A Discourse Analysis of Leadership in Non-Profit Cross-Cultural Organizations in Chiang Mai, Thailand

A Minor Field Study

Charlotte Arenander
Acknowledgements

It’s been 30 – 40 degrees Celsius almost during the entire time when I’ve been working on this thesis, and I am grateful for that since it means I got to spend these nine weeks in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Thank you Ann-Louise Silfver for granting me the MFS scholarship for this thesis!

I want to thank the people who willingly participated in an interview. You have shared many experiences and thoughts with me, which have not only made this thesis possible but also given me new perspectives and wisdom. I wish you and the organizations you are working with all the best! I would also like to thank my friends and contacts in Chiang Mai who have helped me get in contact with different people, and have supported me in other ways during my time in Chiang Mai.

And lastly I would like to thank my supervisor Elin Kvist at the sociological institution at Umeå University, for your support and guidance. You’ve been a great supervisor!
Abstract

This study is a discourse analysis of leadership among Thai staff working in non-profit cross-cultural organizations in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The purpose is to study the pervading leadership discourses, how these are affected by the fact that they are working in non-profit cross-cultural organizations, and how the staff experiences conflicting discourses in the organization. The material consists of six interviews with Thai staff. The result includes eight leadership discourses, where the two greatest are relational leadership and national culture. Relational leadership includes the importance of relationship between leaders and followers, something that also characterizes the Thai culture. The national culture discourse consists of descriptions of leadership styles that depend on national culture. Several of the other leadership discourses presented also include similarities with the Thai culture as explained by for example Hofstede (1980) and Ukosakul (2005), while others are descriptions of transformational leadership, a leadership style said by some to be universal (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1999). The leadership discourses are affected by the fact that the informants are working in non-profit cross-cultural organizations, causing for example challenges in communication. The informants also describe that they adapt to the cultures of the people they are working with, but also expect leaders to adapt to the local culture and context. Despite differences in national culture, the organizational goals create a common base. The conflicting discourses that are described have to do with national cultures, both between different national cultures, but also between culture and personality or religious discourses.

Key words: discourse analysis; discursive psychology; cross-cultural organizations; non-profit organizations; Thailand; leadership.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. 1  
Abstract .................................................................................................................................. 2  
Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 5  
  Study purpose and research questions .................................................................................. 6  
  Definition of terms .................................................................................................................... 7  
  Background – Chiang Mai, Thailand ....................................................................................... 8  
Earlier research and theoretical perspectives ......................................................................... 9  
  Discourse analysis ................................................................................................................... 9  
  Discursive leadership .............................................................................................................. 10  
  Leadership and national cultures ......................................................................................... 11  
    Cultural effects on leadership .............................................................................................. 12  
    Leadership in Thailand ......................................................................................................... 14  
    National language and discourse ...................................................................................... 17  
Method ...................................................................................................................................... 18  
  Limitations and selection ....................................................................................................... 18  
  Methodological procedure ..................................................................................................... 19  
  Method analysis .................................................................................................................... 20  
Ethics, the researcher’s role, and quality ................................................................................. 21  
  Ethics ...................................................................................................................................... 21  
  The role of the researcher ...................................................................................................... 22  
  Quality .................................................................................................................................... 23  
Empirical results and analysis ................................................................................................ 25  
  Leadership discourses .......................................................................................................... 25  
    National culture .................................................................................................................... 25  
    Leaders adapt to the context ............................................................................................... 28  
    Relational leadership .......................................................................................................... 29
Introduction

Globalization is a process characterized by worldwide interconnections and rapid, discontinuous change (Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence, & Nord, 2006). Globalization throughout the world has increased since World War II and “has created a need to understand how cultural differences affect leadership performance. Globalization has also created the need for leaders to become competent in cross-cultural awareness and practice” (Northouse, 2010, p. 335). Different cultures shape the beliefs, attitudes, opinions and behaviors of both leaders and followers (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). Since the number of cross-cultural organizations continuously are increasing, different cultures meet in the organizational context and workplace, which can lead to misunderstandings. Hyatt & Simons write (1999, p. 29):

> Understanding (cultural) codes is complex enough in our own culture. When groups of people, from different institutions and countries with different social and political histories, are brought together to perform a task that is differently perceived, there is huge potential for misunderstanding.

During the end of the 1960s the global non-profit sector began to emerge, which accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s, as a response to the vacuum in international relief and development activities left by nations and the corporate sector (Lindenberg, 1999). “…the globalization of the NGO sector is now too prominent and fast-paced to be ignored” (Lindenberg, 1999, p. 149). Anheier (2005, p. 10) writes that “the nonprofit sector has become a major economic and social force.”

Most leadership research is based in North America or Europe. Some researchers have even stated that all currently prominent theories in leadership are by North American researchers (House & Aditya, 1997). There is a need for research from other parts of the world, for example Asia. Two Thai researchers claim that “despite their considerable importance, the cultural dimensions which impact upon management have been largely ignored” (Runglertkrengkrai & Engkaninan, 1987, p. 9), referring to Thai culture and management. Thailand has been a fast growing economy the past few decades (Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2014), with a big expansion of multinational and international organizations (Rhein, 2013). Chiang Mai is a city in the northern part of the country and a cross-cultural arena with many international companies, non-profit organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For example, most NGOs working with Thailand’s 2 million Burmese refugees (Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2014) have their headquarters here (Lonely Planet, 2014). Engel
claims that “…any observer of Chiangmai today would be struck by the deep and extensive changes that have occurred as a result of expanded global interactions and socioeconomic transformations over the past quarter century” (Engel, 2005, p. 473).

Because of the large number of cross-cultural organizations, complex cultural aspects may arise. Different views of leadership can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings and ineffectiveness in organizations. This study could be of help in understanding the complexity and influence of culture on leadership. Many of the cross-cultural organizations are working with development in Thailand in different ways, and if this study could help them, the study is also supporting the goals of those organizations – development in Thailand.

This study focuses on the Thai staff in cross-cultural non-profit organizations in Chiang Mai. The reason for studying non-profit organizations is that there are few studies conducted in this kind of organization, and there is therefore a need to fill this gap. This study focuses on the followers, as opposed to the leader, which is unusual in leadership studies. The follower is the individual or group who perform under the instructions or guidance of a leader (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). Most research projects focus on the leader, but when paying attention to culture, it is obvious that if the follower’s cultural background has an impact on the way he/she views leadership; it has consequences for the leader’s ability to lead (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). It is therefore important to also focus on the follower in leadership studies.

The pervading discourses concerning leadership among the Thai staff is one of the focus points in this study. The organizational context might also affect the staffs’ understanding of leadership and therefore this will also be studied, as well as how conflicting discourses are experienced.

**Study purpose and research questions**

The purpose of this study is to conduct a discourse analysis of leadership as described by Thai staff in non-profit cross-cultural organizations in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The study aims to create an understanding of the complexity and influence of national culture on leadership, and how followers’ perceptions of leadership are affected by a cross-cultural environment.

- What are the pervading discourses concerning leadership among the Thai staff?
- How are these discourses affected by the fact that the staff are working in non-profit cross-cultural organizations?
- How does the staff experience conflicting discourses in the organization?
**Definition of terms**

The organizations the staff are working in are cross-cultural and non-profit. To be able to understand the context, a definition of these terms is needed.

**Cross-cultural** organizations will in this study include organizations that have staff from different countries.

The **non-profit** sector includes diverse organizational forms and activities, and is sometimes called the third sector, separated from the government (state/public) and the world of business or commerce (market/private) (Anheier, 2005). This study embraces Anheier’s (2005) structural-operational definition, which consists of five characteristics. First of all, a non-profit organization is *organized*, institutionalized to some extent. This can include a legal incorporation or such things as regular meetings, rules of procedures, etc. Secondly, it is *private*, in other words separate from the government and the organization does not exercise governmental authority. *Self-governing* is the third characteristic, which includes controlling their own activities and having a meaningful degree of autonomy. Fourthly, it is *non-profit-distributing*. Even though the organization may have a profit at the end of the year, the profit must go back into the organization’s mission, not be distributed to the owners, members or the board. “In this sense, nonprofit organizations are private organizations that do not exist primarily to generate profits, either directly or indirectly, and that are not primarily guided by commercial goals and considerations.” (Anheier, 2005, p. 48). And lastly it is *voluntary*, which includes two dimensions. The first is that volunteers to some extent engage in the organization’s operation and management. The second dimension is that it is non-compulsory, for example membership cannot be required by law.

Within the field human resource management (HRM) research, there is a subfield studying international HRM with multicultural enterprises being the focus of the study (Fenwick, 2005). Fenwick underscores the fact that the research conducted in this subfield doesn’t include non-profit organizations, despite the fact that these organizations are included in the definition of a multicultural enterprise. Fenwick therefore calls for an inclusion of this type of organization in the research field. Anheier (2005) also invites contributions of research regarding non-profit organizations. This study is one response to these calls.
Background – Chiang Mai, Thailand

To understand the context of the informants and the organizations that they work in, a short background is given to the country Thailand. Utrikespolitiska institutet (2014) gives the following information. Thailand is a Buddhist monarchy in Southeast Asia with almost 67 million people. The official language is Thai, but many tribal groups with their own languages and cultures also live in the country. Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that has not been colonized. Almost 750 years of independence has created a strong, national culture that is heavily influenced by Buddhism. The culture includes a strong respect for King Bhumibol Adulyadej who has reigned since 1948. The King has great informal power even though his formal power is limited. Since the beginning of the 21st century, politics have split into two main parties. There is a serious internal political conflict between these two main parties while this thesis is being written.

Chiang Mai is located in northern Thailand and has a population of 172,000 in the city, and about 1.6 million in the province (Trisila Company Limited, 2014). 80 percent of the population is local by birth while the remaining 20 percent are southern Thais, Chinese, Indians and an increasing number of foreigners (Trisila Company Limited, 2014).

Engel (2005) discuss the changes in Chiang Mai since 1975, and describes it as a social transformation because of the economic growth during the 1980s and early 1990s, and because of globalization. Engel continues to describe the effects of globalization as being more than just transnational business relations or economic development. People from other parts of Thailand or the world are encountered on the streets of Chiang Mai, and local traditions have in many cases faded or been repackaged for the sake of visitors. Examples of demographic changes, ideological changes, financial changes, technological changes, and changes in media and information are described by Engel (2005) as having effect on the residents of Chiang Mai over the past quarter century.
Earlier research and theoretical perspectives

The theoretical perspectives of this study will be presented here, along with earlier research that is relevant. This is presented in three parts: Discourse analysis, Discursive leadership and Leadership and national cultures.

Discourse analysis

In this study, discourse analysis is used since its focus is to understand the role of language in creating reality (Fejes & Thornberg, 2009). According to Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2000), discourse analysis is both the theory and the method of a study, the package that includes the ontological and epistemological premises, theoretical models, methodological guidelines and techniques for analysis of language. Discourse analysis therefore has a theoretical and methodological base that it cannot be separated from (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

Discourse analysis consists of a language philosophy that derives from structuralism and post-structuralism (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). This means that access to reality always is through language, and that representations of reality are created through language, which also creates reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). “Discursive scholars represent a constellation of perspectives united by the view that language does not mirror reality, but constitutes it. Human communication is also more than a simple act of transmission; it is about the construction and negotiation of meaning” (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1608). A goal of discourse analysis is also to conduct critical research which includes exploring existing power relationships in society and enabling social change (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

There is no consensus on what a discourse is, but one way of defining it is that it is a determined way that the world is spoken of and understood (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The fact that it is a “determined way” means that there is a framework that decides what is regarded as a truth or as correct (Börjesson & Palmblad, 2007). The basis of discourse analysis is social constructionism¹ (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). According to the authors, there are four premises that summarize social constructionism.

¹ Social constructionism is also sometimes called social constructivism (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The first concept will be used in this thesis.
A critical approach to self-evident knowledge is the first premise. This includes the perspective that our understanding of the world not necessarily is objective. Reality as we know it is a product of our categorizations of the world, not a mirror reflection. The second premise is historical and cultural specificity, which embraces that people are historical and cultural beings. Our history and culture always has implications on our understanding of the world. Our conception of the world can change over time and could have been different in a different context. Our conception is therefore contingent. Correlation between knowledge and social processes is the third premise, which means that our understanding of the world is created and maintained through social processes, meaning that knowledge is produced through social interaction. The fourth premise is the correlation between knowledge and social action. What actions that become accepted and unaccepted are determined by our conceptions of the world. The social construction of knowledge and truth therefore has social consequences, since different conceptions lead to different social actions.

In discursive psychology, a perspective within discourse analysis which will be described later, identity is seen as discursive (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). This means that individuals don’t have one fixed identity, but instead several, flexible identities which also can be in conflict with one another (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Subject positions is an important concept which includes the different ways a person can choose to convey oneself in a conversation or which subject positions one chooses to avoid (Magnusson, 2006). Magnusson states that these positions always are relational since a person always conveys him- or herself in relation to someone or something else. The chosen position is influenced by the will to appear credible (Magnusson, 2006). Collective identities can in this way also be created, for example as women or as Thai, but they are temporary since there always are several, flexible identities available (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

**Discursive leadership**

The critique that arose of the realist conception of truth during the 1960s and 1970s, led to a linguistic approach that started to take form in philosophy (Fairhurst, 2009). This also affected researchers in other social sciences, including the study of leadership and organizations. According to Fairhurst, the scholars affected by this linguistic turn use more qualitative methods, social constructionism and discourse (called discursive scholars by Fairhurst), and therefore distinguish themselves from the mainstream leadership scholars who mostly conduct quantitative studies. Regarding organization and management research, “discourse analysis
has become increasingly common” (Phillips, Sewell, & Jaynes, 2008, p. 771). Fairhurst underscores the fact that discursive scholars realize that for example post-positivistic studies also contribute to the field, but through a different perspective: “a different journey but with a common destination in view” (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1610).

There are an unending number of definitions concerning leadership. Fairhurst (2008), a discursive leadership researcher, prefers this definition by Robinson (2001, p. 93):

*Leadership is exercised when ideas expressed in talk or action are recognized by others as capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them.*

Fairhurst (2008) gives four reasons for preferring this definition. First of all, the definition places leadership in task accomplishment, that the process of influence and meaning management advances a task. Second, leadership is something recognized by others, the followers, and gives it an ‘eye of the beholder’ quality. The third reason is that the definition focuses on the processes, not only leader communication. The last reason is that leadership isn’t only performed by one person with a certain role, but can include others as well. Fairhurst (2008) therefore prefers the term ‘leadership actors’. Fairhurst (2009) means that leadership actors are agents of change, “having the ability to co-create the contexts to which they and others must respond… Even if leadership actors cannot always control events, they are still viewed as having the ability to control the context under which events are seen” (2009, p. 1608). In contrast from other mainstream researchers, discursive scholars embrace the context with its historical and cultural aspects (Fairhurst, 2009). He goes on (p. 1609):

*Those who aspire to lead must figure out what leadership is in the context of what they do and persuade themselves and others that they are doing it.*

**Leadership and national cultures**

The quote above by Fairhurst creates a need to understand what leadership is in the context of cross-cultural organizations in Thailand. This creates a need to define culture and how it might affect leadership. Culture has been defined in many different ways (Northouse, 2010). Hofstede defines culture as “the collective mental programming of the people in an environment” (1980, p. 43), while Northouse defines culture as “the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people” (2010, p. 336). Both stress the fact that culture is shared or common among a group of people.
During the past 30 years, many studies have focused on identifying dimensions of different cultures, where Hofstede is the most referenced (Northouse, 2010). Hofstede has studied national cultures and what the main dimensions that show the differences between cultures are (Hofstede, 1980). He came to the conclusion that there are four dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity, but emphasizes the fact that not every individual in a country has all the dimensions assigned to that culture. The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness research program (GLOBE), an ongoing program that has studied managers in 62 different cultures, identify nine cultural dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, power distance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation (Northouse, 2010). GLOBE researchers used these cultural dimensions to analyze the 62 countries and divided them into ten regional clusters (Northouse, 2010).

Collard (2007) is critical to this way of viewing cultures, meaning that it is positivistic and generalizes groups and nationalities. Collard states: “The key point is that cultures are in constant states of change and adaptation! Generalizations which ignore this complexity are unhelpful to researchers and leadership practitioners” (2007, p.747). Collard promotes an understanding of culture as dynamic and complex, and continuously underscores the importance for contemporary leaders to understand culture this way.

There are in other words different ways of viewing culture. This study takes a view closer to Collard (2007) than Hofstede (1980), but also realizes the advantage of trying to describe a culture at a specific time to better understand pervading discourses and reasons for actions.

**Cultural effects on leadership**

Research conducted on leadership and national culture has mainly focused on two questions (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). The first question is if there are significant leadership differences across cultures, and secondly, if leadership effectiveness is culture-specific. Many different approaches and results have been presented regarding these questions.

Den Hartog, House, Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla (1999) in combination with the GLOBE study claim that there are several attributes of charismatic/transformational leadership which contributes to outstanding leadership across the globe. These attributes are: motive arouser, foresight, encouraging, communicative, trustworthy, dynamic, positive, confidence builder, and motivational. The researchers also claim that there are charismatic attributes that are
culture-specific, such as enthusiastic, risk taking, sensitive, and compassionate. “The results support the hypothesis that specific aspects of charismatic/transformational leadership are strongly and universally endorsed across cultures.” (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1999, p. 219). Other research has also been conducted with similar results, that transformational leadership behavior generates exceptional performance (Boehnke, Bontis, DiStefano, & DiStefano, 2003). These researchers describe transformational leadership behaviors as visioning, inspiring, stimulating, coaching and team-building. “Although leaders’ applications of these behaviours will need to adapt to national differences, the transformational leadership style will universally help leaders work more effectively with people to reach their needs and create exceptional performance.” (Boehnke, Bontis, DiStefano, & DiStefano, 2003, p. 14).

Collard distinguishes between the conception of leaders as passive transmitters of dominant leadership cultures and practices, from viewing them as “learners constantly constructing and reconstructing a responsive repertoire” (2007, p. 742). He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the individual agency of leaders, including “the capacity of leaders to reflect upon and respond to diverse cultural forces and then construct new knowledge which will equip them for the diverse contexts they encounter.” (2007, p. 746). Collard means that this is a fundamental issue regarding leadership and intercultural contexts.

Collard describes what implications this has on leadership in intercultural contexts. He means that these leaders need a sophisticated understanding of culture “as a learned and adaptive response to contextual needs” (Collard, 2007, p. 750). An understanding of culture as consisting of multiple elements that are fluid and dynamic, and how one element in a culture can cause changes in other elements. Collard means that a first step of intercultural understanding is an understanding of the ethnic and national cultural maps, but the next step includes the understanding of the complexity and dynamic characteristic of cultures. Collard explains Pierce’s definition of intercultural competence as a “capacity to recognize the cultural origins of knowledge and values, incorporate alternative frames of reference into knowledge construction, learn from and with people from other cultures and apply ethical choices which recognize the complexities of cultural interaction” (Collard, 2007, p. 745). A leader’s self-concept is also important, where he/she should be a reflective learner with

___________

2 The original source was not found and therefore a secondary source was used. This is the reason for any usage of secondary sources in this thesis.
cultural sensitivity (Collard, 2007). They need to understand the complexity and then be a mediator between the diversity, building bridges between them. “Leaders are also required to become transformative cultural agents working to create reflexive institutions and systems” (Collard, 2007, p. 751).

Wang (2004) has studied the influence of international education (Western leadership discourse) on Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership. When comparing the leaders’ conceptions before and after the educational program, Wang describes a more complex and diverse understanding of the concepts after the program. She also suggests that leadership is value-based and contextualized, and problematizes the transplanting of Western theories to non-Western countries “without considering local contexts and cultures” (Wang, 2004, p. 282). Wang describes a tension between different cultural forces in the education program. She writes (Wang, 2004, p. 283):

This study suggests that intercultural interaction is a complex and multidimensional process. (...) It is a process of interaction where individual players consciously mediate between cultures and choose to amalgamate knowledge and values from both in unique ways.

Collard discusses Wang’s research and mean that the Chinese leaders are not “frozen in a static, inherited culture” (Collard, 2007, p. 748) as some cross-culture theorists would say, but the leaders show that they can be critical of their own culture and embrace other cultures.

**Leadership in Thailand**

Despite the fact that Hofstede’s perspective on culture is not in its whole adapted in this thesis, an understanding of the general Thai culture can still be important for analysis of the pervading discourses concerning leadership, which Collard (2007) also describes as a first step in working with diversity. This can contribute to an understanding of the social context, which is important in discourse analysis. Thailand is categorized by Hofstede (1980) as being a nation high on power distance, high on collectivism, high on certainty avoidance and high on feminity. His ways of defining these concepts are explained below.

*High power distance* means that power inequality in organizations is highly accepted in the society (Hofstede, 1980). In Thailand, this is expressed by the fact that people high in the hierarchy often have an unusual high level of personal esteem (Rhein, 2013). *Greng-jai* is a Thai word that can be translated as social deference, and is something that is given to those high in the hierarchy (Rhein, 2013). The Thai language also includes honorifics for social
standings such as age, gender, position or occupation (Rhein, 2013). “The effect this (high power distance) has is tremendous as most people will wait for decisions to be made by those of senior status and authority and avoid proactive behaviour” (Rhein, 2013, p. 45).

Collectivism, as opposed to individualism, implies a tight social framework where the difference between in- and out-groups is important (Hofstede, 1980). The group’s needs come before one’s own needs (Rhein, 2013) and the group is expected to look after one another (Hofstede, 1980). Collectivism implies that consensus in the group is more important than revealing one’s own opinion, and those who have ignored this aspect might find themselves unemployed (Rhein, 2013). Rhein also means that this strengthens the legitimacy of the ruling elite.

High uncertainty avoidance means that uncertainty and ambiguous situations are considered a threat in the society, and is avoided if possible (Hofstede, 1980). This includes not tolerating deviant ideas or behaviors, creating formal rules and a strong urge to work hard. Rhein (2013) means that this aspect leads the Thai’s to stability in family, work and life, since they avoid behavior that is uncertain.

Rhein’s (2013) description of the Thai culture as feminine, as opposed to masculine, includes a desire for social harmony, conflict avoidance and the establishment of social relationships. Since conflicts are avoided, organizational change is hard since change creates some conflicts. Happiness and pleasure is also included as components of femininity (Rhein, 2013).

Smuckarn (Runglertkrengkrai & Engkaninan, 1987) describe, among other things, the Thai culture as being more relationship-oriented than task-oriented. Runglertkrengkrai & Engkaninan (1987) study the behavior of Thai managers in relation to the Thai culture. Their study showed that 69 percent of the managers located themselves somewhere between the relationship- and task-oriented extremes. 31 percent were task-oriented. According to the authors, the latter shows the effect of new values in the Thai culture, while the first is an expression of the Buddhist Middle Path and therefore in line with the traditional Thai culture.

Another research by Komin & Smuckarn referred to by Runglertkrengkrai & Engkaninan (1987), study the differences between urban and rural Thai values. Their results show that because of the changes in the economic and social context, the urban Thai no longer adhere to the traditional Thai values, but instead have values more associated with Western culture.
Ukosakul (2005) describes the importance of ‘face’ concerning social interaction in the Thai culture. Included in this is the concept of maintaining one’s face, which means protecting a person’s honor or self-esteem and therefore avoiding behavior that can cause shame to another person. Ukosakul writes (2005, p. 124):

_In order to protect the ‘face’, the Thai has mechanisms to help one maintain smooth relationships with others. These politeness strategies such as indirectness, avoidance of confrontation and criticism, suppression of negative emotions, and greng-jai help ensure that the dignity of a person is protected as much as possible._

Indirectness is a politeness strategy that involves not directly expressing one’s opinion or wish in order to not lose face, either one’s own or the person speaking with (Ukosakul, 2005). By speaking indirectly through hints, neither person will lose face since they are for example not saying ‘no’ directly, but instead hinting the answer. The second politeness strategy is avoidance of confrontation and criticism. Since the rejection of one’s ideas is seen as a rejection of the person, it is important not to humiliate anyone in public. Suppression of negative emotions is a third politeness strategy that makes sure interactions are smooth and conflicts not apparent (Ukosakul, 2005). Being self-controlled, calm and collected is valued as strength, despite what feelings are on the inside. Ukosakul describes the fourth politeness strategy, greng-jai, as a concept “which underlies much of everyday interpersonal behavioral patterns of the Thai” (2005, p. 122). Greng-jai has to do with consideration and respect for other people’s feelings, and is also another way to maintain smooth relationships and avoid conflicts. This concept has two consequences according to Ukosakul. First of all, a person is obligated to do what he/she may not want to do, and secondly, a person will not always be able to do what he/she wants to do. For example (Ukosakul, 2005, p. 123):

_A asked to borrow B’s car. Because B greng-jai his friend, B will let A use the car even though he is not too happy about it. B does not want to cause any ill-feelings between A and himself. However, if A had greng-jai B in the first place, A would not have directly ask to use the car even though he needed to use one badly._

Like mentioned earlier, these ways of categorizing and generalizing people and cultures is not in its whole adopted in this thesis, but it is used to understand some dimensions in the Thai culture. Even though it is a simplified way of understanding culture, this study does assume that there are cultural differences between groups of people, even though there are no strict
boundaries and that culture is continuously changing. Through this simplification, the theories can be one way of understanding people, their behaviors and discourses. Hand in hand with this, comes the fact that cultures are dynamic and complex (Collard, 2007).

**National language and discourse**

Jepson’s (2010) research covers an area which she means often is neglected, the impact of national language on an individual’s order of discourses, especially concerning leadership. She states (2010, p. 425): “National language is argued to be setting boundaries to an individual’s sense-making of leadership through its fundamental influence on an individual’s conversational repertoire.” Jepson uses the words ‘leadership’ and ‘manager’ as examples, two concepts that among Anglo-Saxon scholars is an uncontested assumption that the two concepts exists and are important concepts within organizations. She goes on to write that in for example the German language, these concepts do not have a perfect match in regards to the English words. “Subsequently, language cannot be seen as a neutral tool of communication but rather as a tool shaping individual thought (denotation) and action (connotation).” (Jepson, 2010, p. 427). Jepson means that the national language is a cultural discourse which then also is a level within an individual’s order or discourses. Although she states that national language affects the individual’s theories of leadership, she means that “it may not always be at the top of the order of such discourses” (Jepson, 2010, p. 442).
Method

This study is a discourse analysis which not only gives a theoretical base, but also methodological guidelines (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The discourse analysis is a tool that fits well in regard to the study purpose and the research questions, since the focus is on the pervading discourses, how these are affected by the context, and how the staff experience conflicting discourses concerning leadership in the organization. Social constructionism implicates that a person always affects and is affected by one’s context (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000), and in this study the context is a cross-cultural non-profit organization in Thailand. Discourse analysis is a tool in deconstructing the informants’ words to see what truths are created through their descriptions (Fejes & Thornberg, 2009).

Most research regarding leadership has been conducted through quantitative methods (Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence, & Nord, 2006), so more qualitative research is needed, where this study is one contribution. Discursive scholars are problem oriented, digging deep into the context, asking descriptive questions such as how or what (Fairhurst, 2009). They are not interested in generalization, but instead have particularity as a research goal (Fairhurst, 2009). Discourse analysis is not a very common method in earlier leadership studies, especially not regarding leadership in non-profit, cross-cultural organizations in Thailand. Discourse analysis can be used on a wide range of data (Bryman, 2002). The purpose of this study is not something that is found in existing documents, and therefore the data has been gathered. The study consists of half-structured interviews with 6 informants. It is also a reasonable amount considering the ten weeks (including opposition seminars) that were given to complete this thesis.

Limitations and selection

The chosen type of organizations is specific, which narrows the possible informant population. Since it is also important that all the informants speak English and are willing to participate in an interview, a convenience selection is the best, also in regards to the time limit. Considering the fact that it is hard to find information regarding cross-cultural non-profit organizations in Chiang Mai, personal contacts was a good way of getting in contact with these organizations. Because of the researcher’s previous history in Chiang Mai, there were a number of contacts that helped with this. Despite being available during the appointed time span and having a mix of organization types (within cross-cultural non-profit organizations), the criteria when choosing informants were these: currently working in a
cross-cultural non-profit organization, can communicate fluently in English, is a Thai citizen and an equal number of men and women.

Of the six informants, three of them were women and three of them were men. They worked in cross-cultural non-profit organizations such as schools, Christian mission organizations, and human rights organizations. The organizations’ country origins differed: Thailand, Sweden, American or collaborations between several countries. The informants’ ages were a range between being in their twenties to in their sixties and the amount of years that they had worked in these kinds of organizations was from just a few years to over twenty years. Several of the informants have lived in North America for shorter or longer periods of time.

**Methodological procedure**

An interview guide was written (appendix 1) and the interview questions were written in regards to each research question to keep a clear structure throughout the entire study. Discourse analysis usually asks “how” and “what” questions (Fairhurst, 2009), which was applied to the research questions as well as the interview guide. A small pilot study was done in Sweden beforehand, to test the interview guide and study purpose.

When in Thailand, the interviews were started with an introduction of the researcher and a general explanation of the study. The informants were asked if it was ok if the interview was recorded, which all agreed to. After answering eventual questions, the interview proceeded according to the interview guide. The interview guide was not followed exactly, sometimes the informant had already answered a question and sometimes the question was not relevant for that person, but all areas were covered. At the end, the informants were given the possibility to ask questions and it was made sure that the informants had the researcher’s contact information. The interviews were between 60 and 80 minutes long.

In most cases the interviews were held in a location that the informant had chosen, for example at the organization. It was important to conduct the interview in a place where the recording would not be disturbed by different sounds. This led to the fact that the recordings were of pretty good quality. The interviews were also recorded on two devices, in case there would be any problems with one of the recordings.

After the interview the recordings were transcribed word by word. Since the analysis is not a grammatical one, the transcriptions are in some cases corrected with correct English so that it would be easier to understand when analyzing and quoting, but the changes were minor.
Method analysis

The method analysis’ techniques in discourse analysis vary greatly, both in general and within different perspectives of discourse analysis (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The analysis of this study has taken inspiration from discursive psychology. The purpose of discursive psychology is to explore how people strategically use discourses in social interaction to describe themselves and the world in certain ways, and what social consequences this has (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). It has its roots in social psychology, but exists as a critique of cognitive psychology (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Cognitive psychology includes the perspective that human actions are effects of something inside the individual, such as feelings or attitudes (Börjesson & Palmblad, 2007). This means that a certain action corresponds with a certain feeling or thought, something that discursive psychology researchers don’t agree with (Börjesson & Palmblad, 2007). Discursive psychologists mean that the repertoire always is limited by history, culture and genres, and that speech instead should be linked with cultural and social fields. This perspective corresponds well with the purpose of this study since the cultural field is one context that is highlighted in relation to the informants’ discourses.

The fact that this study has decided the context beforehand (non-profit cross-cultural organizations) does differ from discursive psychology (Börjesson & Palmblad, 2007), but during the interviews the informants have been able to talk freely. The purpose of the context constriction is to narrow the study. The social interaction and language used in a specific situation is the focus of the discourse perspective (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000), which also is true in this study. Magnusson (2006) writes that discursive psychologist researchers mean that every-day talk is one of the core situations where people’s psychological and relational matters occur, which makes these situations important to study. The focus is not the grammar part of the language, but instead the language in use, the discourses (Magnusson, 2006). This is the case in this study, also due to the fact that the informants are speaking their second language. Jepson (2010) means that national language is one discourse that affects an individual’s possible discourses. The researchers using discursive psychology don’t separate the individual from its context, but instead see these as one unit, since the individual and the context mutually create each other (Magnusson, 2006).
Discursive psychology is therefore used as an inspiration in this study. The main influence is that there are fields and contexts which affect the discourses of the informants, such as national culture and the organizational characteristics.

The first step of analysis in discursive psychology is coding (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). This is also the first step that was used in this study. With the research questions as the base, the transcriptions were read and re-read to become well acquainted with the material and writing notes as different things came to mind. The interviews were then read again, focusing on one research question at a time, coding the material along the way. The codes were structured in an Excel document, with different colors for each informant. After the coding, the codes were organized in themes/discourses. When this was done, the different colors clearly showed what discourses had been used in the different interviews. This was important to make sure the discourses presented in the result were not just used in one or two interviews, but in most of them. This same procedure was conducted for all three research questions. The interviews were then read again to make sure the discourses were correctly understood. The different subject positions that were chosen by the informants throughout the interviews were also studied in regards to the discourses, since this is an important concept in discourse analysis, especially in discursive psychology (Magnusson, 2006).

Ethics, the researcher’s role, and quality

Ethics
There are four principles regarding research ethics according to Swedish Vetenskapsrådet (2002). The first one, the information requirement (‘informationskravet’), includes informing the participants of the purpose of the study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). This has been done both before the actual interview, when they were asked if they wanted to participate, but also before the interview started. I also told them that the interview would take about one hour. In a few cases, I did not have direct contact with the informants before the interview since this was done through my contacts, and in these cases I was extra clear about the purpose of my study before the interview was started. In all cases I asked if they had any questions before we started. I made sure to ask them if they wanted to participate and also asked if it was okay that I recorded the interview. All participants agreed to this. At the end of the interview I also made sure that all informants had my contact information so that they could contact me if they had any further questions. To most of the informants I also gave a document (appendix 2) with the purpose of the study, my contact information and thanking them for their
participation. In a few cases I forgot to give this, but in these cases the informants already had my contact information. Through all this, I fulfilled the information requirement.

The second principle is the consent requirement (‘samtyckeskravet’), which means that each participant has the right to by themselves decide whether they would like to participate or not (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). Like stated earlier, I didn’t have contact with all the informants before the actual interview. This means that I do not know how my contacts approached them, but I made sure that I in the beginning of the interview made clear that their participation was voluntary, and asked if they would like to participate. During the interview I also made sure in the best way I could that I didn’t pressure the informants in any way, if they would like to quit. Through this I achieved the consent requirement in the best way I could.

The confidentiality requirement (‘konfidentialitetskravet’) is the third principle, which means that the information about the informants should be treated confidentially (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). During the transcriptions I made sure that any information that can reveal the informant’s identity was anonymized, as well as names or other information. In this thesis I have made sure that the informants cannot be identified, as far as it is possible. Before the interview I also told the informants this, so that they could feel safe in telling me things that can be sensitive. Talking about leadership can be sensitive since things about the person’s boss or organization can be revealed. Through doing these different things I have tried to achieve the requirement of confidentiality.

The last principle is the usage requirement (‘nyttjandekravet’), meaning that information about the informants only can be used for research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). I have not used the information for anything else than for this thesis and will not do so in the future either, and therefore I have fulfilled this requirement as well.

The role of the researcher

I lived in Chiang Mai between the ages of six and fifteen. My parents have worked in cross-cultural non-profit organizations and I have grown up in this type of organization, for example the international schools I have attended. After high school I also spent one year in Laos working in a cross-cultural team. These experiences have been the reason for finding this area interesting to study and have brought many experiences and lessons that have been helpful when conducting this study. I also understand that these experiences affect my role as a researcher. The social constructionist perspective that this study is built upon, applies as much to me as a researcher as it does to the informants. This means that this text is one description
of reality; it is not reality itself (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). The researcher is a part of constructing reality and even more so since I have conducted the interviews and therefore been a part of shaping the actual text. The fact that I am a white woman, third-culture kid, university student, Swedish, former Chiang Mai resident, international school student, etc., most certainly shapes this study. I have therefore done my best to be transparent by thoroughly describing the process of the study.

The fact that I did grow up in Chiang Mai has given me many advantages because of the contacts that I have. This in turn has given me informants, and most likely also the trust of the informants. It may also have affected what they said during the interview. They may have either told me more since they somehow identify with me, or they may be scared, despite promised anonymity, what will happen with the information they give me since I know people they know. Because of this I have chosen not to interview people who work in organizations I know very well, for example the organizations that my parents have worked with.

Like discussed above, there are both advantages and disadvantages of being a former Chiang Mai resident, but without the contacts that this has given me, it would have been hard to conduct this study.

**Quality**

Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2000) mean that discourse analysis researchers view their own works as discursive constructions in the same way that they view other texts. One way of reality is portrayed through this thesis, one among many. This does not mean that the researcher can do whatever he/she likes, but reflexivity is important (Fejes & Thornberg, 2009). The fact that the researcher of this study is a Swedish woman studying at university who grew up in Chiang Mai is something that most definitely has affected this study. It has affected the chosen purpose, the interviews and the analysis of the results. Even though I have tried to see beyond my own experiences and discourses, I am not neutral in conducting the analysis. This thesis shows the results in one of several ways to portray and problematize the informants’ discourses, but through a clear description of the method and procedure, transparency has been the goal of this thesis. Fejes & Thornberg (2009) means that a study has been trustworthy if the arguments and analysis is considered to be reasonable. In other words, the reader of the thesis should be able to follow the different steps of the analysis, which has been the goal. Börjesson & Palmblad (2007) differ between material that already exist and material that the researcher has been a part in creating. The latter is true in this
study, since the material consists of interviews conducted by the researcher. Despite this, I have to the best of my abilities tried to let the informants steer the conversation, as long as the research questions were answered.

Reflexivity also includes considerations concerning power relations between the researcher and the informants (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). As a researcher, I am in charge of the agenda. I am the one with the interview questions and the subject. I am also a young white woman and university student, which affects the power relationship between the informants and me in different ways. I have tried to show them that this study is interested in the informants descriptions and understandings, their experiences. Despite this, I know that my experiences and discourses have affected my questions and reactions, and also my analysis of the discourses.

Once again, transparency has been a goal regarding the procedure throughout the study. Yet this study is one description of reality, not reality itself.
Empirical results and analysis

The result and analysis is presented in three parts which derive from the study’s three research questions. The headings are Leadership discourses, Cross-cultural non-profit organizations as the context and Discourses in conflict. When realizing that most of the informants have worked in cross-cultural non-profit organizations earlier, their experiences from these organizations were also talked about during the interviews. Some of the examples might therefore be from previous work places.

Leadership discourses

In this first part, the informants’ leadership discourses will be presented and the first research question is answered: What are the pervading discourses concerning leadership among the Thai staff? Among the informants there are many different experiences and explanations of leadership and of what a good leader is. While some say that leadership depends on the type of organization or country, others claim that leadership includes the same criteria regardless of situational context. Some claim both. Some of the informants made a distinction between a leader and a boss. One of them says, “…a boss, is someone who is sitting on a chair and you got employees they just like drag that chair for you. But a leader is someone who is down there with the employees and pulls that chair together…“.

Jespon (2010) has studied the importance of language concerning leadership discourses, and means that national language sets boundaries on a person’s understanding of leadership. Language is therefore not a neutral tool of communication. This should be kept in mind since the informants have all used their second (or third) language during these interviews.

Eight different discourses have been identified as the main pervading discourses among the informants. The different discourses exist among several of the informants, and several of the discourses exists within each interview. These discourses will be presented in the following order: National culture, Leaders adapt to the context, Relational leadership, Unemotional leaders, Decision makers and controllers, Leaders engaging followers, Taking the lead and Religious discourse. These discourses will be followed by a short summary.

National culture

A major pervading discourse among the informants is national culture. Different expectations of leadership are often explained by the fact that “I’m Thai” or that people with different national cultures expect different things from a leader.
...sometimes Thai people, I don’t know how to say, they say greng-jai, the word greng-jai, you might have heard that. Because it’s like your boss or things like that, if you have a Thai boss come and talk to you, you will like ah graingjai and you won’t say something directly or you will say it very politely to them. (...) Like if a foreigner boss will ask, ‘how much you want for salary for this position?’ I might say like ok 40 000-50 000. Because I think that I should get this much because I have a lot of responsibility that I have to take or I have to face or things like that. But if a Thai boss came and asked me I would say that ‘it’s up to you’.

This informant explains how she would act differently depending on which nationality her boss had. In this case, she explains how she as a follower adapts to her leader, because of differences of national culture. A Thai boss would expect her to be/feel greng-jai, while she means that a foreign boss would expect something else and she therefore acts accordingly. Ukosakul (2005) describes greng-jai as being a politeness strategy of maintaining one’s face and smooth relationships. She points to the importance of this in the Thai culture, which the informant also does. The informant also talks about not directly saying what salary she wants to her Thai boss, which Ukosakul also means is a politeness strategy to not lose face in the Thai culture. Another informant also describes the followers’ expectations of a leader depending on cultural context:

I think different people might think based on their culture. I don’t think a good leader for Burmese people would be the same as my leader. I think it depends on the context of their country. Someone might want to have very bureaucratic leaders, especially for the country with a conflict. They want to solve it in a very soon time, so they need someone very structured and make use of problems quite strongly. So even in the organization as well I think it depends on the context of the country and the people that grow up in that context. They might have different leaders compared to me.

In this previous quote, the informant describes not only the country’s culture, but how the context of the country, for example a national conflict, affects peoples’ understanding of leadership. This is something that Wang’s (2004) research also showed, that leadership is contextualized and that local contexts and cultures need to be considered.

One informant describes his experiences of leaders from different countries this way:

So it’s quite different, you know. I can compare the Swedish leader, the American leader and the Thai leader (...) with the Swedish leader I think we are quite lucky. The style of leadership is quite flat. Flat leadership. So we
have a voice, we have an opportunity to respond, we have space for discussions. It’s more democ... how to say? It’s the way of the democracy you know. We have some space that we can put our voice on it. And then the decisions are also very transparent. Very transparent. But if we are talking about the American leaders, what they like to call boss by themselves instead of leader, this is also a different wording you know. I think they like to use their power if compared to Swedish. And the management style is about top-down, managing top-down. (...) Thai is more on the culture, you know, Thai is depend on the person as well. Because Thai is a little bit flexible, sometimes too much flexible, you know the flexibility to stuff is quite a lot. But I think they are in between. Sometimes they may use power, sometimes, how do you say, the management skill is not really being used, it’s more on cultural style. You know Thai culture is flexible, you can be late sometimes, this kind of thing. So sometimes, when we are talking about the deadline and things like that, that will be some challenge for Thai leaders. If we compare Swedish is very on-time, American also. But the way of management style is different, you know.

This informant’s experience of leaders from different countries is quite different, despite the fact that all these leaders were living in Thailand. The differences are explained as being because of culture, but when he describes the Thai leader, he means that it is also dependent upon the person, but the Swedish and American leaders are thought to behave this way because of their national culture. Perhaps this is because he has experienced a greater number of Thai leaders and therefore also a greater diversity.

Another informant also says that there are differences between Thai and foreign leaders: “You know Thai and foreigner is different. For Thai is more, I mean, control, right. And for foreigners, when they give something for me to do, they don’t come and check, right. They just see, ok, success or not, only. But for Thai leaders it’s always check”. Many informants use the concepts “Thai” and “foreign” or “Western” when talking about cultures, but sometimes they also use the specific countries to describe leaders.

The hierarchical structure involving age and position is something that is explained to be a part of the Thai culture. One informant says:

I think it’s kind of Thai too, you know the word greng-jai, in Thailand? (...) means like we feel so sorry with something if, when we hurt someone or when we do something wrong to someone or something like that. (...) Like for me, I’m the one that is really the youngest in this workplace. So when I come in, even if my position is like higher than someone and I can like order them to do
something, but no, I’m not gonna do like that. I need to please them and ask them really nicely, and don’t make them angry. Because even though they know that they need to do something that I ask for, but, you know it’s kind of, it’s about the age. That we’re different. And I still need to respect them in the way that they are like elder. (...) It’s kind of like psychology, sometimes we need to pretend like ‘ah, I cannot do it, can you help me?’

Age is therefore a factor in how leadership is described and viewed. Position is another factor that places people on different levels in the hierarchy, and both these things are considered a part of the Thai culture. Hofstede (1980) explains this hierarchy by placing Thailand as a high power distance society, where greng-jai is given to those high in the hierarchy. But through this quote, and also through Ukosakul’s (2005) description, greng-jai is not described as something just given to those high in the hierarchy, but in all social interaction in the society. But position is still highly valued in the Thai culture, another informant says:

...Thai people who teach the younger ones: study well so that you will become the boss of others. So in other words, the motif of many people who will be in the leadership position is to be above others (...) not only because if you study hard you will earn more in the future, probably most cultures will talk about that, but to become a boss inclining that you will be above others, this is important here.

For many of the informants, the subject positions that they place themselves in varies. Sometimes they say “I’m Thai” as an explanation of their behavior or as to not understanding other people’s behavior. Other times, the informants talk about “Thai” as something other than themselves. It seems as though they have an ambivalent relationship to their nationality and culture. If this is because of the fact that they are working with people from many different cultures is not studied in this thesis, but since they often say that they’ve gotten used to the foreign culture or adapted, this fact seems to have influenced their subject positions.

**Leaders adapt to the context**

One informant describes a person that she thinks is a good leader:

... (she) knows how to drive and drive to the village, you know on the road that is not a good road, and she can sit and eat with the hill tribe people, like you know sit on the floor and use hands to eat and to, because when you work with cross-culture, you should do the things that the hill tribe people that you work with do, you know. Cause some, I will see some, I see they have trouble working with the hill tribe people because cross-culture they cannot, how do
you say (adapt?), yeah adapt so they have a problem. But my leader or my idol has to be, things like that.

This informant describes qualities of a good leader as being able to adapt to the culture he/she is working in. This is something that other informants also have described. Talking the Thai language is one part of this, but an understanding of the context and local culture is included in being a good leader. Another informant says: “a good leader who understands the culture or who understands the context, that is very important”. This is something that Collard (2007) also points out as important. The informants don’t say that the leader should be from a certain country or culture, but they say that the leader needs to be able to learn and adapt. Collard (2007) views leaders as individual agents who reflect on the cultural forces that exist, and then construct new knowledge for the contexts that they are in. He says that the first step is an understanding of the cultural map of the context, and then also understanding the complexity and dynamic characteristic of culture. If a leader has this capacity, it would also fulfill the requirements of the informants.

The discourse that leaders are expected to adapt to the context will also be addressed in *Cross-cultural non-profit organizations as the context*.

**Relational leadership**

The discourse that gets the most attention in all of the informants’ descriptions of leadership is relational leadership. When they describe what a leader is and give examples of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ leaders, a lot of the things have to do with the leader being relational. A good leader has a relationship with the followers. Some of the phrases used are: “friendly”, “went to have lunch with us”, “takes good care of people”, “loves her staff”, “good listener” and “genuinely cares”. One informant expressed his expectations of a leader like this:

...it’s very comforting, you know, you are just an employee but your leader or your boss actually knows you, knows your name and actually cares about you. That’s what I expect from a leader. And I guess maybe it doesn’t hurt to be a little personal, you know to get to know a person on a personal level, it helps a lot when, you know, you interact with other people. Because when you lead someone you have to know who you are leading. And to get to know them you will find their potentials and their strengths and their weaknesses.

The informants expect that a leader cares for the followers, listens, have good relationships and knows how to work with different kinds of people. In research, this is often referred to as a relationship-oriented leader as opposed to a task-oriented leader (Runglertkrengkrai &
Engkaninan, 1987). The informants underscore the fact that the tasks and results of their work is less important than being a relational leader: “So leadership doesn’t just get the job done, but also for me, how the job is done is important too. Which means sometimes in the process you must be willing even to delay our agenda.” Another informant expresses her thoughts:

...take a good care of people that are under you and care for them and also you can help when they need you, sometimes they can have a, they get weak and they have a, how can I say, they get a problem in their family so sometimes when you come to work in the morning you just want to start with your job but sometimes when you, when people came to see you and would like to talk about their problems so you have to be ready.

The result or task-oriented way of viewing leadership has not been portrayed much in the informants’ descriptions, but instead other values have been described, mostly relational values. The leaders’ specific knowledge or skills have been mentioned a few times during the interviews, but are also then often about relational skills such as good communication skills or interpersonal relationship skills.

According to Hofstede (1980) the Thai culture is collectivistic and feminine, which both include relational aspects. This includes looking after one another in the group as well as well as a desire for social harmony. In other words, this leadership discourse could be an expression of the Thai culture, manifesting itself in the way that these informants view leadership. Runglertkrengkrai & Engkaninan (1987) describe similar aspects of the Thai culture, meaning that it is more relationship-oriented than task-oriented, which is also expressed in this study. On the other hand, Runglertkrengkrai & Engkaninan’s research shows that a majority of the Thai managers located themselves somewhere between relationship- and task-oriented, and also mean that the urban Thai no longer adhere to the traditional Thai values because of the social and economic changes that have occurred in the country. In this study, the informants clearly express a relationship-oriented style of leadership, which would then in some ways contradict with this.

On the other hand, these Thai informant work in a specific type of context that might create a need of a more relational leadership style. The fact that the informants work in non-profit organizations include the fact that they are not working to make money, but other values and goals are more important. This might include the fact that relationships in the workplace are highly valued. The fact that the organization is cross-cultural, means that people from
different nationalities are working together. This might also demand higher relational skills to be able to handle the cultural differences.

**Unemotional leaders**

“Yeah since he works here I’ve never seen anger, angry from him, always friendly and greeting people”, that’s how one of the informants describes a positive characteristic of her leader. Another informant says: “You should not get frustrated easily, that emotion cannot solve the problem”. Yet another describes a good characteristic of her leader this way:

> And not emotional. Maybe in a private zone, but I mean like in the workplace, sometimes we, like her and us the followers, sometimes we have something that we don’t agree in the same way and argue sometimes, but she still can like control her mood and keep the meeting going.

In other words there is a discourse concerning not being emotional as a leader. Ukosakul (2005) means that the suppression of negative emotions, which is what the informants describe, is a politeness strategy of maintaining one’s face. Showing anger is not a part of maintaining one’s face, but instead being self-controlled, calm and collected is valued (Ukosakul, 2005), which the informants also describe. In other words, this is a leadership discourse that can be described as being influenced by national culture.

**Decision makers and controllers**

This discourse is not existent among all the informants, in fact this discourse and the next, Leaders engaging followers, are two fairly different discourses that exist among different informants, but also within the descriptions of the same informants. There seems to be two different conflicting discourses in some of the informants’ descriptions. First is a description of the discourse Decision makers and controllers.

Within this discourse the informants expect the leaders to make decisions because of the fact that they are leaders. One informant expresses:

> I think the leader should be the leader. I mean, should lead. Yeah. Should lead us. Because sometimes I saw that it’s good that they try to ask for our opinion, but sometimes it’s too much to ask about that. Because sometimes we have no idea too, because we are not the one to decide, who make the decision. So we are the one waiting for their decision.
This quote takes for granted that the leader is the one who makes the decisions and makes a clear distinction between the followers and the leader. The same informant also said later in the interview that she gave her boss an idea but didn’t expect that he would make it reality. In relation to Hofstede’s (1980) description of the Thai culture, this would be an expression of the high power distance in the culture. Rhein (2013) also states that this leads to the fact that people will wait for a decision to be made by those higher in the hierarchy, which is just what is described in the previous quote. The power inequality is highly accepted (Hofstede, 1980). Another informant says that “one thing that a leader should do is to make decisions. (...) sometimes you have to make that decision for everybody.”

Leaders also have a controlling role, making sure the employees do what is expected of them. One example is that the staff forwards all their e-mails to their leader so the leader can check the language and make sure that no misunderstandings occur. The fact that the students’ parents contact the leader first when mistakes occur, is taken for granted, “they will go directly to our boss of course.”

This discourse, although not apparent in all the informants’ descriptions, accepts the power inequality between different people in different hierarchical positions. But as the next discourse shows, this is not a (or the only) pervading discourse among all the informants.

**Leaders engaging followers**

A discourse that is more wide-spread among the informants than the previous one is that leaders engage followers. This includes that decisions are not only up to the leader to make, but that individuals in the organization should be a part of the decision-making process. Leaders should therefore listen and also leave some decisions to the individuals. In the same way, leaders are not expected to control their followers, but instead care and let them be free to think and act to the best of their abilities. One informant says: “…here they give me confidence to think and to do (...) and makes me feel confident to work even with different language, different culture, but we can combine and… doesn’t make me feel rejected or feel that, but I feel good to work with them, even though we are different.”

The informants want leaders who encourage, support and protect their staff, and describe good leaders as people who enable and develop their followers: “And that’s why the job of leaders have to help people to develop, and not only skills or intellectual ability or knowledge, but also the character.” Once again this also shows that there are values that are valued higher than results or tasks.
Like previously described, Hofstede (1980) describes the Thai culture with high power distance, something that is not true concerning this discourse. In this discourse, the informants expect to be able to take part in decision-making and expect leaders to encourage and give them freedom. Is this an expression of that change from traditional Thai values to more Western values that Runglertkengkrai & Engkaninan (1987) describe? Perhaps. Or is it a consequence of working in a non-profit cross-cultural organization? Whatever the reason, this discourse shows that the Thai informants don’t fully adhere to the Thai values described by Hofstede (1980).

These descriptions are however similar to how Den Hartog, House, Hanges & Ruiz-Quintanilla (1999) describe transformational leadership. The concepts encouraging, confidence builder and motivational are all described by the informants, which the researchers mean are universal leadership characteristics that contribute to outstanding leadership. The informants’ descriptions can also be compared with Boehnke, Bontis, DiStefano & DiStefano’s (2003) explanation of transformational leadership. Inspiring, stimulating and coaching are three of the five transformational behaviors that are described by the informants.

**Taking the lead**

This discourse, taking the lead, includes the description of a leader as a person who sets an example for the followers, and through responsibility and initiatives, creates trust. One informant describes a person that he thinks is a good example of a leader:

> I think a good indicator was that people trust him. People listen to him and are willing to do something for him. This is the indicator that I see. (...) So we look at the result of the actions during the last 30 years, I think that it can show something. (...) I consider it is not easy to get 1000 people to listen to you, yeah. You need to have some kind of skill that you have showed people that you are someone they can trust.

A leader is someone that the followers/informants want to follow: “He is a good example, yeah, for me that I can follow. Learn from him.” Another informant says: “...he’s a good example that he shows his followers, he influences the followers in their lives. (...) Not only by telling but by showing...” So being a good model or a good example is something that is related to being a good leader according to the informants.
The discourse *Taking the lead* also includes being positive, taking responsibility and keeping your word. Leaders must have a wider perspective than others, take initiatives and the leading role in the front lines.

These descriptions can in some ways be described as transformational leadership, which Den Hartog, House, Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla (1999) means is an outstanding, universal leadership style. One characteristic that their study showed was universal is trustworthy, which is exactly what the informants describe. Two other concepts that the researchers mention are positive and foresight which are also described by the informants.

**Religious discourse**

Some informants described leadership in relation to their religious views.

> Well, I’m a Christian so I think ultimately you will be a good leader if you, you know take the example of Christ. I think Christ is a good example of how to be a leader. He was one of the greatest leaders. And anybody who follows that example I would say is a good leader, great leader.

Several other informants also use their religious beliefs when talking about leadership and describing good leaders. “Yes, the management skills are there, it mainly depends on the style of him. If he comes from Christian background I think he’s a little bit smooth. But if you come from, how do you say, it does not involve what they believe, it’s strong. It’s a little bit strong.” Yet another informant describes a good leader with the motivation that the leader doesn’t give up his faith and trust in God. The important of religion and the religious discourse exists among most of the informants. The Buddhist religion is an important part of the Thai culture (Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2014). Even though some of the informants describe the Christian faith as important when describing leadership, religion is an important part of the Thai society. How religious beliefs impact leadership understandings is however not something that has been studied a lot.

**Summary**

There are in other words several different discourses existing among the informants, and of course many more that weren’t presented here since they were small or did only exist among a couple of the informants. The two greatest discourses among the informants are *Relational leadership* and *National culture*. Next, the second research question will be treated.
Cross-cultural non-profit organizations as the context

In this part the second research question is answered: How are these discourses affected by the fact that the staff are working in non-profit cross-cultural organizations? Four areas are presented: Challenges of communication, Changes in informant approaches, Good leaders know and adapt to the context, and Organizational vision and goal. Last is a short summary.

Challenges of communication

“…sometimes it’s difficult to work because we have different thinking and different cultures.”

The informants describe challenges with working in cross-cultural organizations, and one of the greatest challenges described is that of communication. “I think the language is really important when you work in a cross-culture (organization)”. This informant describes misunderstandings that have happened because of language and how it was dealt with:

And like email, he (boss) told me to cc every single email to like check my grammar and my spelling and so that he knows the conversation between me and teachers or parents. So he knows like what happened and how can it cause miscommunication. (…) like when I have a conflict right, he can tell the teacher like ‘she doesn’t mean like that’, because of the language or it’s not clear enough or something like that.

The boss of this organization had a strategy to deal with the language problem, which was that the informant sent a copy of every email to him. Another organization dealt with the challenge in a similar way. But the challenge of communication is not only about the struggle of language, but also about communication and culture. Direct communication is something that several informants describe as hard for them as Thai people, and that they prefer to rephrase questions to be more polite.

Actually in my culture when you ask the older people, ‘Why you want to come see me?’, might not be polite right… I might not say like ‘Why do you want to come see me?’ I might say that ‘Anything special that I might need to have ready for you, anything special or any issue that you would like to talk about?’

This struggle with direct communication is once again a politeness strategy in the Thai culture to maintain one’s face and good relationships (Ukosakul, 2005). The informants describe how these differences in culture sometimes create challenges.

One organization has separated two offices where one of the offices only has Thai staff. The informant describes the change of attitude from the partner organizations:
This change shows how language and culture can be a hinder in building relationships with partner organizations. Before, when English was the main language spoken, it was harder for the Thai partner organizations to visit than when they know that the main language is Thai. For this reason, one informant underscores the advantages of Thai leaders in cross-cultural organizations, who understand the culture and the language.

Jespon (2010) study of the importance of national language concerning discourses show that language is not a neutral tool of communication. Although the quotes in this part mostly shows hinders and challenges with communication in general, Jespon’s research can be used. If language sets boundaries to people’s discourses (Jepson, 2010), this will most certainly affect the organization, which in part is what the informants are saying. Another part of what they say is that misunderstandings happen because of communication, and can cause insecurity.

**Changes in informant approaches**

*Whenever I come to work I just change my mind and ok time to learn. I don’t know what will happen today but just learning. If some, maybe some problems, conflicts, don’t understand each other, but just learn how to understand and how to deal with our problems. Yeah. And when I go out, ok I can be Thai. But here I have to, I have to tell ok, I’m not Thai. Don’t be really Thai, because they are not Thai. Learn how to be like them and you know, learn how to say no or yes. For Thai it’s difficult how to say no or yes to people, but here, I have to do, I have to learn. If I cannot do just say, sorry I cannot do, can you tell me how to do? (...) I work more than being with Thai people, so sometimes some attitude or action is more like a foreigner than a Thai.*

This is the description of one informant, how she changes her mindset while at work and distances herself from her own nationality. Once again, the national discourse is clear, but another main discourse in this quote is that the informant changes her own approach to fit with the people she is working with, the foreigners. This change is something that many informants describe. “For me, before I felt it was difficult, but the more I work with them and learn to adapt to others I feel it feels easier.” A change of working style is also described because of the cross-cultural context and leadership. One informant describes her approach when meeting a new cross-cultural boss: “I will use the Thai culture at the beginning… and
after that, after the beginning with the Thai culture and then I will follow what their own
culture. I will look for that…” A change in the way of communicating is also something that
several informants describe. The direct way of communication that was described earlier, is
often something that the informants try to or have adapted to.

...and if they (foreigners) offer you something like water, if you say ‘yes’ they
will give it to you, if you say ‘no’ they won’t give it to you. And if they ask you
something just tell them straight. Don’t feel greng-jai or things like that, tell
them and they will give it to you. If you say ‘ahh’ they might not give it to you.
(…) At the beginning I might get a culture shock you know a little bit and, but
after that I didn’t feel bad all day or things like that. I feel bad a little bit, like
maybe a couple of hours and then ok fine. Then I know these people how their
personality and then next time when they came and talked to me I know how to
deal with them...

The informant describes her reaction of direct communication and how she has learnt to deal
with it. At first it was something that made her feel really bad, which is not surprising since
Ukosakul (2005) means that indirectness is a way of avoiding to lose face and maintain a
good relationship, which means that directness leads to the opposite.

Many informants also say that they can learn from other cultures. For example, “…it’s helped
me understand people better and learn you know, you can always learn from people who are
from different cultures.” One informant says that: “Don’t try to change them, but learn from
them”.

Almost all these Thai staff are changing and adapting their behavior and actions to fit the
cross-cultural organization they are working with, despite the fact that the organization is
located in their own culture. Collard (2007) would probably mean that this is an example of
the fact the cultures not are static, but are in a constant state of change and adaptation. This is
also something that Wang’s (2004) research showed, that the Chinese leaders in some ways
changed their understanding of leadership after attending an international education program.
Despite this, it is interesting to see the extension of the informants’ described changes
considering the organizations they are working with all are located in Thailand. For example
the quote above, where the informant says ‘I’m not Thai’ at work, creates the feeling that it is
expected of the Thai staff that they will adapt to the foreign culture. This is not something that
the informants talked about during the interviews, but instead seems to be something
unquestioned.
Good leaders know and adapt to the context

Despite the fact that the informants adjust their own approaches to fit the organization, they talk about the importance of the leader knowing and adapting to the context the organization is located in: the country and its culture. This discourse has been presented previously and is underscored here since this is a discourse that definitely is impacted by the fact that the organization is a cross-cultural organization. One informant gives an example of a situation where the leader did not know the context.

*We have experience that makes stuff very dangerous, because they (foreign leaders) don’t understand Thailand’s context and they come from abroad and take leadership roles here. So I can tell like, we are working with the human trafficking issue that we have to investigate the brothels, the prostitutes, child prostitutes in the brothel. We have to bring cameras, hidden cameras with us, and you have to go to every brothel in Chiang Mai for example. That’s quite dangerous if the security guy found that you are a spy, you know. But at the same time our boss, they build a relationship and tell what we are doing. You can imagine! To the police, to the police, and you know the brothel, the prostitution business in Chiang Mai is owned by the police. So this is the conflict between the leader that didn’t understand the country context. They don’t understand the relationship, the culture that has been there for a long, long time. So that makes, that means the leader, the boss puts their staff into very risky areas.*

The fact that this leader didn’t understand the situation in Thailand concerning the police and the brothels, created a dangerous situation for the staff. Other informants describe leaders that have adapted to the culture and context, who they describe as good examples of leaders. One informant says: “…those who value relationship and have interpersonal skills probably would do it (adapt to the culture) better. Because if he or she doesn’t know, he or she will learn and observe these kinds of things and probably will laugh at it rather than why, I think, why we have to do that?” Collard (2007) points out the importance of intercultural understanding among leaders working in these kinds of organizations. He means that intercultural understanding is first an understanding of the national cultural maps, but also an understanding of culture as dynamic and complex. To be able to recognize cultural origins, incorporate alternative frames of reference, learn from others and then apply choices that recognize complexities of cultural interactions (Collard, 2007). In other words, Collard’s research is much in line with the informants’ understandings and experiences regarding this.
Since an understanding of the culture is important, one informant also emphasizes the importance of continuation in leadership.

...today there are many organizations still sending people abroad, ...they send someone for two years and they go back. The continuation, the understanding is not there you know. Two years, what you can do? It’s just for the learning process and then after that you have to go back. And then a new person comes and does the same things.

Since it takes time to adapt to a new culture and context, the informant means that continuation is important, so leaders don’t just come and go every other year. He also thinks that a good way of creating this continuation and leaders who understand the culture is by giving Thai people leadership roles in the organizations.

**Organizational vision and goal**

Expectations of leaders differ because of for example national culture, “…so there are differences, but in the Christian circle, at least we have a core, biblical values, and that helps”. All the informants work in organizations that are non-profit and according to Anheier (2005) have other goals than a financial profit. The quote above is said by an informant who works in Christian organizations, and clearly these values and goals therefore have an impact on his way of understanding leadership. Another informant also works in a Christian organization.

*Especially when we work for the Christian organization, Christian people have an open heart and help each other and do a good thing you know. So we have to follow what Jesus tells us, not just business or something like that because we are Christian, we don’t work for business, we don’t work for profit, you know what I mean? So then you have to understand that this is not just a company. This is not to make a profit, so we need to sit and talk and the things that we can compromise or negotiate or adapt or whatever.*

These two informants gave the clearest description of how the organizational goals also affected their way of understanding leadership. But others also described a religious discourse as a part of their way of understanding leadership, which was described earlier.

Since the organizations have clear values and goals, these seem to affect these two informants’ understanding of leadership that spreads across national discourses. This is also in a few cases described as conflicting, which will be described in *Discourses in conflict*. Despite this, the organizational values described here is something that extends across national cultures and becomes a common ground for the people in the organizations.
Summary
The leadership discourses are affected by the fact that the informants are working in non-profit cross-cultural organization. This causes challenges in communication, both because of language skills and styles of communicating. The informants also clearly describe how they adapt to the foreign cultures they are working with, despite the fact that the organization is located in their own culture, although they also expect leaders to adapt to the local context and culture. In spite of different national cultures, organizational goals and visions create a common ground in the organization. Next, the third research question will be answered.

Discourses in conflict
The third part of the result answers the research question *How do the staff experience conflicting discourses in the organization?* Three areas are presented: *Different national cultures, Personality or culture,* and *Religious discourse or culture.* Last, a summary is given.

Different national cultures
The informants described more than one discourse that exists in the organization which have to do with national culture. There are in other words differences within an organization of how people view leadership, which the informants describe as being because of national culture. One informant describes a situation where she strongly disagreed with a leader in front of the whole organization. She said that she didn’t agree with his way of not participating in the work, but instead controlling what everyone else was doing. Her Thai leader told her that she should not have said this, despite the fact that he agreed with what she said, the fact that she said it proved that her attitude was wrong. I asked her if it was hard to disagree with the leader in front of everyone. Her reply was:

No, because I have experience of working with foreigners, you know to work with foreigners we can share our opinion right, we can say how we feel, for Thai sometimes we have to learn you know, don’t share your feelings, just smiling. But not for me, you know. And for some co-workers before, I knew that they had some problems that they just keep silent, after that they will talk. I don’t like that way. For me, you know, if I don’t like something I will just speak out. And tell them. After that it’s just clear you know. I just feel like we have argued now, but it doesn’t mean that we hate each other. After that we can still be friends. It’s better than to keep inside...

She describes a difference between her and her co-workers approach to their leaders and in what ways they can share their own opinions. She says that because of her experience of
working with foreigners, she was used to another way of thinking, another national culture, and she therefore felt free to express her opinions. Her co-workers did not share this same approach, and therefore there is a difference of how they understand leadership. Her leader also focused on the fact that she cannot tell her leader that he is wrong, since he is the leader. There seems to be a difference in the acceptance of power distance (Hofstede, 1980) that the informant explains by different national cultures. Because of the importance of not losing face in the Thai culture, a politeness strategy is to avoid confrontation and criticism, and to avoid humiliating people in public (Ukosakul, 2005). This is also something that is described in this quote, that show that the Thai leaders did not want to be questioned or criticized. The informant herself is also Thai but did not follow this description of the Thai culture. She explains it with the fact that she has been working a lot with foreigners.

Several informants describe the difference concerning showing emotions. For example:

...when I have a conflict with a teacher it’s like something that they say show that they are really angry, but you know I’m Thai I don’t understand what, what the feeling. Ok I understand what they say and the meaning, but I’m not like, I don’t really understand the feeling that they are really angry or really upset or disappointed. So I’m just like ok ‘I’m sorry’ and that’s like, that’s it.

In this organization, there are two pervading discourses of how to act that are in conflict with one another, and once again the informant distinguishes the difference as national culture.

Another informant describes a difference between American or Western cultures and Thai culture. She describes the American/Western culture as being “I first”, and then she says: “...in Thai we have like an ‘I first’ too, but not normally strong like showing like really strong. Because of the culture, if you do something like that people are going to look at you and be like ‘what, you are not going to think like to others first?’” Earlier she has described conflicts between her and her Thai colleagues, because she experiences that they think too much about themselves. They have worked longer than she has in the cross-cultural organization, and they might therefore have been influenced by other cultures, and have accepted the Western ‘I first’ attitude.

In regards to national culture and in opposition to the Thai culture, the informants often use the words ‘foreign’, ‘Western’ and sometimes even ‘American’ as equivalent. In a few cases, other cultures than Western cultures are referred to, and all those times it’s the Korean (South Korean) culture that is talked about.
Yeah, like we have Koreans as well, and for Koreans you know, like if today we set a time, I mean time table or plan, and in another day my leader might change a little bit without telling other people. But when we were at the meeting, and then my leader said ‘ok the plan is changed’, and for others you know it’s ok, they accepted, except Korean. ‘No you have to tell me before, I don’t accept. It’s wrong’, you know. For them it’s like really, really wrong, we have to tell them before, like before we have a meeting. But my leader always says that because he doesn’t know. When we plan it, and change a little bit it’s ok right for Thai and for others, but Korean, no.

This quote also shows conflicting discourses in regards to flexibility and time between Koreans and others. In this example, ‘others’ includes both Thai, Western and eventual other nationalities.

**Personality or culture**

Some of the informants also describe conflicting discourses between different people in the organization, but explain them as dependent on different personalities. Like described earlier, people with good interpersonal skills, that one informant describes as personality, will be able to adapt quicker to a new culture and to people with different cultures. “But even personality when it comes to perception and orientation, and these two things even people from the same culture will have problem too, but I think there are at least some guidelines if there’s a culture, at least there are some know in some sense.” So there are conflicting discourses in the organization concerning how leadership is viewed which are dependent on personality or national cultures.

**Religious discourse or culture**

The religious leadership discourse has been presented earlier, as well as the common ground that for example Christianity brings to people. But there are also other discourses that are conflicting with the religious discourse, for example the national culture discourse.

*For example Koreans are very controlling, are very strong, to the extent that many Thai don’t like it. Even among the Christian circle, and you see many Korean churches growing very fast in Korea, I don’t know about elsewhere, but I heard quite a few leaders in this country they haven’t seen any Korean church grow because of the differences.*

In this quote, the informant describes how two discourses are in conflict. There is a Christian religious discourse about leadership that in the informant’s eyes conflict with a national
culture discourse. In Thailand, the Christian churches are not growing because they don’t appreciate the leadership style. In this specific case, it seems as if the national culture discourse is stronger than the religious discourse, but the same informant also said that the Christian values are a common ground to people of different national cultures.

…but I think the most important is this understanding, to see that not taking the Thai value in that sense that you will become the boss, people will follow you, people will serve you. And that is very true in the Thai culture, but as Jesus showed us himself and he taught us too that I come to serve you. If you want to be leader you will be the last not the first, so that kind of value that I major change I will say.

In this quote the informant distances himself from the Thai understanding of leadership and instead adapts the Christian leadership discourse. The other informants also use different subject positions throughout the interviews. Sometimes they describe themselves as for example Christian and sometimes Thai.

**Summary**

The conflicting discourses are mainly conflicting with national cultures. Either different national cultures conflict with each other or the national culture discourse is in conflict with discourses such as personality or religion.
Discussion

The discussion is divided into three parts. First a Summary of the results will be presented, after that a Method discussion followed by suggestions for Future research.

Summary of the results

The summary will be presented like the results, according to the three research questions: Leadership discourses, Cross-cultural non-profit organizations as the context and Discourses in conflict.

Leadership discourses

There are many different discourses concerning leadership that exist among the informants. A couple of them (Taking the lead and Leaders engaging followers) describe transformational leadership, which some researchers mean is an outstanding universal leadership style (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1999; Boehnke, Bontis, DiStefano, & DiStefano, 2003). Boehnke, Bontis, DiStefano & DiStefano also mean that transformational behaviors need to be adapted to national differences. This view seems to be shared by the informants, since one leadership discourse is that leaders should adapt to the context and national culture (Leaders adapt to the context). Collard (2007) would agree with this, pointing out the individual agency of leaders and the need for them to have a sophisticated understanding of culture as complex and dynamic, and being a reflective learner with cultural sensitivity.

The two largest pervading discourses among the informants are Relational leadership and National culture. The latter of the two discourses include the informants’ descriptions of leadership as depending on national culture. They describe differences between for example American, Swedish and Thai leaders. The first of the two discourses include the importance of relationship in leadership. This could be an expression of the importance of relationships in the Thai culture, which is described for example by Hofstede’s (1980) categorization of the Thai culture as feminine and collectivistic. The focus on relationship could also be an expression of the type of organization that the informants are working in.

The discourses Decision makers and controllers and Unemotional leaders portray the Thai culture as high in power distance (Hofstede, 1980) and the importance of not losing face and of maintaining smooth relationships (Ukosakul, 2005). Some informants also use a Religious discourse when describing leadership, referring to their beliefs when describing a good leader.
Cross-cultural non-profit organizations as the context
The informants work in cross-cultural non-profit organizations, so how are the leadership discourses affected by this context? The informants describe challenges of communication that have to do with language skills, but also in ways of communicating. The Thai cultures promotes an indirect way of communicating to maintain face and smooth relationships (Ukosakul, 2005), while the informants describe other ways of communicating among their colleagues and leaders. This creates challenges in communication. The informants describe changes in their own approaches to leadership and other behaviors, because of cultural differences. This change among the Thai informants is despite the fact that the cross-cultural organizations are located in Thailand. But the informants also expect their leaders to adapt to the culture and context which the organization is located in. Examples have been given of both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ leaders depending on their ability to adapt.

Despite national culture differences, the context gives way to a common ground of the non-profit organization: the vision and goals of the organization. In several cases this includes a religious vision/goal, but either way it is a contextual discourse that transcends some culture differences. There is a common ground in the vision and goals of the organization.

Discourses in conflict
The informants clearly describe conflicting national discourses in the organizations. Different national cultures lead to differences in behavior, that in turn conflict with each other. These conflicting national discourses involve the largest conflict described by the informants, but this discourse is also in conflict with other discourses, such as the religious discourse. Even though the religious discourse can create a mutual understanding among different cultures, the national culture can also be in conflict with a religious discourse. Which of the two that is the strongest differs, but some informants have described the national culture discourse as having a greater influence. Conflicting discourses between personality and national cultures are also described among the informants. In other words, all the described discourses that are in conflict, are in conflict with the national culture discourse.

Method discussion
The aim of this study is to clearly describe the procedure and method to be transparent as well as to fulfill ethical requirements. Despite this, there are always things that could have been done differently or better.
First of all, the research was conducted by a white Western woman. Despite having grown up in the Thai culture, this has definitely shaped the study. The purpose, questions asked and analysis made are all affected by the researcher’s context, just as social constructionism assumes. Secondly, the national culture differences between the researcher and the informants will also have shaped the understandings of the interaction. This includes the fact that English is not the first language of any of the people involved. Misunderstandings or hinders because of language has impacted this study, just as language impacts the organizations. The communication style is another example of this. The Thai culture has an indirect way of communicating (Ukosakul, 2005) which has impacted the interviews. A question is if this is something that has ‘forced’ the informants to agree to participate in the study, if their culture hinders them from saying ‘no’. The interview also included direct questions, which might have made the informants feel uncomfortable. This has never been on purpose, but if this has happened, it is a lack of cultural understanding. The importance of a cultural understanding before conducting research in another national culture has become clearer to the researcher.

Future research

Since discourse analysis is a rare method and theoretical perspective used in leadership studies, more research is needed. The study of cross-cultural organizations is also something that is needed because of the rapid globalization and increase of these kinds of organizations. The non-profit sector is described as a major economic and social force (Anheir, 2005) which is also strongly affected by globalization (Lindenberg, 1999). More research concerning leadership in these kinds of organizations is therefore needed.

More specifically, the results of this study have showed that research is needed concerning a few different things. First of all, it would be interesting to conduct the same type of study but instead studying foreigners in these types of organizations, and then compare the results to the results of this study to see how the foreigners describe their own ways of adapting in comparison to the Thai staff is one interesting area. A question that should be included in that study is to what extent the foreigners expect the Thai staff to adapt to their foreign cultures. A second study that could be conducted is a more linguistic study of discourses in the Thai language concerning leadership. Jepson’s (2010) research show that national language is one discourse that affects an individual’s possible discourses, and it would therefore be interesting to see how the Thai language affects an individual’s discourses. A third possible study is to conduct a similar study but by a Thai researcher. Since this study is conducted by a white
Swedish woman, the answers of the Thai staff might differ if similar questions were asked by a Thai research, especially considering the differences in communication styles between the Swedish and Thai culture.

There are of course many future research possibilities. My hope is that this thesis will have inspired others to conduct leadership research in non-profit cross-cultural organizations.
References


Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduction
- Study purpose: study leadership in cross-cultural non-profit organizations, interviewing Thai staff
- About 1 hour, recording (informationskravet)
- Anonymous and all information about you will be kept confidential (konfidentialitetskravet)
- I will only use this information for this study (nyttjandekravet)
- Any questions? Ok to participate? Record? (samtyckeskravet)

Background questions
- Can you describe the organization you are working in?
- What countries are your colleagues from? Your leader(s)?
- Describe your role in the organization?
- How long have you worked here?
- Where have you worked earlier?
- Have you lived outside of Thailand?

What are the pervading discourses concerning leadership among the Thai staff?
- How would you describe a leader?
- Can you describe someone who you would say is a good leader? An example.
- What do you expect of a good leader?
- Can you describe someone who you would say not is a good leader.
  - Can you give an example of a situation when you were disappointed with a leader? What happened? Why were you disappointed?

How are these discourses affected by the fact that the staff are working in non-profit cross-cultural organizations?
- How would you describe your leader at work?
- Does he/she match your description of a good leader?
- When you first started working here, what did you think of your leader?
- Has your understanding of your leader’s leadership changed during the time you have worked here?
- Has your understanding of leadership changed during your employment in this cross-cultural organization?
How does the staff experience conflicting discourses in the organization?

- Do your expectations of a leader differ from that of your colleagues?
- Do these different expectations cause conflicts or misunderstandings?
- Have you experienced any misunderstandings in relation to your leader?
  - In relation to your colleagues?
- Can you tell me about a conflict that has happened at work?
  - What happened?
  - Has the conflict been resolved? How?

Ending

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions to ask me?
- Would you like to have the thesis e-mailed to you when it is finished? (get e-mail!)
- Thank you!
Appendix 2: Information to informants

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview!

I am studying a master's in leadership and organizations at Umeå University in northern Sweden. This interview is for my thesis regarding leadership in cross-cultural non-profit organizations in Chiang Mai.

I will handle the recording and any other sensitive material confidentially and you will be anonymous in the thesis. If you have any questions feel free to contact me!

If you want to have this thesis e-mailed to you when it is finished, please give me your e-mail address.

Once again, thank you for your participation!

Charlotte Arenander
xxxxxx@gmail.com
09-00000000