

THE LADDERING TECHNIQUE

A way to conduct interviews

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What is it?

- Laddering is an interview technique used in semi-structured interviews.
- Laddering is a method that helps you elicit the higher or lower level abstractions of the concepts that people use to organize their world.
- The method is performed by using probes. Probing means to “*peel back the layers*” of the informant’s experience.
- Laddering and probing is used to: “*understand the way in which the informant sees the world*” (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).



In which situations?

Laddering is used within two streams of research:
Consumer research and organization research

- Consumer research to elicit consumers' preferences towards certain products or services.
- Consumers' preferences are categorized into three dimensions:
 - *Attributes* of a product/service
 - *Consequences*
 - *Values*
- Example:
 - Cola light



In which situations?

- Organization research to elicit values and decision making structures in organizations.
- The laddering method can be used to elicit values among managers or employees (e.g. work conditions among employees).
- Preferences are categorized into *means* and *ends*.
- Example:
 - Work conditions for employees




How is it performed?

- It is performed on the basis of a one-to-one interviewing technique.
- In consumer research, you start out by focusing on a certain product or service and its *attributes*.
- In organization research, you start out by focusing on certain *aspects* related to a specific work situation/event.
- Probes are oriented towards ‘why’-questions, i.e.:
“*Why is that (attribute/aspect) important to you?*”



Example – consumer research

- The example is based on a salty-snack study.
- The consumer is asked about the product's attributes.
- On the basis of the attributes, you start probing: *“Why is that (attribute) important to you?”*
- E.g.:

Self-esteem	(V)	
Better figure	(C)	
Don't get fat	(C)	
Eat less	(C)	
Strong taste	(A)	
Flavored chip	(A)	

- And then you draw a map (HVM) that show the different concepts and relations (ladders).



In my PhD project

- Not a product...rather an event.
- Focus is on an implementation of an Electronic Patient Record (EPR) in a Danish hospital.
- Interviews with nurses and doctors.
- *What* do nurses and doctors consider as important aspects in the EPR implementation and *why*.
- Laddering and probing as a method to study user perceptions.



In my PhD project

- 21 cards were composed before the interview, each containing an activity or aspect in the EPR implementation process at a more or less abstract level, e.g.:
 - User training
 - Support
 - Work stations etc.
- On the basis of the cards, the informant was asked: “*What do you understand by...?*” or “*what is implied by...?*”
- And then: “*Why is that [aspect] important to you?*”



Interview passage – EPR user training:

Interviewer: What do you understand by ‘EPR user training’?

Nurse: That the teacher is able to teach me the most basic functionalities in the system.

Interviewer: What do you understand by the most basic functionalities in the system?

Nurse: How to write a nursing note, save it and be able to find it again. But these functionalities also concern procedures regarding the overall hospitalization of the patient.

Interviewer: Why is it important that the teacher is able to teach you these functionalities in the system?

Nurse: Because it makes me confident when I have to use the system later on. Then I know that I will be able to carry out my work as a nurse.

Interviewer: What do you mean by ‘feeling confident’ and why is it important that you feel confident when using the system?

Nurse: Well, I wish to provide the best possible patient care...



Summary ladder:

Best possible patient care

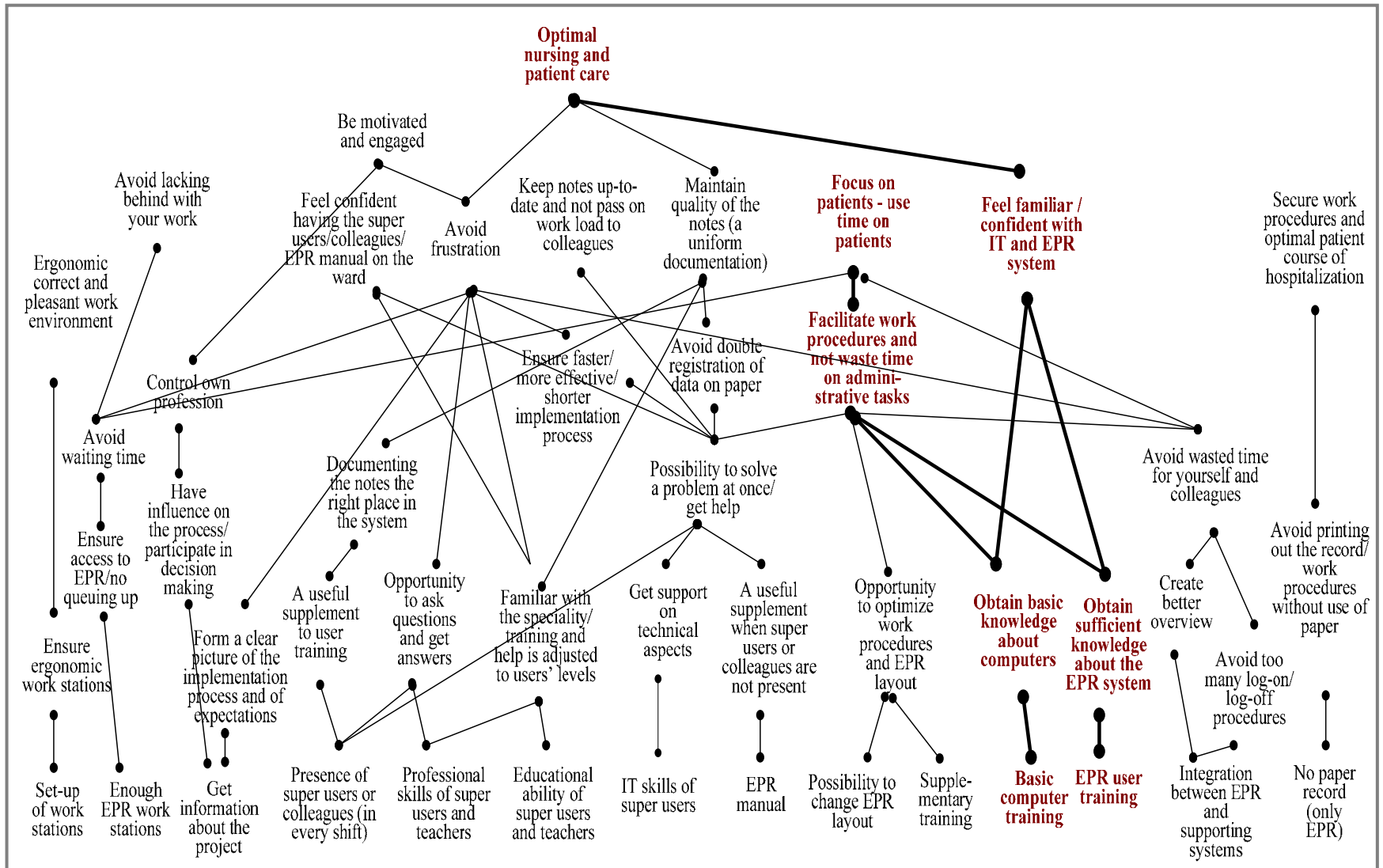
Carry out my job as a nurse

Feel confident about using the system

Being thought the most basic functionalities
in the system

The teacher's competences





Why use this technique?

- The laddering interview technique is a structured approach.
- You get to know *what* is important to the informants and *why* it is important; the values.
- The informants become very reflective.
- The informants are able to relate to this way of thinking (e.g. focus group interview).
- Remember to listen to the informants and let them talk about other aspects that are not mentioned on the cards.



Interview with Margunn

Mention three things that are important to you when conducting an interview

