by all Ladies and Gentlemen and it's a place to capture the guest need, their preference- like their allergies, things like that. If it's their anniversary- whatever might be important to capture. So that's always a physical reminder of what we should be doing in our thought process to anticipate, anticipate, anticipate." [J.D.]

The preference pad forces deliberate observation so that the staff member as bricoleur has more data and resources to go back to later for the design of experiential services. The preference pad also orients the organizational actor to think and sense prospectively in order to deliver meaning. Listening and observing can be viewed as part of the experience design research methodology. The experience design literature emphasizes the importance of fieldwork, and who better than the front line employees to be trained to continually practice observation and listening, relay back that data through the Mystique database, and then have that database analyzed on a weekly and monthly basis.

The third element is *surrendering self and ego to support others*. This is elaborated upon in this statement:

> "…When you experience someone at the hotel interacting with you, you know, it's not like they feel subservient, it's that it's their job- well not their job, their life to make sure that you're taken care of." [J.F.]

Through engagement, the organizational actor transitions from existing solely in an operational field to a more comprehensive design field that involves their whole identity, i.e., their life. The second Service Value, "I am always responsive to the expressed and unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests" illuminates this element. Surrendering of self is in fact the posture of service and translates into a position of empowerment:

> "They're totally empowered to take care of the guest so it doesn't mean if you report a computer problem to a housekeeper, that the housekeeper is going to take care of that problem, but that the housekeeper is not supposed to say to you, 'You know, well that's computer related, you have to call the tech department' or whatever. It means that housekeeper is empowered and to make sure that it's handed off to the proper person to do follow up, to report the defect or whatever it is. But it's the whole idea that it's that employee's decision or that Lady and

Gentleman's decision as to how the guest is gonna be taken care of and how that difficulty is gonna be resolved." [B.D.]

The following statement also reflects empowerment that is emergent, coming from the bottom up due to the empowerment all staff feel, due in large part to the Motto:

"…Most people would expect the general manager to handle the situation right away- but it's when housekeeping, it is when someone from engineering, when, you know, those things that create the wow… I mean for us, we want these guests to have these bonds and relationships with our staff." [G.D.]

This statement reflects a most important goal of accompanying and soloing: that guests connect viscerally to the Hotel Luxe experience and relationships are formed. There are three significant outcomes of alternating between soloing and accompanying in terms of experiential service design.

1. The first outcome of accompanying and soloing in terms of experience design is an extension of one already discussed in retrospective sensemaking: that a more egalitarian and democratic concept of who can contribute to the designed experience arises. An important tenet of experiential service design is that when companies design meaning, the process should be a company wide experience, not one existing in silo opportunities. This contributes to a more evolved interpretation of Hollins' concept of total design (Hollins and Hollins, 1991).

2. The second outcome of accompanying and soloing in terms of experience design is that value and meaning embedded in the designed experience is inhabited by all and consequently transmitted to the guests. This is a feed-forward loop, resulting in integrating (Crossan et al. 1999) due to the mutual adjustments that have been made in order to alternate between accompanying and soloing. Since meaning is what makes experiences valuable, such a recursive dynamic is essential to the design process.

3. Lateral service, an iteration of soloing and accompanying, highlights the complexity in designed experience. While it would have been easier to ask each person to only be responsible for their own area, through lateral service more judgment and empathy is required of individual staff members. Lateral service also introduces complexity to the process of experiential service design

because employees must be cross trained to do more than one task, and to judge when to shift gears.

> "An example is at the front desk; it is more complex because they're not only front desk agents, they are the concierge. They also at times can assist from the bell man perspective. They could be assisting at the front door. It is a smaller model where we are creating this more personalized type of experience and we require more from them than we do a typical front desk agent. …Our philosophy helps us drive empowerment…and again, one of the service values is tied to empowerment." [G.D.]

The empowerment that organizational members derive from lateral service (a component of soloing and accompanying) is an example of minimal structures amplified. That is, small assessments and actions have larger ramifications in the design delivery as well as in the organizational actor's orientation. The amplification of minimal structures will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

Introduction to Chapter 5

The improvisational lens provides a framework for understanding experiential service design as complex, adaptive systems produced without a blueprint, plan or set of instructions. This investigative study has led to a conception of experiential service design that is relational, systemic and dialectical in that organizational members are both institutionally constituted and constrained, yet they have the capacity to transform fields of relations. My selected literature in complexity, experiential service design, and organizational improvisation helps me to answer my research question in three key ways. I used these three major bodies of literature to make experiential services at the Hotel Luxe accessible in some interesting ways. First, the literature on complexity reframes the organization in a context where uncertainty, turbulence and chaos are not avoided but rather are accepted and embraced as opportunities for innovation. As such, the complexity literature serves as a connector between the organization studied and the methodology of the improvisational lens which also hinges upon uncertainty. Second, the literature on experiential service design uses a range of metaphors to explain the design of touchpoints and delivery of services and, therefore, provides precedent for utilizing the jazz improvisation metaphor as an investigative tool for understanding the design of experiential services at the Hotel Luxe. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, the design of experience-centric services is multi-faceted, resulting in some unpredictability in the service offering. Third, the literature on organizational improvisation links in nicely with that unpredictability in the service offering because it engenders questions about innovative, flexible and dynamic processes within organizations. The improvisational lens clearly illuminates the centripetal and centrifugal forces at work in experiential service design. Centripetal forces emphasize order and control and are typically retrospective while centrifugal forces are those which unravel coherence and are both present-shaping and future-shaping. Such dualities coexist in experiential service design and give us new understanding about complexity. By superimposing the improvisational lens on to the Hotel Luxe, the ways in which both structure and creative complexity inhabit the organization highlights both retrospection and future-shaping.

In the following section, I explore the new dimensions that this study contributes to a more dynamic view of experiential service design by summarizing significant points from the data that answer my research question, "What does the improvisational lens reveal about experiential service design?".

Reflections on the Research Question

This study yields three revelations about experiential service design as revealed through the improvisational lens: responding to ambiguity, elastic structures and meta-design.

Responding to ambiguity

The selection of organizational actors who are comfortable with ambiguity is key in the design of experiential services. My study demonstrated that where detailed attention, research and efforts are put into selection processes and methodologies, the results yield organizational actors who are capable of striking a balance between operational skill and intuitive ability to nuance experiential design outcomes. The Hotel Luxe selection process reviews the whole person, not only the applicant's operational skills, to yield a resourceful, intuitive generalist (Stacey, 1996; Stacey and Griffin, 2008) who will excel at bricolage. Generalists endowed with empathic competence will be better equipped to break down silos and work in cross-functional teams. Empathy assumes actors possess a level of self-awareness; such capacity for self-awareness stems from elastic structures (to be explained in the second section) such as the Hotel Luxe's motto, where a posture of service (to be explained in the third section) is self-reflective in relation to those one serves.

The rigorous selection process explained in this study reflected that new hires' future contributions to the organization were taken very seriously; as a result, Hotel Luxe staff considered it a privilege to have been "selected and not hired". The selection and ongoing learning processes also indicate that the Hotel Luxe incorporates the tangible and intangible tools of experiential service design. Leadership and creativity can be part of the pool of organizational resources. Other resources such as humility, expertise, and data about guests (e.g. the Mystique database) are also valuable to the extent that organizational actors use them as tangible and intangible tools for experiential service design. In addition to these terms for selection, environments of trust and empowerment

militate treatment of organizational actors that is most conducive to conditions which foster meaningful experiential service design. For example, The Motto generates opportunities for strategic and creative agency, giving rise to a dialectical dynamic where "a relation of forces in continuous motion and shift of equilibrium" (Gramsci, 1971:172) exists. Such environments require actors with bricolage skills that have shifting and contingently aligned interests: their multiple identities come alive when called to design a meaningful experience either singly or collaboratively. The elastic structures afford the actors to simultaneously be the initiators and "the active, operative expression of the collective will" (Levy and Scully, 2007). What results is a democratized, egalitarian organizational field for actors to work in, resulting in a more distributed notion of experiential service design. Where there is heterogeneity (of design tools in this case), then there is variance in outcomes resulting in a more fluid and responsive design process brought about by actors with a larger adaptive capacity. Such heterogeneity is aligned with the complexity perspective.

The old Hotel Luxe used to be quite prescriptive and the new Hotel Luxe has created systems and structures that allow for anticipatory service by staff acting as co-creators and designers, rebounding off of structural boundaries per their own assessment of guests' needs. This phrase "rebounding" calls to mind the agility required among organizational actors, leading to a wonderful image of organizational actors who are not rote or static in their service orientation but fluid and almost acrobatic. I will expound on variations of such fluidity in the next section, "Elastic structures".

Elastic structures- A merger of structure and creativity

As I discussed in Chapter 2, while experiences cannot be designed, the conditions and context to create those experiences *can* be designed so that organizational actors respond to situations in ways that create meaningful experiences for guests. The assumption is that different environments engender different behaviours among organizational actors. By extension, different structures serve different purposes at different times. This is a principle of the contingency hypothesis (Thompson, 1967) which states that organizations with forms that fit their organizations will outperform organizations

with forms that do not fit their organizations. Thus, it would seem that more flexible forms identified by means of the improvisational lens would serve organizations even better than more rigid structures for experiential design purposes. Rather than remove controls to gain flexibility, the Hotel Luxe organizational members integrate Hotel Luxe structures so that their ideas about how to design experiences around guests fit the broader company culture. Operating in a self-reflexive open system (Stacey, 1992) characterized by continuous collaboration, cooperation and innovation, organizational members construct design methods to continuously discover what suits customer needs. Such continuous discovery sets conditions for equifinality (Gresov and Drazin, 1997) where there is acknowledgement that more than one structural element may be involved in producing a given result. Sometimes as environments change, institutionalized learning no longer fits the organization and more value is put on individual learning and initiative, resulting in the development of micro-open systems embedded in the organization. This is what occurred when leadership at the Hotel Luxe changed and more iterative processes such as the 12 Service Values (a type of micro-open system) were incorporated as experiential service design tools. As improvisational activity to design guest experience is promoted by management through methods such as provocative competence and emotional contagion, so then do innovative design outcomes increase. Improvisational activity to design is part of an interconnected organic system.

Minimal structures are enlivened (to borrow a phrase from the Hotel Luxe lexicon) when expectations in an organization are realized and values translate into assumptions; consequently, cognition (e.g., knowledge about a guest's preferences) and emotion (e.g., empathy to connect with a guest) are also activated (Hatch, 1993). Such enlivening of expectations can be an imaginative act and the design of specific resolutions is customized by the particular organizational actor. A meta-level interpretation of minimal structures is that they transform the conduits and the resulting product of the service design process. That is, minimal structures such as lateral service, the 12 Service Values or scenography, alter the mode by which organizational members do their job and consequently the resulting experience a guest can have. These are additional illustrations of contingency (McGrath, 2002), where different

structures serve different purposes at different times. Hedberg et al. (1976) first discussed that minimal structures are important for keeping organizational processes dynamically balanced, and that they are particularly important in turbulent environments. The notion of dynamic balance can take on new and more adept meaning as synthesis (Tatikonda and Rosenthal, 2000), where achieving equilibrium between structure and creativity is not the goal so much as is maintaining awareness to incorporate structure and creativity at any given time. This is in contrast to having a goal of reaching a state of equilibrium that some scholars of chaordic structures have written about (van Eijnatten, 2001). The 12 Service Values (which evolved from the prescriptive 20 Basics) embody such synthesis as they make available access to sufficient amounts of structure and issue creative license for organizational members to design experience, ultimately institutionalizing experience and meaning (Crossan et al., 1999).

The Hotel Luxe's design methodology requires ease with ambiguity and produces heterogeneous design outcomes consisting of *elastic structures*, valuing ambiguity of meaning over clarity, and indeterminacy and paradox over excessive disclosure (Barrett, 2002). Elastic structures refers to the expand-and-contract quality that adaptive, minimal structures elicit according to the situation at hand. Such functional equivalence (Morton, 1967; Gresov and Drazin, 1997) moves organizational actors to the edge of chaos, that point where ambiguity and the potential for innovation are greatest. As the competitive market environment in which the Hotel Luxe existed produced guests who were diverse, heterogeneous and unpredictable, elastic structures made sense. The Hotel Luxe phrase "be consistently inconsistent" best summarizes the organizational directive to embrace ambiguity; its outcomes-focused design methodology (in contrast to a prescriptive design methodology) is part of embracing the vague and ambiguous in the post-modern view of the organization (see Diagram 11). Engagement occurs at the edge of chaos; it is risky and makes the actor vulnerable, but that vulnerability is essential. Meaning that is customized and couture, not ready-to-wear, is constructed and manipulated (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) by balancing the chaordic elements of structure and chaos.

| Embrace Ambiguity | Accept vulnerability | Engage with guests | Variance in outcomes |

Elastic structures equip actors with the tools to determine the effective balance of structure and flow and deliver the most meaningful design outcomes. To this end, selection and treatment of organizational actors are pivotal. Developing actors who can adeptly distinguish between when structure is liberating and when structure obstructs process and flow is the goal. Such identification is key to maintaining the dynamic between elastic structure and flow which is alternately static and fluid. The improvisational lens reveals that meaning-making occurs because of the structures *and* because of the flow; both are necessary. This is the idea of complementarities (Milgrom and Roberts, 1995), that an organizational design should leverage inter-dependencies between organizational elements. For example, there are interdependencies between observation and intuition when Hotel Luxe staff are executing the art of anticipation. Their observation acumen is sharpened by their intuitive ability; their intuitive ability is enhanced by their observation skills. Therefore, configurations of elements, not individual elements, are appropriate levels of analysis to determine organizational fitness. In this case, configurations of the logico-thinking (operational) and emotional-feeling elements have to be considered simultaneously when designing experiential services (see Diagram 12).

Diagram 12. Configurations of logico-thinking and emotional-feeling elements

Job skill set

Observation

Intuition

Anticipation

Mystique
data base
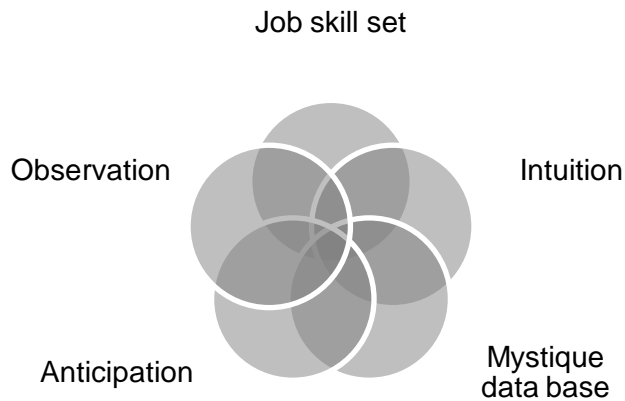
Meta-design

Sensemaking's (Weick, 2001) relevance to experiential service design has been discussed at length in Chapter 2, but in reflecting upon the larger outcomes of this study, it is apparent that sensemaking's counterpart is another critical discourse, one which I will call *meaning-making*. Actors' main acts of agency are related to meaning-making, or the management of meaning, which has to do with influencing how others understand, frame and make sense of established or new structures, practices and behaviours (Zilber, 2007). As organizational members are managers of meaning, meaning-making is key to the efforts of experiential service design. The management of meaning refers to "a process of symbol construction and value use designed both to create legitimacy for one's own demands and to de-legitimize the demands of others," (Pettigrew, 1977:85). The design tools of bricolage and emotion, useful in retrospective sensemaking are also utilized in meaning-making. The Hotel Luxe's assertion that "feelings are facts" is central to meaning-making where the design tools of intuition and anticipation are incorporated. Deciphering guests' feelings and interpreting them to design conditions for meaningful experiences transitions observations from the realm of what is perceived to what is fact.

Incremental fine-tuning is needed to interpret guests' feelings (the data) through the use of perception, observation and intuition. This study revealed that elastic structures shifted away from being minimal and simplistic to taking on more

complex iterations. As elastic structures are amplified, interlinked and reiterated in variations, then the less minimal they become and the more they serve to direct larger meaning-making processes where intuitive systems are critical for design outcomes. Legitimizing guests' demands was constituted by both change and stability, a reference back to Giddens' duality of structure (Giddens, 1979). For example, the wow story described in Chapter 4 about the staff members who improvised the design of a ramp to transport a wheelchair bound guest from the beach bar to the ocean, was amplified and interlinked for other staff during lineups when that story was retold. It served to generate larger meaning-making processes across the organization because it inspired other staff to think about ways they could turn a small observation into a meaningful outcome for a guest. Organizational members skilled at bricolage can best take advantage of elastic structures in the context of developing wow experiences by creating additional opportunities to exploit and thereby develop new ideas, make meaning and even institutionalize innovations. This meaning-making is a type of *meta-design*, where organizational actors design the design process, creating the conditions by which design can occur. There are two temporal orientations that must conjoin simultaneously in this meta-design process of meaning-making: a retrospective stance and a prospective stance (see Diagram 13). These orientations draw upon the deliberate and intentional as much as the emergent and intuitive. Designing the conditions for experiential service design requires an integration of a *retrospective stance* utilizing organizational memory and organizational artefacts (e.g., in story creation and in realization (Hatch, 1993). It occurs when ideas are brought into being and made real because values are transmitted into action through interaction with guests. The recounting of wow stories epitomized Weick's observation that there is power in retrospect (Weick, 2001). The *prospective stance* utilizes observation, anticipation and intuition; as a result, rapid prototyping occurs on a continuous, as-needed basis. This study drew attention to this dual agenda and the resulting collaborative relations between actors designing the experiential services.

Diagram 13. **Meta-Design: Posture of service incorporates a retrospective stance and prospective stance.**
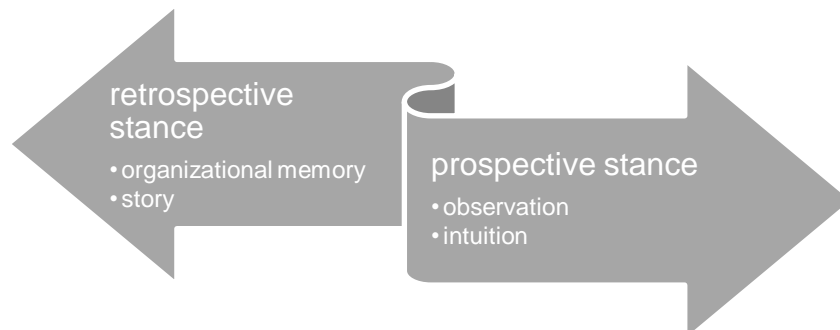
Elastic structures are conduits for designing experiential services. One interesting way to analyze elastic structure is to view the Motto as an interpretation of the language of managing services- which is different from the language of managing manufacturing, a more proscriptive and linear discourse. The language of managing services is self-reflective and recursive; it is simultaneously assertive and humble. Its reflexivity is central to actors' ability to design experiential services. Having said so, this study contributes an additionally new understanding about meta-design via the posture of service: that surrendering self and ego to the greater community and to the more expansive objective of impacting a client's life is an empowered orientation, not one of inferior submission. The posture of service revealed by this study distinguishes service from servitude, where servitude has more to do with bondage or a condition where an individual lacks liberty. The old Hotel Luxe suffered a reputation of its members repeatedly stating "At your service" and "My pleasure" so that images of butlers bowing incessantly led to an impression of robotic service. , Posture is about perception, about putting oneself in a state of mind in order to influence another's assumptions and interpretations. The Hotel Luxe's new posture of service- to humble oneself and relinquish ego while simultaneously being fully conscious of one's ability to interpret and design experiences- reveals another layer of complexity in experiential service design. The managerial expectation to produce wow experiences could faultily set up an organizational member to only look for opportunities to design grandiose wow

experiences. But the reality is that some of the best wow experiences came from small ideas and gestures requiring organizational members to have a humble stance and to enter the design of experiential services with the intention of small successes; these small successes can ultimately culminate in huge wow moments. The Motto enables an ongoing process of meta-design by organizational actors who in other contexts would be simply subservient. From this posture the conditions in which organizational members work may engender behaviour where they orient themselves (unconsciously) as designers, even if consciously they do not refer to themselves as designers.

The idea that people working in service can view themselves as designers and approach their service as a work of art advances experiential service design. Related to this unspoken self-identification as designers is the subtle reference to the artistic dimension of experiential service design. The Hotel Luxe's directive to deliver the art of anticipation, subtly references an artistic dimension in the posture of service. Viewing organizational members' work as artistic in nature is radical given the traditional posture of service in organizations such as the Hotel Luxe. Conducting the work of meaning-making goes beyond being a job, it is an organizational members' life; such an attitude is parallel to the approach that artists take. This is yet another illustration of the idea that if organizational members are trained to access the balance between structured interaction and spontaneous flow, then they will better utilize a design tool such as the art of anticipation and will self-identify more broadly.

Another dimension (see Diagram 11) in the posture of service is the aura of mystery which has become a component for enhancing design delivery. The idea that the design of the experience should not be discernible to the customer gives it an aura of mystery, or in the parlance at the Hotel Luxe, "mystique". To this end, elastic structures are enabling and mysterious platforms. Mystique breeds necessity. If the guest cannot discern "How did they know I would want that?!", then they will be motivated to return in an attempt to recapture the experience all over again. Of course, an exact replica of the experience is not possible, given the unique variables of time, actors and place, but a reverberation of experience is possible. Intuiting and engaging the emotions cultivate the more iterative aspects of experiential service design. Emotion is entwined with meaning-making as well as with cognitive processes (Barry,

1999; Forgas, 2000; Isen, 2000). Through this study we see how experiential service design gives insight about the role of emotion-spaces in processes for innovation. Emotion is both a personal and an organizational resource through which different rationalities are interpreted, contested and re-formed. The emotional elements in the Hotel Luxefeature deftly in the way meaning is constructed and experienced. Emotion-discourses allow actors to choose and select mediation of emotions for desired outcomes. Actors are deeply implicated in the social construction and feelings guests have about well-being. Skilful emotion-management with the client is key, and requires that actors be producers and mediators of well-being: "eye and ear-catching events are part of the dramaturgical armoury of the emotion change manager," (Fineman, 2006). Organizational members in experiential service design organizations are skilled mood-managers, active as stakeholders of particular emotion discourses.

The idea that a maid thinks as highly of herself as a high net-worth hotel guest sets up a feedback loop that enlivens chaordic principles: employees cannot extend to guests what they themselves have not experienced. The creation of wow experiences are expected to be as meaningful for the employees as the resulting wow experiences are for the guests. The Motto is an equalizer because it is a reminder that the humanity of the staff is paramount; leadership sees the staff's humanity first, and their operative role in the organization second, as exemplified by the respect that is accorded to each employee when their input and opinion is asked for in strategic decision making, or when they are allowed to spend up to $2000 per day in company funds to make their own decisions about designing a great experience for a guest. The actors themselves are serviced by the same principles they are expected to deliver to guests. Such a discourse serves as an equalizer 1) among staff to initiate innovative solutions, and 2) between staff and customers.

The staffs are both the product and the means by which the emotionally engaging experience is made possible. That holonic capacity gets extended even further when one deciphers that the Motto broadens the employee's self-awareness to be able to empathize with and identify with the customer and thus more readily and easily fulfil the art of anticipation. From the perspective of The Motto, individual self-organizing won't lead to anarchy due to the pride that staff has, stemming from the Motto. The Motto is their great equalizer for delivering

service design within a luxury context, imbuing service work with pride. The Motto also relates back to a statement that Dee Hock, original developer of chaordic principles, once made: "I am as great to me as you are to you; therefore we are equal" (Hock, 2005: 126). The empowerment this motto creates on the individual level encourages creative self-organizing and the legitimate use of power at the group and organizational levels. Organizational actors who self-organize without oversight or permission from management, produce strategic new directions by being creatively resourceful and making enlightened decisions about how to best interact with guests. Experiential designs are then retrospectively manifested as assumptions, as taken for granted beliefs about reality (Hatch, 1993) and also prospectively manifested as interpretations, as insights into design spaces.

Diagram 14. **Dimensions in the posture of service**
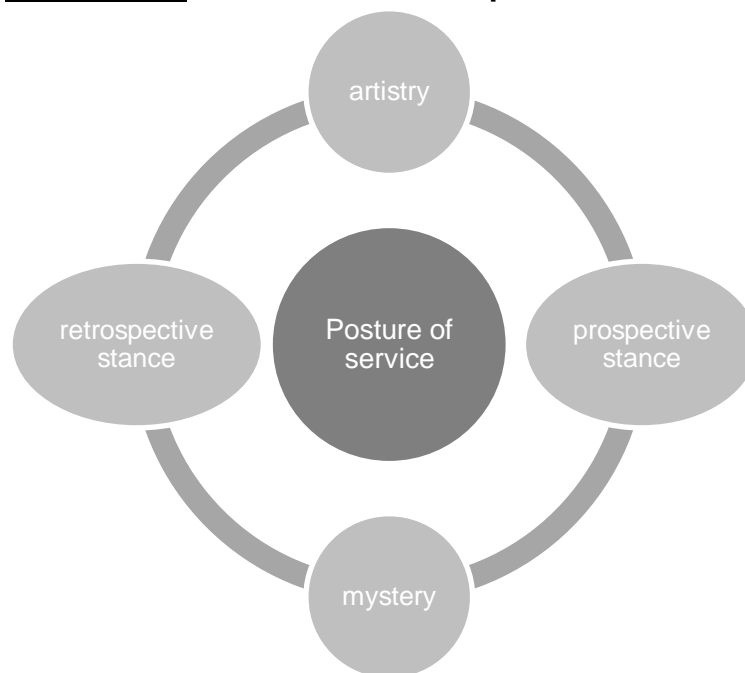
In summary, this study establishes that successful experiential service design is destabilizing, hinging on the next conundrum and the next creative resolution, positioning it along the continuum of complexity. The jazz improvisational lens shows that structure and agency are not in opposition, but rather are mutually

constitutive. Agency gets continually redistributed among the minimal structures. As such, organizational actors create experiential services from both intentional and spontaneous points of readiness, revealing once again that uncertainty is a means to the end of meaning-making. The improvisational activity that organizational members engage in when designing incorporates both the content (e.g. a wow story) and the medium (e.g. lineups) by which the content is communicated. Flow is the connective thread linking together the design spaces that are constantly reframed in the design prototyping process. Elastic structures serve to re-energize organizational philosophy and values, feeding back into the system moving as an organic whole in solidarity (Durkheim, 1933; Sharron, 1983). In the next and final chapter, I will discuss this study's two major contributions, its limitations and ideas for further research.

Introduction to Chapter 6

When I reflect on this study of experiential service design processes, I realize that there are two contributions that I have made. The first is a perspective on how experiential services can be designed better by adapting some of the design tools that the Hotel Luxe has developed. The second is an evaluation of how the improvisational lens works as an investigative tool to research experiential service organizations. In this chapter I will expand upon each of these contributions, followed by some suggestions of generalizations that could be made from this investigative study of a single experiential design organization, then review the limitations of this research and finally culminate with identification of further research and a personal reflection on this research process.

Contribution: Design Tools from the Hotel Luxe

Having discussed the major outcomes of my research question in Chapter 5, it is helpful to map out four aggregates of design tools from the Hotel Luxe that are useful for understanding the design of experiential services. Those four tools are 1) embracing errors, inconsistency and ambiguity; 2) unscripted service; 3) meta-design; and 4) elastic structures. Each of these design tools is operationalized in the complexity literature. The design tool of embracing errors, inconsistency and ambiguity, was elucidated at the Hotel Luxe through their "MR. BIVS" heuristic. Such a tool is important and useful in what the complexity literature refers to as the edge of chaos, those environments and spaces where there is turbulence and where scripted plans are not necessarily practical or useful. Unscripted service, the second design tool, develops from cultivating the skill of the art of anticipation, an orientation that the Hotel Luxe emphasizes and rewards. Without the art of anticipation, organizational actors have no reference point for using those intangible design tools of empathy, intuition or observation. The third design tool, meta-design, requires a self-reflective orientation and awareness within the organizational actor to step back and design the design process while also looking forward and anticipating. That is to say, the retrospective stance and prospective stance that have been discussed in Chapter 5 must be fully engaged.   Critical to fully utilizing this tool

is skill in the art of anticipation. The fourth design tool, elastic structures, relates back to not only the literature on complexity but also to the literature on organizational memory. It requires synthesis of structure and flow to fully design and deliver experiential services.

Diagram 15. Research Contribution- Design Tools from the Hotel Luxe
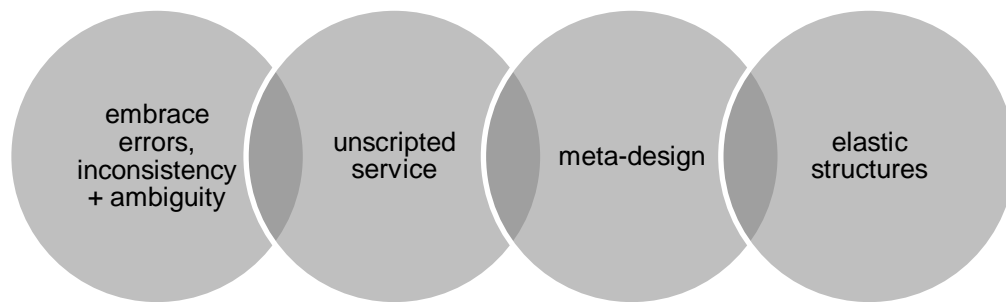
Implications for scholars: The contribution from this research of design tools used at the Hotel Luxe can prompt other scholars to investigate whether or not those tools are evident at other experiential design organizations and then do comparative studies of the extent and modes of their use. It can also prompt scholars to study if such design tools would be operationally effective in other types of service organizations. Additionally, further scholarship could be done in the hospitality industry specifically to understand the efficacy of design tools such as embracing errors, unscripted service and elastic structures. An entire focused study on how meta-design is used in experiential service organizations would help expand our understanding of the deliberate versus emergent use of design in organizations by actors who are not explicitly trained in design. In such a study it would be interesting to investigate the application of dialectics (Boje, 2008) where there are multiple interpretations by the diversity of staff about how to use these four tools at any given time, indicating that there are always other stories beyond the official narrative of a wow experience. Since organizational actors fluidly shift back and forth between being leaders and followers, they have multiple identities and thus multiple interpretations of realities and interactions. For service design research, it would also be interesting to investigate the extent to which these four tools as revealed by the

improvisational lens are means to optimize uncertainty and perhaps even prompt organizational members to view themselves as designers.

Implications for hotel managers: Hotel managers are traditionally trained to be focused on operations and consistency in quality. However, the design tools discovered from this study run tangential to such an exclusively-operations orientation and if adopted by other hotel managers would complement the traditional focus on operations, as well as assist them in dealing with uncertainty. Additionally, the design tools of embracing errors and unscripted service would reveal new things about training and management styles as they require more trusting environments where staff is encouraged to be experimental and innovative. The design tools of meta-design and elastic structures could impart new modes of management styles. These tools would also affect recruitment, as it would become more desirable to hire those who are not only operationally effective, but also have the ability to develop the intangible design tools of empathy, intuition and the art of anticipation.

Contribution: Improvisational Lens as Investigative Tool

This study identified an opportunity to apply the improvisational lens for understanding how experiential services are designed in ways that optimize uncertainty.   Historically, the Hotel Luxe prided itself on delivering reliable operational performance that produced consistently high quality service.   In contrast, jazz musicians pride themselves on producing something recognizably part of a genre that comes out differently each time (Weick, 1998). What is the bridge between these two constraints of reliability and distinctive customization? The improvisational lens connects these two values by justifying some broader limits in the design of experiential services at the Hotel Luxe where the structural boundaries of experience-design tools, such as lateral service and The Motto, are loose enough for staff to interpret what meaningful service is for each customer. For example, the improvisational lens reveals that there are new ways of understanding the art of anticipation, which is the crux of experiential service design at the Hotel Luxe. This connective function is an important contribution of the improvisational lens as methodology.

The spontaneous idea-nurturing uncovered in my research is a form of rapid prototyping in experiential services that can lead to innovation. Innovation as a result of idea transfer was an outcome in my 2007 pilot study. Voss et al. (2007) have outlined the impact of experiential service design on innovation. The improvisational lens illuminates innovations that are a result of experiential service design (Voss et al., 2007) and that contribute to methodological thinking in experience design by adding dimension to the more linearly occurring prototyping in service design and experience design methodologies. For example, the improvisational lens adds to prototype-based methodologies such as those used by the design firm IDEO (Jones + Samalionis, 2008) by contributing dimension to what is understood about design processes from the producer's perspective, an important aspect in design thinking.

Implications for scholars: This research more fully integrates experiential service design perspectives into the organizational management literature. The improvisational lens as applied to the Hotel Luxe exposes more fluid and less prescriptive modes of using experiential service design in a context which is ambiguous and unpredictable. Design's role in business contexts is unique because it accesses creative opportunities and interesting approaches to problem solving (Verganti, 2009; Martin, 2009; Esslinger, 2009). Applying concepts about jazz improvisation to experiential service design is one way of helping service brands innovate further under a common framework of thinking.

Scholars might use the improvisational lens to provide an integrative framework and a descriptive vocabulary for promoting the understanding and management of experiential service design. The framework integrates improvisational characteristics into physical evidence and service assembly dimensions of experiential service design. My research also demonstrates that the improvisational lens offers a vocabulary for translating and communicating characteristics of a particular service in terminology such as "groove", "comping" (i.e. accompanying) and "soloing" as well as "flow" and "posture of service". Thus, a helpful methodological contribution that comes from the improvisational lens is an orientation for unique and one of a kind contributions.

Implications for hotel managers: As a design tool for management, the improvisational lens can serve in planning, coordinating and implementing

experiential service design. This is a stage away from how theorists use it as a supplement to other metaphors such as the blueprinting metaphor (Kingman-Brundage, 1989; Shostack 1984a, 1984b, 1987).   The improvisational lens provides a structural model that could be applied across different services potentially leading to a cross-fertilization of concepts and strategies.

Having articulated my contributions to the field of knowledge from this single investigative study of the Hotel Luxe, there are two generalizations that can be made about designing experiential services at other hotels. One generalization is that organizations which incorporate structure and flow will be more responsive and creative in designing meaningful outcomes for customers. This will require a selection process which identifies the intuitive capacity of organizational actors and learning structures which develop the intangible design tools described in Chapters 2 and 4. A second generalization is that identifying the processes of experiential service design will be an emergent one, and that using methodologies such as the jazz improvisational lens help to make sense of how meaning is designed into experiences.

Limitations and Future Explorations

I will elaborate on four limitations of this study.   The first limitation is that this is a single company and there are limitations to "the singular case", namely the narrow scope of its applicability to other phenomena no matter how simple or complex (Stake, 2005). Had I developed a series of comparative cases, then my research would be based on more data for the purposes of comparison and contrast. Additionally, a broader set of research data could have included external informants such as hotel customers and hotel critics, which would have been useful for triangulation purposes in my methodology.   For example, a hotel critic who has a macro view of the hospitality industry may have given more insight about how common or not is the use of the more iterative dynamic of structure and flow to design experiences for guests. A second limitation is that the heuristic device I chose did not really deal with issues of dissent or power in the process of organizational improvisation- nor did I explore those perspectives in the direct process of experiential service design by examining obedience to structure versus resistance to structure. Thus a criticism of my choice of methodology is that the Barrett's 7 heuristic device is limited in what it

can reveal about disharmony in the process of designing experiential services. My analysis does not include an examination of the promotions, dismissals or similar political elements within the parameters of organizational activity; those may have yielded some additional interesting findings and through that I could have examined notions of power. Had I developed these perspectives on dissent and power then I may have netted more interesting information regarding notions of hegemony which I could have then incorporated as a significant part of this research. A third limitation is that while I believe that integrating chaordic systems thinking aided in my understanding and analysis of experiential service design, I did not in this study point out how my work contributes further to chaordic systems thinking. Had I developed more thinking in this way then I may have enriched my findings by including explanations about the extent to which experiential service design is a model for chaordic systems thinking. The fourth limitation is that my research data might have been enriched if I had been able to interview even more of the frontline staff; as it were, I was mainly directed to managers, all of whom had at one point worked on the frontline. These two perspectives are distinct within the organization and yield different characteristics about what I could have understood regarding the nature of improvisation in experiential service design and the nature of power in that process.

There are opportunities for future explorations based on this study. I examined creative self-organizing and empowerment on the individual actor level and on the group level within the organization. One area for further research would be to investigate distributed uses of power on the inter-organizational level, borrowing from the resource based view of the firm and learning how available and imitable resources are. Applying the resource based view of the firm has yet to be applied within the context of experiential service design literature. A second area for further research would be to study the extent to which the meta-design described in Chapter 5 can guide organizations in designing experiential services. Within the meta-design construct I have proposed a new concept of the posture of service, operationally defined in terms of the firm's ability to compose experiential services.

An alternative view to develop from this study is that customers are the design directors, deciding what feels right and what the touchpoints actually mean;

perhaps then the next stage of this research would be to examine experiential service design through the improvisational lens from the customer's perspective at the Hotel Luxe, or at another experiential service organization. While I did incorporate emotion as an intangible design tool, further research could explore more specifically and in depth the role of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) among actors in delivering experiential services. Another question that I would be interested in exploring further is whether or not the egalitarian and democratic tone that exists internally to the Hotel Luxe, is found in other high quality service design organizations and whether it translates over to the guests' perception. That is, do guests in a luxury context that executes experiential service design in this way view the producers of the experience as their equal, or do they continue to choose to exert the traditional hegemonic rules and assumptions about being in a luxury context? Another platform for future research is to apply the theatrical metaphor- or any other of a number of improvisational metaphors- to the Hotel Luxe or to a different experiential service design organization and discover what new knowledge is yielded in comparison to that from the jazz improvisational lens. Lastly, idea transfer and sources of competitive advantage is a topic I explored in my 2007 pilot study; conducting further investigation about whether idea transfer is a strategic resource in experiential service design and therefore imitable would also be of interest.

For me, this has been a fascinating topic to research, as it is an understudied but important area for what can be learned about experiential service design processes; for these five reasons it is worthy of further study.

Final Reflections on This Research Process

Reflecting back on my 2007 pilot study of style diffusion I now realize that the retrospective stance was present in its concept of idea generation and that the prospective stance was operative in the diffusion of style ideas to diverse industries. Some of the modes of style diffusion were improvisational and were therefore a foreshadowing of my implementation of organizational improvisation; there were both deliberate and emergent diffusion processes at work. News in this past year that the W Hotel has appointed a Global Fashion Director

(Binkley, 2010) brings this research back full-circle to my original ideas and agenda to understand patterns of idea transfer from the fashion realm, but with the added value of new perspectives on the design of experience and the delivery of meaning. I now believe I am better equipped to address the issues in my pilot study with more insight and depth.

More personally, this entire research process has been truly enlightening for me. At various interims I observed in myself interesting ways that I was connecting disparate ideas not necessarily related to this research, but reflective of a newly formed way of thinking in which I am now trained. I am confident that the efforts I will bring to the classroom as a professor and to my colleagues as a researcher will be immensely enhanced because of this intensive and invigorating intellectual process. I am extremely grateful to the mentors, colleagues and friends who encouraged me to begin this journey four years ago and who have seen me through to the end. This has definitely been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences I have ever taken on; I am confident that it will be made manifest in very creative ways in my professional and personal future.

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