Popular management discourses as constituents of organizations

A case study of Stephen R. Covey’s discourses on organizational conflict management

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine what current discourses within the expanding popular management culture carry to organizations in terms of worldview, knowledge view, ideologies, norms, and values, and how these discourses shape leader’s roles in modern organizations. A case study is conducted on a conflict management book by a popular management guru, Stephen R. Covey. The three main study questions concern: 1) ontology and epistemology found in the discourses, 2) how the ideas of ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’ conflict management strategies are constructed by the author, and 3) how the ideas of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ leader are constructed. The study applies different discourse analytical and poststructuralistic tools combined in a bricolage, to analyze and deconstruct Stephen R. Covey’s (2011) managerial discourses in his book “The 3rd Alternative - solving life’s most difficult problems”.

The study result shows that popular managerial discourses such as Covey’s lack solid scientific ground and carry institutional myths, ideology and normative religious beliefs to the learning organizations. The analyzed managerial discourses carry an underlying naive realistic worldview, and belief that there are some universally applicable correct principals concerning conflict resolution, and that there are also some principles and paradigms that are fundamentally wrong. Consequently, leaders who use the ‘right’ conflict management strategy are characterized as good and those who use the ‘wrong’ strategies are characterized as bad leaders.

The conclusion of the study is that such non-scientific managerial discourses are given constituting power in organizations, generating a simplistic, ideological and normative view of organizational life, while creating myths about how the organizational reality should be perceived and how a leader should operate in it. It is furthermore argued that even a myth, or an ideal, can sometimes be useful to create a necessary change in an organization and move it in the desired direction.

Keywords:
organizational learning, consulting, Foucault, Derrida
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Chapter 1: Introduction

After conferring with Mr. Covey over Thanksgiving in 1994, President Bill Clinton said American productivity would greatly increase if people followed Mr. Covey’s advice. More than two-thirds of Fortune 500 companies flocked to use a consulting company he had founded (Martin, 2012, July 16)

The above citation is taken from the New York Times Magazine, describing the popularity and the vast impact of managerial guru Stephen R. Covey in broader society and in organisational life in America and world wide.

My own first encounter with Covey happened when the CEO of a large international company whom I worked for, let me borrow his copy of Covey’s (1989) “7 habits of highly effective people”. At the time, I was in my late teens, working as an au-pair, yet I was still drawn to the content of this managerial book. I could relate to many things written in the book. I got new ideas on how to improve my work, my relationships, and my status, even as a 19 year old au-pair. Reading the book as a 19 year old girl brought about a paradigm shift which impacted my ontology and epistemology a great deal.

More than 10 years have passed since I first stumbled on Covey’s writings, and while I still appreciate some popular wisdom I learned in his books, I am more capable of critically evaluating such popular management literature through a scientific lens. As I have studied the scholarly discipline of working life, organization, and leadership, within the field of pedagogics, I have become more critical to the concept of knowledge, what it is, where it comes from, and who constructs it. What fascinates me today though is how managerial paradigms, values, norms, and ideologies, such as Covey’s, are able to break through, in such a powerful manner, to an East European teenage house holder girl, as I was, to a CEO of a large multinational company, as well as to one of the most famous presidents of United States of America. From the bottom to the top layers of society, these managerial discourses seem to have a powerful impact on people.

My own experience of encountering popular managerial literature affecting different groups of people, is not exclusive. Research on popular managerial knowledge presented below, shows its impact on the global society, organizations, and individuals. The influence and impact that this popular managerial knowledge has on different groups of people world wide through out time, is what fascinates me today, and it is what this study is about.
1.1 Popular managerial knowledge

Staffan Furusten (1995, 1999), docent in business administration at Stockholm university, has done scientific studies on the construction of expertise and experts in the area of management. He has studied how knowledge on management is created and spread. Furusten’s (1999) research reveals that popular managerial knowledge is increasingly distributed within companies and organizations themselves and is increasingly being packed and offered in the marketplace as educational seminars and courses for vocational training in working organizations. Research reveals that popular managerial knowledge also appear in courses at universities and business schools as important references for consultants and also in academic research (English, 2002, Furusten, 1999). Furusten states that managerial manifestations such as seminars, courses, and educational literature, produced by self-named management experts, reach considerable popularity and that therefore there are reasons to believe that they have a major influence on how individuals and organizations in modern societies apprehend and enact their reality (Furusten, 1999).

Academical studies have also been done to investigate the impact of popular managerial discourses on organizations and found that they had an important impact on organizational life, which by the organisations was seen as positive (Jahansoozi, 2007; Stemmle, 2000; Birrell et al 1998; Tyson Martin, 2013). It would be very difficult and arguably impossible to gather and summarize all the practical impact of popular managerial discourses on organizations. I have therefore gathered a small sample of academical research, exemplifying the impact of managerial knowledge in organizations. This following sample of research is on the effects of Stephen R. Covey’s managerial discourses in organizations only, as this case study focuses on Covey only. This sample could be seen as representative of the research on practical effects and impact of Covey’s discourses on organizations* (see reference link below).

Jahansoozi (2007) shows in her empirical research of a petroleum industry community in Canada, how Covey’s teachings have shaped the way the industry and community members engaged with each other. The research shows that communication, trust and transparency emerged after a crisis as the consequence of use of Covey’s tools and teachings in guru’s educational workshops arranged for this industry community. Stemmle (2000) describes in his article successful application of the leadership principles taught in Covey’s educational workshop held for members within a facility management operations. Stemmle states that these principles are very useful in training and transform leadership in today’s work-environment. Birrell et al (1998) gives a report on one school-university partnership that used Covey’s educational materials as a framework for initiating and sustaining teacher-education reform and shows how Covey’s teachings helped establish collaboration and overcome difficulties and distrust between the different parties. The project describes considerations on the positive collaborative reform that took place and on organizational learning. Tyson Martin (2013) states how the principles and strategies taught by Covey are extremely relevant and applicable to the physical educator’s workplace and that they are applicable not only to working with students in classes, but are also relevant in working with colleagues and in many aspects of one’s career. The article focuses on how Covey’s taught principles can help physical educators work more successfully with administrators and other teachers.

* Reference link: [http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.ub.umu.se/ehost/results?sid=c7441f32-e670-4do8-83de-91079385d7dc%40sessionmgr114&vid=2&hid=115&bquery=(Stephen+AND+R+Covey)&bdata=JmRiPWVyaWMmdHlwZTowJnNpdGUgZWhvc3QtbGllZSzzY29wZT1zaXRl](http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.ub.umu.se/ehost/results?sid=c7441f32-e670-4do8-83de-91079385d7dc%40sessionmgr114&vid=2&hid=115&bquery=(Stephen+AND+R+Covey)&bdata=JmRiPWVyaWMmdHlwZTowJnNpdGUgZWhvc3QtbGllZSzzY29wZT1zaXRl)
The above named academical research shows that popular managerial knowledge impact organizations and is seen as meaningful and useful by the management in organisations in different ways. These managerial knowledge can therefore arguably be seen as important carrier of representations of contemporary organizational life. Furusten (1999) states that popular managerial manifestations such as literature, seminars and courses carry knowledge, ideologies, norms, values, notions, standards, and institutions of managerial and organizational life between individuals, organizations, and societies. This means that they arguably contribute to the social construction of reality both in organizations and in wider society. The managerial discursive constructions are therefore arguably important for our concepts of what organizations are. Furusten suggests that they can be seen as constituents of social mechanisms that, together with for example government and business made laws and regulations, create and govern the institutional rules of organizational life in a modern society (Furusten, 2005).

Though this impactful managerial knowledge is not unproblematic. According to previous research (Furusten, 1999; English, 2002; McGill (1988) in Furusten, 1999; Huczynski (1993) in Furusten, 1999; and Jacksson, 1999), the problem with popular managerial knowledge and the managerial discourses carried to the organizations world wide is that this knowledge lacks solid scientific base and is instead based on institutional myths and normative ideological beliefs.

For example, according to McGill (1988 in Furusten 1999) popular managerial literature is sold as easy remedies and quick fixes that can be applied on complex organizational problems. McGill argues that the methods and models offered by management literature promise to be able to relatively easily fix whatever challenges the organizations are battling with. His concern is that the large supply of such quick fixes, has resulted in a managerial swamp wherein simplistic solutions take form, flower briefly, then sink back to feed new forms of managerial quick fixes, which also Huczynski (1993 in Furusten 1999) confirms. The main problem that McGill (1988 in Furusten, 1999) sees in this is that these mythical quick fixes do not correspond with organizational reality and therefore obstruct the understanding of the real complexities of organizational management (McGill, 1988 in Furusten, 1999).

Furusten (1999) made a discourse analysis on several popular managerial books. He found that the popular management ‘gurus’, the authors of the studied literature, base their arguments on the myths of what successful managers and organizations do, instead of relating their findings to other studies or to methodological restrictions. These myths appear in their texts as examples of successful or ‘good’ managerial behavior and organization. According to Furusten, the authors use institutional myths and beliefs, such as the myth that the key to organizational success is the omnipotence of the manager. He also characterizes these managerial texts as personal, since the author’s only refer to their own expertise and experience. Paradoxically though, according to Furusten they also have universal and normative ambitions, suggesting that their managerial ideas can be applied in all relevant managerial contexts, and that their suggested ideas are the ‘right’ way of doing things. Furusten (1999) therefore strongly questions the validity and reliability of such popular managerial discourses presented in managerial literature and questions whether they at all can be called knowledge, which is characterized by stable, mobile, and combinable argumentation. Furusten suggests that these managerial discourses be defined as related to beliefs, myths, institutions, composed as an ideal view of reality. They can according to him be regarded as attempts to make sense of the ambiguous and uncertain world out there, they try to constitute values and beliefs about what reality would be if it were ideal; these managerial discourses can therefore be labeled as ideological, according to Furusten (1999).
English (2002), who did a deconstructive reading of popular management literature, came to similar conclusions as Furusten (1999). English (2002) states that there are some strong warning signs that need to be taken serious in such popular management literature as it lacks solid scientific base and it neglects to meet even the most minimal standards of academic scholarship. English (2002) found that the studied managerial discourses are based on religious naive-realistic worldview which is obfuscated and made difficult to discern for the reader. This is even supported by Jackson (1999) who also argues that popular management knowledge which is not based on solid scientific foundation, is appealing to such a broad spectrum of people world wide because this ‘knowledge’ is able to address the material, existential and spiritual needs that are characteristic to individuals of late modern age.

Furusten (1999) compares the managerial experts, the writers of these books, with the medieval crusaders, who diffused Christianity throughout the world while claiming to be sent by God. Furusten argues that managerial gurus do not claim to be sent by God to spread the Christian faith, but rather to spread their own faith in North American Managerialism. Furusten (1999) also notices in his study that popular management literature is almost exclusively produced in the United States. Other economically successful countries as Japan or Germany do not have any such known popular management manifestations. He argues that the wide spread of american management literature could be due to the english language which means basically no need for translation. But even Great Britain, an english speaking country, has no popular management literature which is known around the world. Furusten’s conclusion is though that the vast amount of popular management literature circulation around the world is originated in the USA and is an Americanized nationalistic managerial ‘crusade’.

To summarize, according to the above stated research, popular managerial discourses have shown to have major influence on formation and shaping of organizational knowledge, norms and values, which can be seen as problematic, as they lack a solid scientific foundation and are instead based on americanized normative ideological and religious beliefs and institutional myths (Jackson 1999, Furusten 1999, Fenwick 2002; McGill 1988 and Huczynski (1993) in Furusten 1999).

Furusten (1999) argues that it is therefore important to investigate and examine further what these popular managerial discourses bring to organizations, since they might be reflective of how many individuals view and understand organizations in postmodern societies and since they may have powerful influence on the individual’s worldview, their choices, and actions.

Now, how does this present study position it self in relation to the previous studies on the topic? What new knowledge can it contribute with? The above mentioned research is somewhat outdated, as it has been done approximately 15 years ago. Also the empirical material (popular management books) studied in their research (Furusten 1999, Fenwick 2002, Jackson 1999) were written in 1980, which means that the analyzed material in previous studies is 20-30 years older than the analyzed material in this present study. There has not been found any newer studies on the current popular management literature. The contribution of this present study is therefore to conduct a contemporary, updated research on what popular managerial discourses carry to the postmodern learning organizations, through analyzing a popular management book written by a renown management guru Stephen R. Covey in the year 2011, with the intention to see what current management discourses carry to the organizations today. Now I will continue on to giving an account for the aim and questions of the present study.
1.2 Aim and study questions

The aim of this study is to analyze current discourses within the expanding popular management culture in the postmodern society and to examine what these discourses bring to organizations in terms of worldview, knowledge, ideologies, norms, and values and how these discourses shape leader’s roles in postmodern organizations.

I fulfill that aim by conducting a case study on a conflict management book by one the most popular management gurus, Stephen R. Covey. The book “The 3rd Alternative - solving life’s most difficult problems” is used by Covey as an educational tool for leadership training worldwide. My study questions are:

1) What ontology and epistemology is present in the chosen management discourses and carried to the organizations?

2) How does Covey construct an ideal for the right and proper strategy of conflict management vs. the wrong and improper strategies of conflict management?

3) How is the normative ideal and categorization of a ‘good’ versus a ‘bad’ leader constructed? What qualities and behaviors are expected of a ‘good’ leader? Consequently, what qualities and behaviors are categorized as ‘bad’ and undesirable?

The limitations of this study are following. This study is limited to analyzing in deep the first three chapters of the book, as they concern specifically organizational and workplace conflict management, whereas other parts of the book are not as relevant. Chapters 4-10 are on the topic of conflict management in home, school, law, society and in the world. Covey applies exactly the same principles, models and paradigms of conflict resolution on all levels: individual, group, organizational and societal, as he considers this principles as universally applicable in all contexts and levels. Chapters 4-10 were thus not analyzed in deep, but their contents were contributing to the deeper understanding of Covey’s discourses and were useful for study question 1, concerning the guru’s ontology and epistemology. Thus the book as a whole is analyzed on a surface level and chapters 1-3 are analyzed in deep, as they are mostly relevant for the study on organizational learning and education.

In this study I also chose to focus on the leader’s role in conflict management, and on the leader’s qualities and skills because this thesis is written within the field of leadership in organisations and working life within the broader field of pedagogics. As leadership is in focus in this study, a limitation to it can also be made, meaning that focus is not on the workers and employees. The analysed book is also primarily aimed for leadership training, although it’s rhetoric is often inclusive of employees on all levels.

This study does not claim to be representative for all popular management discourses, although it can show a part of that picture. Further studies are needed to create a more complete picture of managerial discourse’s role in formation and shaping of organizational realities.

1.3 Relevance for the field of working life pedagogics

Next, let’s take a look at how the current popular managerial discourses are relevant for the field of working life, organization, and leadership, within the broader research field of pedagogics/education.
I would like to start with introducing the broader research area of pedagogics and point out some similarities with the more specific area of working life pedagogics.

Umeå University’s pedagogical institution defines the field of pedagogics as follows:

Pedagogics is a scientific discipline, that builds knowledge about the processes through which people are formed and changed in different social, cultural, and historic contexts. The pedagogical problem area is concerned with different aspects of nurturing, education, learning, teaching, and other processes of influence. The questions of the pedagogical discipline are how and why different values, knowledge, and skills emerge, how they are maintained and how they change within and between generations, groups and individuals (own translation from Swedish [http://www.pedag.umu.se/digitalAssets/19/19763_vadarpedagogik.pdf](http://www.pedag.umu.se/digitalAssets/19/19763_vadarpedagogik.pdf)).

Accordingly, working life pedagogics as a research area has many similarities to the above definition. This specific research area studies how people learn, how they are formed and changed through different work-related educational processes, which take place within the historical, cultural, and societal and organizational context of the working life ([http://www.pedag.umu.se/forskning/ledarskap-organisation-och-arbetsliv/](http://www.pedag.umu.se/forskning/ledarskap-organisation-och-arbetsliv/)). Working life pedagogics focuses on pedagogical processes in (working) organizations in the labour market. The term pedagogical processes can here be seen in it’s broadest sense, as all kinds of influence such as teaching, education, socialization, disciplining, etc. and different kinds of change processes such as learning and organizational development (OU) (Pommer Nilsson 2003 p.7).

I want to pay special attention to the idea that pedagogics and working life pedagogics study all kinds of processes of influence in individual, organizational and societal settings, as mentioned above. Pommer Nilsson (2003) refers to SOU (1970:22) that states that even if pedagogics as a research area focuses on education in schools and other educational institutions, the concept of pedagogics covers even other forms for systematical influence (Pommer Nilsson, 2003 p. 8). Pommer Nilsson also refers to Tedenljung & Ryhammar (2001), who define working life pedagogics as a scientific study of different processes of influence within working life (Pommer Nilsson, 2003 p.9).

Now, how does this particular study fit into the field of working life pedagogics? The aim of this study is to analyze chosen popular managerial discourses, with the purpose of contributing to knowledge about how they can shape and form organizations and individuals and with the purpose of understanding what values, norms, knowledge and ideologies they carry to the learning organizations. The aim of this study fits into the research field of working life pedagogics through it’s similar focus on the processes of influence, shaping and formation of organizations and individuals and focus on knowledge about how and why different values and norms emerge, how they are sustained and changed. Let me now continue on to the next chapter and introduce previous academical research on organizational conflict management, which is the main topic of Covey’s book analyzed in this study.
Chapter 2:
Previous research on organisational conflict management

The analyzed empirical material in this study is on the topic of organizational conflict management. I have therefore chosen to use previous scholarly research on organizational conflict management as my interpretational frame for the question 2, which concerns different conflict management styles. I will now summarize the vast amount of that research, which will later be used as an analytical tool for question 2 of the study, together with other methodological and theoretical tools.

I have found a large amount of previous academical studies on different strategies/styles of conflict management in organizations, and have therefore chosen to look for some consistency in the results of these studies, and compile here the most essential parts of it. I have found that many researchers use the same five conflict management strategies as a frame of reference and also show how these strategies are used in organizations and what strategies are most effective in what situations. Researchers draw these strategies from the same three established conflict management theories, which are relatively consistent with each other. These theories are: 1) TKI Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management of Differences Instrument (MODE), (1974), 2) KCSI Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory Style Matters, (1980) and 3) Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) (1983). I am now going to shortly summarize these five conflict management strategies/styles which are: 1) competing 2) accommodating 3) avoiding 4) compromising 5) collaborating. I am then going to describe how they are used in different situations in organizational settings and what outcomes they have for the involved parties in workplace.

2.1 Conflict management styles

1) Competing conflict management style is also called directing or dominating by the different researchers and conflict theorists. This strategy is described as having high concern for self and low concern for others which has an win-lose outcome. Leaders using this style are usually assertive and try to win the own position on the expense of the other party.

2) Accommodating style is also called harmonizing or obliging by the different researchers and conflict theorists. This style is characterized by low concern for self and high concern for others, which has a lose-win outcome. Low assertiveness and high cooperativeness is common here. Own interests are neglected to satisfy the other party. This is often done in order to preserve the relationship in a conflict situation, even at the cost of own objectives.

3) Avoiding strategy is about ignoring or not addressing the conflict at all. Here low concern for self and low concern for others is common, and the outcome is lose-lose. This style is used when the leader does not want to be assertive and does not want to cooperate with the other, but rather avoid the conflict altogether.

4) Compromising style is characterized by intermediate concern for self and others. Both parties here work cooperatively to find a mutually acceptable solution for both. Each party has to sacrifice something to get some of their interests met, so there are no actual losers or winners. It is a compromise.

5) Collaborating is also called cooperating or integrating by the different researchers and conflict theorists. In this style both parties show high concern for self and others and the outcome is win-win. A leader using this conflict management style is both highly assertive and highly cooperative, trying to integrate interests of all the parties involved and search for an outcome that would be equally advantageous for everyone. This strategy is used when both parties objectives are important and can not be compromised* (see reference below).
2.2 The use and outcomes of each style

Although previous research and academical theories agree on identifying the five above describes conflict management styles, the results about the outcomes and use of these styles are though not as unanimous. Some results were difficult to interpret and are therefore not presented here. In general the results of different studies were not always consistent with each other, but were presented here anyway.

1) Research shows that *competing/directing/dominating* conflict management style had negative consequences at workplace (1. Din, Khan, Bibi, 2012). This style significantly predicted workplace incivility in both parties involved in a conflict (Trudel, Reio, 2011) and reduced job satisfaction of employees confronted with conflict (Williams, 2011). This style was found to be negatively related to the human resource frame (4. Kimencu 2011). A manager’s directing and dominating strategies resulted in the subordinates feeling no interpersonal or performance rewards on their jobs (Hatfield, 1996).

2) One important finding about *accommodating/harmonizing/obliging* style is that preferring this style of conflict resolution changes according to the status of managers. Obliging is mostly used when the conflict partner has an upper level status (Özkalp, Sungur Aytül, Özdemir, 2009), Another finding is that administrators tended to use obliging style less, as their employment in an administrative position increased (14. Earnest, McCaslin, 1994). Another finding is that when managers used accommodating strategies in a conflict situation with subordinates, it did not have any influence on the subordinate’s perceived interpersonal and performance rewards at the job (Hatfield, 1996).

3) Some research shows that *avoiding* conflict management style had significant negative consequences in the workplace (1. Din, Khan, Bibi, 2012) Other research findings show that avoiding conflict management style did not cause any incivility in the workplace (Trudel, Reio, 2011). Other study shows that using this style did not predict reduction in employees job satisfaction, meaning, employees were not less satisfied with their job if they avoided conflict (Williams, 2011). Here some inconsistency between different study results can be seen, as one study shows negative outcomes when avoiding conflict, other studies show somewhat positive outcomes like absence of incivility and unchanged job satisfaction level for those using the strategy.

4) *Compromising* style was found to have positive effects in workplace (Morris-Rothschild, Brassard (2006). This style did not show to cause any incivility in workplace (Trudel, Reio, 2011). Efficiency of management was also associated with the use of compromising style (Morris-Rothschild, Brassard (2006). Another study shows that compromising style was found to be the most preferred by the studied managers, together with the collaborating style (Özkalp, Sungur Aytül, Özdemir, 2009). Another study shows though that the more lower level supervisors used compromising style, the more their overall job satisfaction decreased (3. Williams, 2011). Studies also show that the use of compromising strategy is increased with age and work experience (4. Kimencu 2011, Din, Khan, Bibi, 2012).

*Reference: (Ellis (2010); Kimencu (2011); Epps, Thompson (1990); Stanley, Algert (2007); Hatfield (1996); Din, Khan, Bibi (2012); Morris-Rothschild, Brassard (2006); Trudell, Reio (2011); Williams (2011); Özkalp, Sungur Aytül, Özdemir, (2009); Earnest, Garee (1993); Epps, Thompson (1990); Kimencu (2011); Earnest, McCaslin, (1994); Wheeless and Lisa S. Reichel (1990); Hatfield (1996). The research were found on: [http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.ub.umu.se/ehost/results?sid=a8d5a6e4-9c1e-49da-97c6-72bd6dc6ff6b%40sessionmgr111&vid=0&hid=109&bquery=(TI+%22conflict+management+styles%22)+OR+(TI+%22conflict+management+strategies%22)+NOT+(parental)+NOT+(teachers)+NOT+(schools)+NOT+(classroom)&bdata=JmRiPWYyaWWMmYzxpMDIzYVDeEmYzv2MDoxOTkwMDEtMjAxMzEyJnR5cGU9MSZaxXRIPWVOb3NoLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9e2loZQ%3d%3d.).*
5) In several studies, the collaborating/cooperating/integrating style was found to be the most preferred conflict management style in the studied managers and directors (Özkalp, Sungur Aytül, Özdemir, 2009 and Earnest, McCaslin, 1994). Another study found significant positive relationship between the use of collaborative strategy and the subordinates experiencing interpersonal and performance rewards (Hatfield, 1996). Yet another study found collaboration to be significantly positively related to overall job satisfaction for middle level managers (Williams, 2011). Another finding is that the use of integrating conflict management style was positively related to all the four frames of leadership, which are structural, human resources, symbolic and political frames (Kimencu 2011). A leader using multi-frame leadership, like a collaborating leader does, was found to be an effective leader (Bensimon, 1987; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Thompson, 2000 in 4. Kimencu 2011). One study though shows that collaborative conflict management style significantly predicted incivility in both parties involved, just as the competing/directing/dominating style did (Trudel, Reio, 2011), which may seem surprising, as the collaborating style otherwise was found to have many positive effects. Though an explanation for the incivility could be that in both collaborating and dominating styles, at least one part will search for a win, which means he/she will be assertive and defend it’s own interests, which in it self could lead to some incivility.

### 2.3 Summary of the research

To summarize, the collaborating style was found to be the most preferred by managers and directors, and was found to have most positive outcomes like increased overall job satisfaction, increased experience of interpersonal and performance rewards at the job and connected to effective leadership. This style had though also an arguably negative outcome of increased workplace incivility. The competing style was found to have many opposite, negative outcomes, like reduced job satisfaction, reduced feeling of interpersonal or performance rewards and negative relationship to human resource frame. The result on the use and effects of the other styles like accommodating, avoiding and compromising, were inconsistent, were both positive and negative effects were found when these styles were applied. Research also shows differences in style use depending on age, sex, culture and organizational context. It shows that sometimes several styles like competing and collaborating, were inapplicable, as it demanded going for a win, which in some situations were not possible because of unequal power relations between the two parties (Marin, Sherblom, Shipps, (1994), Din, Khan, Bibi, 2012).

My conclusion is thus that the vast amount of previous research on conflict management styles does not identify one single, universal conflict management style that can be effectively applied in all organizational contexts at all times. This conclusion and research findings will later be used in this study, in question 2, as an analytical tool for examination of Stephen R. Covey’s managerial discourses in his book on conflict management. Let me now continue on to the next chapter and introduce the methodological and theoretical framework for this study.
Chapter 3: Method and Theory

3.1 Case study on Stephen R. Covey

In this thesis I chose to apply case study as my research design. Bryman (2011) states that case study as a research design means a detailed deep study of a single case, which can mean that a complexity and special nature of the chosen case is studied. A case can according to Bryman (2011) be a specific community, specific school, family, organization, happening or a specific person (Ibid p 73-74). In this study a case is then a specific person - a popular management guru Stephen R. Covey (1932-2012). I am conducting a somewhat detailed deep study of Covey’s discourses on how a leader should handle conflict at workplace and I am studying the complexity and the specific nature that my special case - 'guru’ Covey - and his discourses on the topic show. Case study here means that I do not study several management guru’s books, as previous researchers on the topic have done (Furusten, 1995; McGill, 1988; Huczynski, 1993), but only one guru’s book, or focus on one person and make a deep study on his specific discourses. Now shortly about who the guru is. Covey is the founder of FranklinCovey (http://www.franklincovey.com/tc/) - a global consulting company that offers varies vocational educational programs for competency development for leaders and employees, to develop different skills and knowledge and to better employee performance. FranklinCovey is also present on Swedish market for workforce training (http://franklincovey.se/utbildningskatalog ).

Research shows that Covey’s teachings are used to educate and train all from kindergarten and middle school children to teachers, educators, employees, managers and top leadership in all kinds of organizational settings. According to English (2002) Covey’s teaching are included in a broad range of texts marked to educational leaders, including textbooks for the formal preparation of school administrators at the university level (English, 2002 p. 13). The guru’s global consulting company FranklinCovey’s main objective is to educate, train and consult people to improve their performance through behavioral change. The education and training is offered in different areas: leadership, execution, productivity, trust, sales performance, customer loyalty, education (http://www.franklincovey.com/tc/). FranklinCovey use all kind of workshops, personalized programs, on-line training, on the job training and certification of intern trainers (http://franklincovey.se/utbildningskatalog) as they training methods.

Besides being a world wide educator and consultant, Covey is also a New York Times Magazine best-selling author. Covey’s (1988) popular book “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” remained on the New York Times best seller list for 5 years, and sold more than 25 million copies world wide and was translated into 28 languages, according to the reference below. This is what New York Times Magazine has to say more about Covey:

After conferring with Mr. Covey over Thanksgiving in 1994, President Bill Clinton said American productivity would greatly increase if people followed Mr. Covey’s advice.
More than two-thirds of Fortune 500 companies flocked to use a consulting company he had founded (Martin, 2012, July 16)

The above citation shows thus how widely used and popular Covey’s consulting company and consequently his books, been in the organizational world, where the most successful companies world wide have sought Coveys guidance, education and consultations since 90-ies.

Covey’s best-seller “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” that sold 25 million copies around the world is though ‘old news’, first published in 1989. It has also been analyzed by several researchers like
English (2002) and Jacksson (1999). I have therefore chosen to analyze Covey’s latest book, published in 2011, a year before the guru passed away. The analyzed conflict management book in this study, *The 3rd Alternative - solving life’s most difficult problems*, is included in leadership training at Covey’s consulting company. As leadership within organizations and working life are the central study objects in this pedagogical research, I chose to analyze Covey’s management books aimed to educate leaders. The following link shows which books are used for leadership education at Covey’s consulting company in Sweden [http://franklincovey.se/utbildningskatalog](http://franklincovey.se/utbildningskatalog). Out of these books, aimed for leadership training, I chose the very latest one, “The 3rd Alternative - solving life’s most difficult problems” published in 2011, with the intention of researching Covey’s latest, most updated discourses. This latest book aimed for leadership training, appeared to be on the topic of conflict management. The analyzed book is arguably the most important of all Covey’s published books, as it assembles according to him self the most important work he ever did in his life, as it was his last. Covey states: "Always believe your most important work is ahead of you, never behind you" (Covey, 2011 p. 416). I have therefore chosen to analyze it, to make an updated contribution to the study of what popular management discourses as Covey’s carry to the postmodern organizations in terms of worldview, norms, values, knowledge and ideology.

### 3.2 Discourse analysis

The aim of this study is to analyze current discourses within the expanding management culture in modern society and to examine how these managerial discourses are shaping leader’s roles in modern organizations. The most appropriate method to fulfill that aim is discourse analysis. In this study I am using several related methodological and theoretical approaches and tools, described below. My primary methodological inspiration is discourse analysis and closely related poststructuralist theorists. Notice that these are only an inspiration in this study, and that I do not use all the complex models of discourse analysis or all the complex post-structuralistic theoretical concepts, but I only use the aspects of discourse analysis and poststructuralism that are relevant and applicable to my study questions. This way of conducting my study can be motivated by following.

Poststructuralists Levi-Strauss (1962) and Derrida (1967) recommend using *Bricolage*, when conducting a critical discourse analysis and deconstructing a text (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p.242), which I do. Brinkman & Kvale (2009) define bricolage as a toolkit, designed with a special purpose. Bricolage can also be explained as a construction made of variety of available materials or resources, or as a use of multiple, diverse research methods. Winther Jørgensen och Phillips (2000) also argue that it is reasonable for a discourse analytical researcher to construct an own analytical tollkit. In this study I am thus constructing my own bricolage or analytical toolkit in order to analyze and deconstruct Stephen R. Covey’s managerial discourses, as suggested by the above mentioned sources. Such an analytical toolkit made out of diverse analytical tools, matches well with the poststructuralistic theoretical approach used in this study. The different analytical tools in my toolkit will be explained later through out this method chapter and later be used in all three study questions. To make my study more transparent and replicable, I have further in this chapter also described in detail how I conducted my analysis of Covey’s managerial discourses, step by step. I have also chosen to use some previous scholarly research on organizational conflict management as my analytical tool in question 2, as this question specifically concerns conflict management styles. Thus another researcher, if using the same methodological and theoretical tools, following the same steps of analysis, and analyzing through the same previous research lense, might possibly come to similar results and conclusions as I did.

There can be found several different theoretical and methodological approaches within discourse analysis. However these approaches have some common features. One of them is that a discourse is
defined as a certain way of describing and understanding the world or an aspect of the world. Another common feature of many discourse analytical approaches is that language is seen not as a neutral representation of the world, but as a constructive, generative force, that constitutes and changes different representations of the world. In discourse analysis, language is not merely a means to describing the social world, but it is the goal, the study object in and of itself (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Bryman, 2008; Alvesson, Sköldberg, 1994; Bergström & Boréus, 2000). Another common feature is that discourses are to be understood through their contextual frame. It is important for the researcher to analyze who the author of the text is so as to determine what kind of interest and influence it has on the produced discourse. The researcher has to determine with what ideological, political etc voice the discoursive story is told (Berglund, 2008; Bryman, 2008; Alvesson, Sköldberg, 1994). Those were the common features in general discourse analysis. Now, I want to introduce a few specific ideas and concepts from the different approaches within discourse analysis.

In this study I draw my inspiration from following theoretical and methodological approaches and analytical tools of discourse analysis: critical discourse analysis, post-structuralistic theories including Foucault's theories on discourses and power and Derrida's deconstruction of discourses, which are interrelated and intertwined (Bryman, 2008; Alvesson, Sköldberg, 1994), and Berglunds (2008) suggested tool to analyze the binary use in a text. I therefore here do not separate discourse analysis as a method of study and closely related theoretical frameworks of poststructuralism, Foucaults and Derridas theories from each other. Both method and theory (and previous research) are used in this study as a lense through which I examine my empirical material. The theoretical and methodological aspects of discourse analysis are extensive and complex, therefore I will only focus on the ideas and concepts, most relevant for this study.

The approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) extends to the written and spoken language, but is not limited to it as are several other text analysis methods. CDA also has an ambition to analyze the processes and structures that generate the discourses expressed through written and spoken language (Wodak, 2001). CDA is a clearly critical approach, as it focuses on the role that discourses have in producing and reproducing power and oppression. This approach sees discourse as constituted or influenced by the surrounding social world, but it also sees discourse as a constituting power, which means that the discourse shapes and forms the surrounding social world. Discourses can thus constitute or produce knowledge, ideology, values, norms and identities within and between individuals and groups. A discourse can therefore be both sustaining and transformative for different social constructions as knowledge, values, norms ideologies etc. (Bergström & Boréus, 2000, Berglund, 2008). In other words, the social world is produced and made real through discourses, and social interaction must be understood through the lens of the discourses that give it meaning. A discourse in CDA is thus seen as a "generative mechanism", producing social reality. A discourse analysts role is then to examine the relation between discourse and reality (Bryman, 2008, Alvesson, Sköldberg, 1994).

Different discourse analytical approaches seem to have different ontological premises or different world views. Some approaches are anti-realistic, meaning that these approaches do not support the belief that there is an outer existing reality that needs to be described and explained by the researcher. Other approaches, like one version of CDA, have a critical realistic ontology. Some researchers (Fairclough, 2005 in Bryman, 2008) suggest that such a critical realistic world view can be more valuable in organizational studies than an anti-realistic view, as the former supports the view that organizations are sustained by some real, objective social structures. The focus in such a critical realistic discourse analysis is then on examining the tension between discourses adapted by organizations and organizational structures (Bryman, 2008). In this thesis I am partially inspired by
such critical realistic ontology suggested by Fairclough, (2005), as this ontology is viewed as more valuable for organizational studies, which I also do in this thesis.

3.3 Poststructuralism: Foucault and Derrida

Discourse analysis is often focused on critical examination of power relations (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Foucault’s post-structural perspective on discourse analysis is that power is present in all relations and it is expressed through different practices. According to this perspective, the purpose of analysis is then to examine what power relations are at work, how these power relations make certain discourses possible and how discourses can support and sustain certain power-relations (Bergström & Boréus, 2000). Foucault is especially interested in those discourses that seek to rationalize themselves to particular ways of "saying the truth", which relates directly to his genealogy of power. Foucault sees knowledge and power as closely intertwined. Foucault’s genealogy is inherently critical, his objective is to interrogate what is held to be given, held to be a natural law, and necessity. It’s concern is with the relation between knowledge and power, and with practices of regulation of bodies, government of conduct, formation of self. Foucault is concerned with study of how people govern themselves and others through the production of knowledge and ideologies. He sees knowledge as a power generating force, that constitutes people as subjects and then governing the subjects with the knowledge. Although Foucault sees links between knowledge and power, he does not mean that some particular elite groups of the society are consciously conspiring against weaker societal groups, rather it’s about structural relations between knowledge and power (Ritzer 2011 p. 614).

Discourse have according to Foucault also power to control people through so called exclusion mechanisms. Thus a post-structuralistic Foucauldian question asks who is constructed as included and excluded, normal and deviant, desirable and undesirable, what is constructed as moral and immoral, right and wrong, good and bad, true and false in different contexts (Bergström & Boréus, 2000, Berglund, 2008). The above post-structuralistic Foucauldian questions have inspired two out of my own study questions from the aim of this study:

2) What is constructed as the ‘right’ and proper conflict management strategy? What conflict management strategies are categorized as ‘wrong’ and improper?

2) How is the normative ideal and categorization of a ‘good’ versus a ‘bad’ leader constructed? What qualities and behaviors are expected of a ‘good’ leader? Consequently, what qualities and behaviors are categorized as ‘bad’ and undesirable?

To find answers to these questions I have found helpful to use a strategy inspired by Berglund’s (2008) study, which is examining how binaries are used in a text. The rhetorical technique of binary use has an underlying purpose of persuading the audience of the ‘goods’ by opposing it to the ‘bads’ (MacLure 2003 in Berglund, 2008 p. 31). To me this strategy occurred to be appropriate when searching for answers to the above post-structuralistic questions, as binary use in a text show who is considered as included and excluded, normal and deviant etc. Analyzing the technique of binary use in a text helps the researcher to go down to the deep level of a rhetoric, compared to other techniques that only touch on a surface level. Binary use technique, according to Berglund (2008), can reveal the most important underlying ‘truths’ about what is categorized as good-bad, desirable-undesirable, proper-improper, moral-immoral (Berglund, 2008 p. 32). I therefore intend to examine how Covey uses binaries in his book to construct the ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ leader and to construct standards and norms for the ‘proper’ and desirable versus ‘improper’ and undesirable qualities and behaviors in a leader. By constructing
the ‘good’ and desirable, the ‘bad’ and undesirable is thus also constructed. The use of binaries therefore reveal what individual qualities and skills are constructed as good and bad, desirable and undesirable, proper and improper. To illustrate how binary construction can look, I am here presenting a chart from Berglunds (2008) discourse analytical study, which shows some of the binaries she identified in her studied empirical material:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>new</td>
<td>old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual responsibility</td>
<td>collective solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge age</td>
<td>industrial age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyday life</td>
<td>classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lifelong learning</td>
<td>traditional education and training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Chart 1: Berglunds (2008) illustrative matrix for binary construction in her study (Ibid. p. 32, 61)*

In my study I am thus using the same strategy of analyzing binary use in a text as Berglund (2008). This strategy will be most obvious in the last third question of this study. There, Covey characterizes a leader and prescribes good/positive qualities and skills to a 3rd Alternative leader and bad/negative qualities and traits to a 2 Alternative leader. Thus he constructs a ‘good’ leader with desirable skills and qualities and a ‘bad’ leader with undesirable qualities and traits. This analysis of binary use in Covey’s text will be presented in a chart in the end of analysis of question 3.

Besides Berglunds (2008) analytical tools, I am also inspired by Derridas tools for text analysis and deconstruction. Derrida, just as Foucault, is seen as one of the main figures within poststructuralism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). Derrida’s deconstruction is all about uncovering a hidden but crucial weakness in the analyzed text - a crack in its apparent entity. Apparent, because it does not draw conclusions from its own premisses and this negligence permeates the whole text. The aspects that are suppressed to almost non-existent, are revealed through deconstruction and made central (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p.235). Deconstruction is also focused on opening up "the big narratives" or myths that claim to explain different phenomenons and myths that gain such a great power over the minds of people, that they function as absolute truth or dogmas. One of the main purposes of deconstruction is then to critically analyze these myths (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p.242-243). Alvesson och Sköldberg (1994) suggest that these big narratives or myths can for instance be different kind of system theories like marxism, psychoanalysis or hermeneutics. This system theories claim to explain many phenomenons and they therefore gain such a power over the minds of people (Ibid. p 242). Covey’s (2011) analyzed book “The 3rd Alternative - solving life’s most difficult problems” is thus in this study seen as such big narrative story or a myth, which claims to explain the phenomenon of conflict and its resolution and claims to carry the only correct universal, timeless principal of solving life’s most difficult problems and conflicts (Covey, 2011 p.219). It is therefore of a major importance to critically analyze and deconstruct such “big narratives” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p. 242) as this managerial guru has constructed.

### 3.4 How I did my analysis

This study is not done strictly following all the complex methodological rules and models of discourse analysis, but is instead only inspired by discourse analysis. By inspired I mean that I do not conduct a
discourse analysis strictly according to all three dimensions of text analysis (text-dimension, discoursive praxis dimension and the social praxis dimension) suggested by for instance Bryman (2008, p. 485). I have instead chosen to ask the analyzed text specific study questions and identify discourses that answer these study questions. The analysis of Covey's book is thus limited to these study questions, which means that only discourses relevant to these questions are presented and analyzed, not all the discourses in the book. Another limitation is that not the whole book is being analyzed, but only first three chapters of the book, as only these have most relevant information for the study questions. The first two chapters in the book are introductory to Covey's general idea on conflict resolution and the third chapter is focused on conflict resolution at workplace. I structure my analysis by the research questions. The three questions in this study are related to each other and build upon each other. The first question focuses on the underlying ontology and epistemology that are present in Coveys managerial discourses and carried to the organizational world. These are important to understand before moving on to the other questions, as they reveal the foundation for all guru’s discourses presented in his book. In question two I move on to presenting Covey’s discourses on conflict management and ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to resolve conflicts. Last third question focuses on summarizing Covey’s constructions of a ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ leader, his/her qualities and skills. This question is built upon the previous question two. The skills and qualities of a ‘good’ leader are drawn from the rhetorics about the ‘right’ conflict management strategy, and skills and qualities of a bad leader are drawn from the rhetorics about the ‘wrong’ conflict management strategies.

**Steps in my analysis**

1) The first step of my analysis was listening to the whole analyzed book, the audiobook version on Kindle, to get a general idea of what the book was all about. At this stage I formulated my three study questions also with help of the earlier described theoretical and methodological frames.

2) Second step was to read through the first three analyzed chapters more carefully several times, and mark and write down the themes, keywords and phrases that appear most relevant for the study questions. I then sorted these themes, keywords and phrases after relevancy for each study question. These themes, keywords and phrases were identified as the author repeatedly brought them up again and again throughout the book, or in some cases he only mentioned them one or two times, but he put a lot of ‘weight’ and importance to them. In such way these themes, keywords and phrases stood out as carriers a major significance and meaning in the text. Therefore I created a chart to make these visible and create transparency in my analytical process. The chart 2 below shows these outstanding significant themes, keywords and phrases, identified in the analyzed material.

3) As a third step in my analysis I used these themes, keywords and phrases as help to find the discourses relevant for my study questions. I used the search option on my electronic Kindle version of the book and searched all these keywords and phrases in the text. I read carefully through all the statements that included these keywords and phrases and picked those most relevant for the study questions. These several identified statements together formed discourses, and were cited or summarized and presented in the result chapter under the relevant question.

Thus another researcher could follow the same three steps in my analysis and have a possibility to identify the discourses that I identified.
Study question | Searched keywords/phrases
--- | ---
1) What ontology and epistemology is present in the chosen management discourses and carried to the organizations? | principle, paradigm, correct, right, false, wrong, flawed, truth, dilemma, God, universal
2) What is constructed as the "right" and proper conflict management strategy? What conflict management strategies are categorized as "wrong" and improper? | 2 Alternative, fight, flight, denial, compromise, the great middle, win-win
3rd Alternative, synergy
3) How is the normative ideal and categorization of a "good" versus a "bad" leader constructed? What character traits, qualities and skills are expected of a "good" leader? Consequently, what traits, qualities and skills are categorized as "bad" and undesirable? | I see myself, I see you, I seek you out, I synergies with you

**Chart 2: Themes, keywords/phrases**

**3.5 On ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ in discourse analysis**

According to Berglund (2008), the concepts of validity and reliability are not immediately applicable in discourse analysis. These concepts are more applicable to the logical positivist tradition, where a study would seek to establish *the* truth, or a true representation of the real world through systematic gathering of data to make it possible to repeat the study. Brinkman & Kvale (2009) argue that striving for a homogenous and repeatable knowledge is not even desirable within social sciences, because knowledge is then unique in each context. Each researcher carries a new context and the produced knowledge is therefore unique. Although in all academic writing it is mandatory to evaluate the research process in relation to its knowledge claims, I will therefore attempt to do so, relating to concepts of validity and reliability.

The question of validity is concerned with whether a method is measuring what it is supposed to measure (Bergström & Boréus, 2000). A ‘validity’ question for this study is thus: can I acquire scientific knowledge about what kind of values, knowledge, norms and ideologies are shaping postmodern organizational life and forming leaders and workers, through a method of discourse analysis performed on popular management literature aimed for organizational education and training? According to researchers as Furusten (2008), English (2002), and Berglund (2008), the answer to that question is yes, I can acquire scientific knowledge on the topic through analysis of popular management discourses, as these have an important role in shaping and forming postmodern workplace and organizational world and the actors in it.

Another question of validity is about what role and influence do researchers own prior subjective understanding of the studied object play in the results and conclusions of the study? Seen through a constructivistic lens, the researcher is unable to ever view any phenomenon in social science without constructing the study object through one’s own subjective understanding of the phenomenon (Bergström & Boréus, 2000). As Richardson so rightly put it: "People who write are always writing about their lives, even when they disguise this through the omniscient voice of science or scholarship. No writing is untainted by human hands, pure, objective, ‘innocent’" (Richardson 2001:34 in...
Berglund, 2008 p. 26). It is therefore arguably inevitable, that this study will be colored by me as a researcher and by my own subjective prior understanding of the studied phenomenon, as Richardson states. Though the degree to which this study will be colored by my own subjective understanding can and should be reduced as much as possible. Therefore to raise the ‘validity’ of the study I have made myself aware of my own subjective prior understanding and opinion on the studied object, of my own epistemology and ontology and of the social context of the study and done all possible to my knowledge to eliminate as much of my own ‘coloring’ of the results and conclusions as possible.

The next question is on reliability of this study, which concerns the precision of measuring. How exact is my measuring of popular management knowledge, ideology, values and norms brought to organizations to shape and form individuals in them? If another researcher performed the exact same study, would the researcher come to the same results and conclusions as I did? In a qualitative social science study built on analyzing and interpreting written discourses, it is difficult to reach total intersubjectivity, which is another researcher reaching exactly the same results. It is though my hope that if another researcher applied the exact same theoretical, methodological, ontological and epistemological premises and analyzed exactly same chosen parts of the book and followed the same steps I did, that it would be possible to reconstruct somewhat similar argumentation and conclusions (Bergström & Boréus, 2000). I also try to give clear argumentation for all my conclusions and provide all the sources supporting these, to make possible to replicate the study. On the other hand, another researcher would bring a new, different context, different personal lens of interpretation, which could lead to different conclusions.

I have thus in previous chapters above described my methodological, theoretical and research frames and now I would like to move on to giving an account for the results of this study.
Chapter 4: Result and analysis

The aim of this study is to analyze current discourses within the expanding popular management culture in modern society and to examine what these discourses carry to organizations in terms of worldview, knowledge, ideologies, norms and values and how these discourses shape leader’s roles in modern organizations. I fulfill that aim by conducting a case study on a conflict management book by one the most popular management gurus, Stephen R. Covey (2011). The book is used by Covey as an educational tool for leadership training worldwide. The study questions are:

1) What ontology and epistemology is present in the chosen management discourses and carried to the organizations?

2) How does Covey construct an ideal for the right and proper strategy of conflict management vs. the wrong and improper strategies of conflict management?

3) How is the normative ideal and categorization of a ‘good’ versus a ‘bad’ leader constructed? What qualities and behaviors are expected of a ‘good’ leader? Consequently, what qualities and behaviors are categorized as ‘bad’ and undesirable?

The analysis of Covey’s book “The 3rd alternative-solving life’s most difficult problems” is limited to the above study questions, which means that only discourses relevant to these questions will be presented and analyzed here. Another limitation is that not the whole book is being analyzed, but only first three chapters of the book, as only these have most relevant information for the study questions. The first two chapters in the book are introductory to Covey’s general idea on conflict resolution and the third chapter is focused on conflict resolution at workplace. I structure my analysis by the research questions. The three questions in this study are related to each other and build upon each other. The first question introduces the underlying ontology and epistemology that are present in Coveys managerial discourses and carried to the organizational world. These are important to understand before moving on to the other questions, as they reveal the foundation for all guru’s discourses presented in his book. In a discourse analysis it is important for the researcher to analyze who the author of the text is so as to determine what kind of interest and influence it has on the produced discourse. The researcher has to determine with what ideological voice the discursive story is told (Berglund, 2008, Bryman, 2008, Alvesson, Sköldberg, 1994). In question two I move on to presenting Covey’s discourses on conflict management and ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to resolve conflicts. Last third question focuses on summarizing Covey’s constructions of a ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ leader, his/her qualities and skills. This question is built upon previous question two. The skills and qualities of a ‘good’ leader are drawn from the rhetorics about the ‘right’ conflict management strategy, and skills and qualities of a ‘bad’ leader are drawn from the rhetorics about the ‘wrong’ conflict management strategies.

Question 1: Covey’s epistemology and ontology

First question in this study is: what ontology and epistemology is present in the chosen management discourses and carried to the organizations? In the process of analyzing Covey’s managerial discourses I found it important to bring to the surface and analyze Covey’s fundamental worldview, his view of what things actually exist, and what is the essence of all things according to him, and his view of
knowledge, what knowledge is and where it comes from, and how it is acquired. How does Covey, reason on what is true and what is false, right and wrong, real and fabricated?

I found that Covey has a fundamental religious worldview, where he sees God as the origin and source of all things existing. Covey’s ‘knowledge’ or rather ideology, norms and values expressed in his fundamental principles and paradigms taught in this book, are inspired by the Bible, as well as by his own experience and experience of people he worked with, by the myths and believes on what successful leaders and organizations do, and mixed with fragmentary bits of scientific knowledge, which will be presented later on in question study two. The guru’s worldview and knowledge view is based on Biblical ideas, which is obvious in his rhetoric referring to the Bible and God in the citations below:

The New Testament teaches, Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God (Ibid. p.249).

Covey’s view of knowledge can be revealed in his following statement concerning his own teachings:

it is a book of timeless, universal, self-evident principles of human effectiveness. They belong to every enduringly prosperous culture, society, religion, family, and organization. I did not invent them; I simply sequenced and organized them into a framework that gives people personal access to them. I believe these universal principles come from God and are a manifestation of His love for us and desire for our happiness (Covey, 2011 pp. 436-437).

Synergy - The 3rd alternative, the best conflict resolution strategy - is in the above citation seen as the main universal principle pictured in Covey’s book. It is pictured as applicable in all possible contexts and times, and the knowledge about this principle of conflict resolution has been according to him attained by Covey directly from God. This universal principal of synergy (described more in the next question), is in Covey’s discourses a primary example of the ‘correct’ principles (Ibid p.391). Consequently there also exists ‘wrong’ principles and paradigms. The primary example of the ‘false’ principles according to Covey is The 2-alternative paradigm (described in the next question). Below I show Covey’s rhetoric on the ‘correct’ and ‘wrong’ principles and paradigms:

What we do know is that synergy works; it’s a correct principle (Covey, 2011 p 392)

and

But the problem with conflict in the workplace is not that it exists, but that we have the wrong paradigm about it. The 2-Alternative response to conflict is “fight or flight,” while the synergistic response is welcome, delight, engagement, discovery (Covey, 2011 p 92).

Again, any other principle, paradigm or strategy than Covey’s advocated, is pictured as wrong and incorrect, and only synergy is pictured as the right and true way of resolving conflicts.

Covey also seems to crave certainty in his discourses throughout his book. He consistently sees ambiguity as wrong and belonging to a false paradigm. He argues that too many people think that they face dilemmas - which he defines as ”a problem that seems to have no satisfactory solution” (Ibid p 20), - but that they are wrong, because the very concept of dilemma is false. He argues instead that basically all problems have a potential satisfactory solution that can be found, and that dilemma, is therefore a false way of seeing things. There is a solution to nearly all problems and conflicts; Covey states:
"There is a path that cuts through nearly all life's dilemmas and deep divisions. There is a way forward. It's not your way, and it's not my way. It's a higher way. It's a better way than any of us have thought of before. I call it "the 3rd Alternative." (Ibid p.8).

Covey states above that "the 3rd alternative" is not his way, but that it is a true, correct, universal, timeless, self-evident principle, applicant in all contexts. He claims though that he was able to tap into the truth, The right way, were as too many leaders and organizations have not been able to do so and therefore struggle with destructive conflicts. The guru sees therefore that it is his mission to help people open their eyes to that 'universal truth' that he claims to have discovered.

Paradoxically though, when Covey talks about other people involved in an organizational conflict with each other, he pictures the 'truth' in a different light, not as self-evident and universal anymore. In his paradigm of 'I seek you out' (see next question), he states:

“I Seek You Out” starts with the principle that truth is complicated and that everybody likely has a little slice of it. “Truth is never pure and rarely simple,” said Oscar Wilde. No one has it all. 3rd Alternative thinkers recognize that the more slices of truth they have, the more they see things as they really are. So these thinkers deliberately seek out different slices of truth. If you have truth that I don’t have, why wouldn’t I come and find you so you can teach me? (Covey, 2011, p. 42)

In other words he states that there is a whole objective truth that is waiting to be found, and that each one person involved in a conflict holds only one slice of that truth, not the whole truth, and that it is therefore essential to put together all "slices" in order to find that whole objective truth. That is how Covey’s rhetoric goes concerning other people’s “truth”, but when it comes to Covey’s own "truth": the principles and paradigms he teaches in his book, the "truth” suddenly becomes obvious, certain, clear, self-evident, universal and timeless (Ibid p 8, 391, 436 etc). Covey’s rhetoric can thus be interpreted as if he means that other people have slices of truth (Ibid p 42, 43, 54 etc), but Covey himself has found the whole truth (Ibid p 8, 391, 436 etc) on how to solve complicated conflicts and problems, which seems as an obvious contradiction or inconsistency.

To summarize Covey’s epistemology and ontology: there exists an objective ‘truth’ or reality, universal, timeless self-evident principles. Covey claims to have found that universal ‘truth’, or it was revealed to him by God, and he sees it as his mission to deliver this ‘truth’ to the world. The inconsistency in his discourses is though in his rhetoric about other peoples truth. Guru’s rhetoric appears to be that other people have pieces of it, but he himself, have been revealed the whole truth on how to solve life’s most difficult conflicts and problems.

4.1.1 Analysis of Covey’s epistemology and ontology

The above described findings are more then less in accordance with previous research on popular management literature. Result of this study shows that the ‘guru’ bases his teachings on fundamental religious worldview, where he sees God as the origin and source of all things existing. Previous researchers like Furusten (1999) compares popular managerial guru’s, the writers of these books, with the medieval crusaders, who diffused Christianity throughout the world while claiming to be sent by God. Furusten shows though that managerial gurus that he studied do not claim to be sent by God to spread the Christian faith, as Covey obscurely seems to be doing, but rather to spread their own faith in North American Managerialism. Researchers like Fenwick (2002) and Jackson (1999) though show that the managerial gurus that they studied, did base their teachings on religious worldview, but they did so in such a way that it was not easy for an ordinary reader to discern, the religious foundation
of the discourses was obfuscated and covered up with managerial arguments and ideas. Jackson (1999) also argues that popular managerial knowledge is appealing to such a broad spectrum of people worldwide because it is able to address the existential and spiritual needs that are characteristic to individuals of late modern age. It could then be argued, on the basis of Jackson’s (1999) statement, that Covey’s advocated necessity for resolving all conflicts peacefully and synergetically, is that existential and spiritual need that is characteristic to postmodern individuals. It is here obvious that popular managerial discourses are not homogenous, and their ontology and epistemology cannot be generalized, as each ‘guru’ carries own worldview. My perception is therefore that conducting a case study on popular managerial literature is fruitful as it more accurately shows the specifics of and uniqueness of each separate case.

The findings of this study on the topic of Covey’s epistemology are also in accordance with previous research. English (2002) had very similar findings on the guru’s epistemology. English (2002), who also studied Covey’s earlier written management literature, states that Covey’s definition of truth is: “a knowledge of things as they are”. That definition was not worded in exactly the same way in the analyzed book, but can be read ‘between the lines’, as Covey claims himself to have found that truthful knowledge of things as they are, that truthful knowledge about the correct universal principles. English (2002) concludes that this conception of truth has been called “naive realism”, which posits that there is a tangible reality, and experience with it can result in knowing it fully.

It is interesting to see that some discourse analytical researchers have somewhat similar ontological premises as Covey, though to a different extent. The realistic ontological approach, as mentioned in my method chapter, is by researchers as Fairclough, 2005 (in Bryman, 2008), seen as more valuable in organizational studies than an anti-realistic view, as the former supports the view that organizations are sustained by some real, objective social structures. It is though important to point out that managerial guru Covey is seen as a "naive realist" where as organizational researchers as Fairclough, 2005 present themselves as "critical realists". There is a large degree difference between naive and critical, still both have realistic worldview. A question can though be posed here: can such popular managerial realistic ontology as Covey shows, have had any influence on organizational researchers such as Fairclough, 2008 who also advocate a realistic worldview? Can there have been any power relation between realistic managerial discourses and organizational researcher's worldview?

According to Michael Foucault there could have. Foucault sees some important links between knowledge and power. He is especially interested in those discourses that seek to rationalize themselves to particular ways of "saying the truth", his objective is to interrogate what is held to be given, held to be a natural law, and necessity, which is exactly what Covey's discourses do. Foucault is concerned with study of how people govern others through the production of knowledge and ideologies. He sees knowledge as a power generating force, that constitutes people as subjects and then governing the subjects with the knowledge. He does not mean though that this governing with knowledge and ideologies is a conscious conspiracy, but rather it’s about structural relations between knowledge and power (Ritzer 2011 p. 614). Based on the above it could be argued that such managerial discourses as Covey's and their worldview, could have an influence on the worldview of some organizational researchers as Fairclough (2005). Even more so could such managerial discourse’s ontological standpoints have an impact on organizations and individuals in them, on their worldview and knowledge view, which is also supported by several researchers (Furusten 1999, English, 2002, Jackson, 1999, Berghlund).

The findings about Covey’s epistemological claim that he has found The universal, timeless, self-evident principles, applicable in all possible contexts is also in accordance with Furustens (1999)
research on popular managerial discourses. Furusten (1999) shows that popular managerial ‘gurus’ have universal and normative ambitions, suggesting that their managerial ideas can be applied in all relevant managerial contexts, and that their suggested ideas are the ‘right’ way of doing things. Although Covey’s ‘knowledge’ or rather ideology, norms and values expressed in his fundamental principles and paradigms taught in this book, are inspired by the Bible, as well as by his own experience, not by previous scientific research on the topic. This creates therefore a contradiction, as Covey claims to have found universal truth, but he bases his claims only on his own contextual experience and on religious beliefs, not on proven facts. Furusten (1999) therefore strongly questions the validity and reliability of such popular managerial discourses presented in managerial literature and questions whether they at all can be called knowledge, which is characterized by stable, mobile, and combinable argumentation.

Discourse have according to Foucault also power to control people through so called exclusion mechanisms, by constructing the included and excluded, normal and deviant, desirable and undesirable, moral and immoral, right and wrong, good and bad, truth and false in different contexts (Bergström & Boréus, 2000, Berglund, 2008). It can be argued that it is exactly what Covey does in his discourses: constructs the right and the wrong way to resolve conflicts, thus constructing the desirable and undesirable categories of leaders, such as peace makers and their opposite fighters or those who flee conflict. Peace makers are then included in ”god’s family” and consequently the rest is excluded of that constructed fellowship. In other words, popular managerial discourses, which are adapted as knowledge by organizations, are given power to control people through exclusion mechanisms. Organizations give these discourses power by seeing the producers of the managerial books as experts, as producing the ‘right’ management knowledge (Furusten 1999, English, 2002, Jacksson, 1999, Berglund).

Covey’s discourses can also be analyzed through the lens of another poststructuralist Derrida. Derrida’s deconstruction of a text is focused on uncovering a hidden but crucial weakness in the analyzed text - a crack in it’s apparent entity. Apparent, because it does not draw conclusions from it’s own premisses and this negligence permeates the whole text (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p.235). Covey’s premisses is that there is one universal truth about how to solve any conflict, and he has discovered that truth, but he does not draw conclusions from his own premisses about truth being universal, as he also writes that everyone participating in a conflict has their own truth. Thus it is a ”crack” and a contradiction in his discourses, as he states that he has found the whole, the universal truth, but other people have not, as they only have pieces of the truth. My interpretation is that this negligence does permeate Covey’s whole text.

Covey also states that he did not invent these universal principles that he teaches, but he simply ”sequenced and organized them into a framework that gives people personal access to them” (Covey p. 436). Sequencing and organizing these ”universal” principles includes though using language, which according to many discourse analytical approaches is not a neutral representation of the world or these ”universal principles”, but a constructive, generative force, that constitutes and changes different representations of the world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, Bryman, 2008, Alvesson, Sköldberg, 1994, Bergström & Boréus, 2000). In other words, just the fact that Covey uses language means that he himself constructs, constitutes and changes the representation of these ”universal” principles, and Covey’s constructions can thus not be representing a neutral objective truth.
Question 2: Construction of conflict management strategies.

Second question in this study is: What is constructed as the ‘right’ and proper conflict management strategy? What conflict management strategies are categorized as ‘wrong’ and improper? As mentioned in the previous question, Covey’s discourses split conflict management styles or strategies in right and wrong, even if he sometimes words it somewhat differently, the bottom line is still the same: the 2-alternative way of conflict management is incorrect, where the advocated 3rd alternative way is the correct, universal way of solving conflict in all kinds of contexts. I will now introduce both ways and then analyze them through the lens of previous scholarly research on organizational conflict management.

4.2.1 Construction of ‘wrong’ conflict management strategies

Here is how Covey describes the 2 Alternative thinking in conflict resolution, which he sees as flawed:

Most conflicts have two sides. We are used to thinking in terms of “my team” against “your team.” My team is good, your team is bad, or at least “less good”. My team is right and just; your team is wrong and perhaps even unjust. My motives are pure; yours are mixed at best. It’s my party, my team, my country, my child, my company, my opinion, my side against yours. In each case, there are 2 Alternatives. Almost everyone identifies with one alternative or the other. That’s why we have liberals against conservatives, Republicans against Democrats, workers against management, lawyer against lawyer, children against parents, Tories against Labour, teachers against administrators, college against town, rural against urban, environmentalists against developers, white against black, religion against science, buyer against seller, plaintiff against defendant, emerging nations against developed nations, spouse against spouse, socialists against capitalists, and believers against nonbelievers. It’s why we have racism and prejudice and war. (Covey, 2011 pp. 8-9)

Covey goes on to tell throughout the first two chapters of his book, that this polarized thinking is so deeply rooted in us, that we usually don’t get past it and therefore here are the options we are left with: fight, flight, denial, compromise in a conflict situation with the opponent. Any one of these options will result in either win-lose or lose-lose outcomes, which means that whether one of the parties involved or both of them will lose something. All this options are in Covey’s discourses seen as flawed, incomplete and incorrect. Even a win-win option is considered as incomplete, as it does not meet the high standard of the advocated 3rd alternative. Below, I specify on these ‘flawed’ conflict resolution options, described in Covey’s discourses.

One of the 2-alternative conflict resolution options is to “fight” or oppose the opponent. That is described as one of the dominating paradigms of leadership in most organizations together with “flight” (Covey, 2011 p. 148) It is also described as “going on a war path”, creating enemies, attacking, opposing, competing, demonizing the Other etc (Ibid p.5, 95) Covey metaphorically compares “fighters” in a conflict situation with animals, as animals are only able to either fight or flee in a threatening conflict situations (Ibid. p 16). Here the opposing side is attacked, stereotyped and viewed as an enemy and one needs to defend against it. The consequence is bitterness and both parties thus lose.

Another dominating paradigms of leadership in most organizations is “flight”(Ibid p. 148). Covey explains this conflict management strategy as surrendering your positions and interests and giving the opponent what he/she wants. Here guru refers to conflict theorists who call this strategy “accommodation”, though he never mentions any specific theory or researcher, the reader is expected
to trust without checking the source. Covey states that accommodation or flight approach to conflict usually just creates more problems (Ibid. p.95).

Denial is another "easy" 2-alternative approach to conflict in organizations, states the guru. Covey describes it as follows: "we take positive thinking to the extreme and slip into a pleasant state of denial". Ignorance is bliss - is the attitude here. A leader who is in the state of denial, avoids conflict by "pointing the finger of blame at society, at the parents, at the teachers' union, or at the legislature for his failure to make a difference" (Ibid p. 218), Covey states. The danger with this kind of approach according to the guru is that "reality crushes people in denial" (Ibid. p. 6).

Then there is compromise, or as Covey calls it, "The Great Middle". Covey explains that there are those who are generally turned off by the extremes of 2-Alternative thinking, they do not identify with either pole. They believe in teamwork and collaboration and in seeing the other side's point of view, but they don't see possibilities of a 3-rd alternative. They lose hope that there are any real solutions to conflicts, and they only have enough hope for a compromise. Covey admits that compromise has a good reputation and has prevented many problems from getting worse. He refers to "dictionaries", though never mentioning which ones, that define compromise as where both parties “concede, sacrifice, or surrender” some of their own interests in order to get to an arrangement. This is called a “lose-lose” situation” (Ibid p.21). Compromise might leave people satisfied for a while, but never delighted, it leaves them with a weakened relationship, and to often the conflict will just flare up again. "Because they live in a lose-lose world, people in the Great Middle don't hope for much" (Ibid p. 21) Covey states. "In a compromise, one plus one equals one and a half at best. Everybody loses something" (Ibid. 13). "Compromise is always a pinched and narrow thing. The assumption is there's only so much pie on the table, and if you get more, I get less. Compromise is the polite outcome of scarcity thinking” (Ibid p.96). In a compromise "everyone gives up something to get an agreement while the resentment lingers” (Ibid p. 83). Compromise does not feel so good in the end (Ibid p. 1), a sad consequence for compromisers is " the metastasizing cancer of cynicism" (p 24). Here, one plus one equals one and a half at best. Everybody loses something (Ibid p.13). Compromise thus, is described as belonging to the flawed, incorrect paradigm.

Covey's discourse goes that all the above approaches mean that there always will be a loser in a conflict, either both sides will lose something, or just one of them. You could therefore logically argue that a win-win outcome should then be satisfactory, but it does not appear to be so in Covey's discourses. Covey sets much higher expectations and standards, he aims beyond win-win (Ibid p. 108). Even though he sees it as a good beginning, it is still not the best approach to conflict resolution. Covey exemplifies with win-win not being enough in sales: "Today buyers can get much of what they want from the internet, so even a win-win–minded salesperson is unnecessary. Still, the one thing you cannot get from the internet is synergy" (Ibid p.109). Here a leader or a salesperson is expected to do their uttermost to keep the customer, even a win-win is not enough, only The 3rd alternative - synergy is the best approach, the rhetoric goes. "Buyers have become impatient with sellers who can't synergize, whether they are win-win– minded or not” (Ibid p 113). So if all of the above mentioned approaches are either flawed, wrong or incomplete, which one is then the 'right' one, the proper one, the very best one, according to the guru? - It is the 3rd alternative - the synergy approach.

4.2.2 Construction of "The right" conflict management strategy

As mentioned in the first study question, Covey pictures the advocated paradigms and principles of the 3rd alternative as "universal, timeless, self-evident ... common to every enduring, prospering society,
organization, family, and individual” (Ibid p. 436). Here is how he pictures The 3rd Alternative thinking in conflict resolution, which he sees as based in the correct paradigm:

There is a path that cuts through nearly all life’s dilemmas and deep divisions. There is a way forward. It’s not your way, and it’s not my way. It’s a higher way. It’s a better way than any of us have thought of before. I call it “the 3rd Alternative.” (Covey, 2011 p. 8)

and

Most conflicts are two-sided. The 1st Alternative is my way, the 2nd Alternative is your way. By synergizing, we can go on to a 3rd Alternative — our way, a higher and better way to resolve the conflict. (Covey, 2011 p. 9)

Covey tells that it is a way that neither of the opponents in a conflict have walked yet, that they haven’t even thought of it yet, but they can get there together through a process of synergy (Ibid p. 11).

Synergy is what happens when one plus one equals ten or a hundred or even a thousand! It’s the mighty result when two or more respectful human beings determine together to go beyond their preconceived ideas to meet a great challenge. It’s about the passion, the energy, the ingenuity, the excitement of creating a new reality that is far better than the old reality (Covey, 2011 p.11).

Synergy is though not to be mixed with compromise. In compromise 1+1=1,5 meaning everybody loses something. In synergy though 1+1=10 or 100 or 1000 meaning both parties win and something new is created, which was not there before. Synergy is not just resolving the conflict, it is transcending it, it is transformational, not just transactional paradigm (Ibid p.11-13). It is the natural principle that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, “You and I together are far greater than we are alone” (Ibid. p.13). Covey states that there is always a potential 3rd alternative if people are willing to synergize and look for it together. If they are though not willing or able to do so, the only good option left is no deal (Ibid p. 438). In order to arrive at the 3rd Alternative through a process of synergy, a leader has to acquire several character traits, qualities and skills, which are described in the next third study question. Paradoxically, Covey states that synergy is the universal, the best and right way to solve a conflict as shown above, but he also states that almost no one understands it and few people have really experienced true synergy (Ibid p.13). The rhetoric goes though that he is an expert in it and can therefore teach it to the world.

4.2.3 Summary of conflict management strategies

I will now shortly summarize how Covey constructs conflict management strategies and categorizes and divides them in ‘correct vs flawed’ ones. Conflict management strategies are split into the 2-alternative strategies versus The 3rd alternative. The 2-alternative strategies such as fight, flight, denial and compromise are very commonly used and their results are either lose-lose, or win-lose. Even the strategy of collaboration, when two parties are able to create a win-win, is still unsatisfactory in Covey’s discourses, as it still is transactional, not transformational, which means that nothing new is created, even though the two parties interest are met. All these 2-alternative conflict management strategies are thus pictured as either incorrect and undesirable or just incomplete. The only ultimate desirable way to resolve a conflict is to reach for the 3rd alternative through the process of synergy, meaning being able to let go of both parties original imagined solutions, in order to create a new one, that meets both parties interests and is better than any of the parties originally had in their minds.
Though to do so, both parties must first acquire the qualities and skills of a good synergetic leader (Ibid p.438), described in the next question.

4.2.4 Analysis of conflict management strategies

I am now going to analyze Covey’s discourses on organizational conflict management using scholarly research and academic theories on conflict management, as my interpretational frame. Notice that I am not referring to specific researchers who studied organizational conflict management with the following reason. I have compiled the results of 18 academic research articles and doctoral dissertations on the topic, and a major part of these agree on the earlier described 5 conflict management styles, I therefore will refer to them as one whole. It would take up too much space to mention every researcher. Instead I refer to the link, where all these 18 articles and dissertation are gathered* (see reference below).

The first prominent feature found in Covey’s discourses on conflict management is that he divides different conflict management strategies in the commonly used 2-alternative strategies and the advocated, 3rd-alternative strategy. All the 2-alternative strategies, which in Covey’s discourses are pictured as either flawed and incorrect or just incomplete, appear to be the strategies identified by the conflict theorists and studied by previous researchers. In other words, my interpretation is that Covey acknowledges the existence of all the academically identified and studied conflict management styles, but he sees them as either flawed and incorrect or as incomplete.

Here are some examples where I compare Covey’s constructed conflict management styles belonging to the “flawed” and “incorrect” 2-alternative thinking, with the academic research on organizational conflict management styles. Covey’s discourses on the strategy of ”fight” are mainly in consistency with the previous academical research, that identifies this style as competing/directing/dominating. Both describe many negative outcomes that this style can result in for both initiator and the target. There is also some agreement on Covey’s described “win-win” strategy, which research identifies as collaborating/cooperating/integrating. Both research and the guru show many positive outcomes for those using the style and few negative. Covey is though not totally satisfied with this style as it does not fulfill the high standards of the 3rd alternative strategy of synergy. The arguably most valuable and interesting aspect of analysis is though the other three strategies, which show some uncertainty and inconsistency in previous research results. Covey calls these flight, denial and compromise, where as previous research names these same styles respectively accommodation, avoidance and compromise. I have decided not to do in depth analysis of each of these styles separately as it would take up to much space, but instead call these the "uncertain/inconsistent middle", because previous research shows inconsistent results about these three styles, standing in the middle.

Reference: [link to 18 articles and dissertations on conflict management styles]
Covey though does not accept any uncertainty in his discourses, so such styles are categorized as incorrect, flawed or incomplete, belonging to the wrong paradigm of limited alternative thinking. According to Covey, a good leader should always strive for the 'good' 3rd alternative and should always strive to avoid the 2alternative strategies like compromise, accommodation and avoidance.

Understanding of Covey’s fundamental epistemology and ontology helps understand his polarized, naively realistic black and white, right and wrong thinking, where there is no place for the shades of grey and relativity; where there is no place for strategies like compromise, accommodation and avoidance, as someone has to sacrifice some and give up something to gain something. Only the ‘best’ (the 3rd-alternative) is meeting his immense standards, or if it does not work, no-deal is better than compromising, accommodating or avoiding, the guru argues in his discourses.

The 3rd alternative conflict management strategy, advocated by Covey, has no identified academical or theoretical basis, other than his own constructed basis. The guru’s rhetoric rises though the 3rd alternative conflict management strategy above all the scholarly identified and studied and commonly applied styles in organizations. The 3rd alternative goes according to the guru beyond all these, as it is the universal, true, correct and ultimate strategy to not only transcend but also transform the conflict through the process of synergy.

My conclusion is that Covey’s not very scientific constructed theory on The 3rd alternative paradigm achieved through synergy, intuitively appears as a positive and desirable strategy as it transcends the conflict and creates something much better that any of the parties originally had in their minds. This theory can certainly be applied in some situations, Covey does give an account for a vast amount of these in his book. The analysis shows though that Covey’s constructed not exactly academical theory lacks some serious consideration of how organizational structures and contexts, status, age, sex, culture, time and resources available, how all these factors influence the possibility of choosing synergy as a conflict management strategy. What if a middle manager wants to go for a synergetic conflict management solution with his upper leadership, but they will only use a directing/competing style? What if an important and urgent solution must be found quickly and there is no time for empathic listening and synergizing? Is no deal really the best alternative option here? It is, according to Covey. My interpretation of that kind of approach is similar to Fenwick’s, who defines Covey as a naive realist; it is somewhat naive and very idealistic to believe that synergy is basically always possible and that compromise, accommodation and avoidance are basically always flawed conflict management strategies.

**Question 3: Construction of a leader**

Last question in this study is: How is the normative ideal and categorization of a "good" versus a "bad" leader constructed? What qualities and behaviors are expected of a "good" leader? Consequently, what qualities and behaviors are categorized as "bad" and undesirable in a leader? It must here be noted that Covey doesn’t explicitly use the words "good" or "bad" for describing a leader, although my interpretation is that all his rhetoric in his discourse categorizes leaders in these two categories, he might do so unconsciously, but still my interpretation is that his discourse seems to do such categorizations, which we now will explore.

**4.3.1 Qualities and skills of a "good" leader**

Covey explains that in order to arrive at the 3rd Alternative through a process of synergy, a leader has to acquire and to practice several specific character traits, qualities and skills. In other words, in order
to be a "good" leader, who understands and applies synergy, you must embody these specific character traits, qualities and skills. To find what these qualities and skills are in Covey's discourses, I have analyzed the model that depicts the 3rd alternative thinking constructed out of following paradigms: 1) I see myself 2) I see you 3) I seek you out 4) I synergize with you, as this model describes qualities and skills of a desirable synergetic leader. These paradigms are shown in the model below:

**Model 1. The paradigms of the 3rd alternative thinking (Covey, 2011 p.24)**

1) Paradigm "I see myself" is about seeing oneself as a "unique human being capable of independent judgment and action" (Covey, 2011 p.25). A "good" leader working through this paradigm is thus expected to possess qualities as creativity, self-awareness, independent thinking not bound by the group or position he/she belongs to/identifies with. The opposite undesirable trait would then be seeing oneself in terms of one's own group belonging or role (for example: my company, my gender, my race, my political party; mother, feminist, environmentalist etc.) and be defined by these group belongings and roles. A "good" synergistic leader is not limited and defined by his/her group belonging and roles, he/she is capable of independent judgement (Ibid p. 25-26). A good leader is able to transcend his/her cultural political and social identity and conditioning. It encompasses the ability to "stand mentally outside of ourselves and evaluate our beliefs and our actions...think about what we think ... challenge our assumptions" (Ibid. p.28). This also demands that a leader must be able to exercise humility, understand own limitations and "blindspots" at the same time it demands confidence, an ability to see his/her own boundless potential, that lays outside all group belongings, roles and personal weaknesses (Ibid. p.29). This boundless unlimited potential is found through the process of synergizing with others.

2) Paradigm "I see You" is about seeing others as people instead of things. This paradigm is fairly similar to the previous one, where as a "good" leader is expected to see the opponent outside and beyond his/her group belonging. The opposite undesirable trait would then be remoteness and indifference (Ibid. p.37) expressed through stereotyping the opponent because of their age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or political or religious belonging (Ibid p. 32-33). A "good" leader has the ability to see the other as a whole, unique, worthy, talented, strong human being, who deserves dignity and respect, instead of seeing a category, a label, a thing, a tool, a resource, a symbol. A "good" leader is here expected to exercise "human love, generosity, inclusiveness, honest intent" (Ibid. p.34), reverence, openness, intimacy and trust (Ibid p 37) towards the opponent in the conflict.

3) Paradigm "I seek you out" is about deliberately seeking out conflicting views instead of avoiding or defending oneself against them (Ibid. p. 40). Covey states that the best leaders are able to seek
out and face provocative questions, bring them out into the open and deal with them honestly and not be threatened by them (Ibid p. 40-41). The main skill of a "good" leader that Covey pays a whole lot of attention here in his book is empathic listening. Here, Covey sees as mentioned in question 1, that "truth" is complicated, that everyone has a slice of it and a "good" leader is able to "gather" all the different slices of it to create a more complete picture of the supposed objective truth in a certain situation. A good empathic listener is able to find himself "in the mind of the other", observe reality through their eyes, feel their emotions, share their pain, "stand in their shoes and know what it feels like" (Ibid p.48). A "good" leader is also expected to have an active listening skill, which means mirroring feelings and repeating the other's ideas without judging or commenting on them (Ibid p.52). A "good" leader is able to make "robust decisions" which are dependent on a thorough understanding of all stakeholder's viewpoint (Ibid p.55), which is achieved by empathic listening and consideration to all the stakeholders viewpoint.

4) Paradigm "I synergize with you" is about finding a solution that is better than anyone has thought of before, it is about creating a new better reality together. It is a paradigm of creative, and collaborative problem solving (Ibid. p.60). "The mantra of synergy is this: As many ideas from as many people as possible as early as possible" (Ibid p.69). Covey explains that a "good" synergistic leader is able to create a 3rd alternative solution, under pressure if necessary, create it quickly and do it out of the resources at hand and don’t always need more or different resources (Ibid. p.63) A "good" leader is here able to abandon own original ideas, must be vulnerable enough to let them go, for a new "better" one, created through synergy. He must be able to brainstorm, experiment with radical possibilities, turn ideas on their heads, innovate. He is able to have an abundance, not scarcity mentality, he is able to think outside of all limits and be able to see an abundance of potential solutions (Ibid. p 71, 73). Covey states that according to the law of synergy there is always a better way than what either of opponents have (Ibid. p.73). Synergists are "rare but highly influential, creative, and productive ... they are the paradigm shifters, the innovators, the game changers" (Ibid. p. 24).

4.3.2 Qualities and traits of a "bad" leader

As mentioned in the previous question, the strategies of fight, flight, denial or compromise in a conflict situations are seen as bad choices, made by leaders who are only thinking in terms of 2 alternatives. My interpretation is that Covey sees 2alternative thinkers as bad leaders. He does not specifically state this, but I make that conclusion through examining his rhetoric on characterization of 2-alternative leaders. I will now specify on that through describing Coveys rhetoric about their undesirable and improper qualities and character traits.

Leaders who choose the strategy of "fight" or attack (not meaning a physical fight or attack) when faced with a conflict situation, are in the discourses first of all metaphorically compared to animals, who are limited by they instincts of fight and flight in a threatening situation. A leader who chooses to either fight or flee is thus figuratively speaking reduced to a level of animal kingdom and pictured as lacking self-awareness and ability to make a conscious deliberate choice (Covey, 2011 p.16). A "fighter" is also pictured as insecure in him/herself, fearful and therefore defensive (Ibid p. 92, 101). Such a leader is unempathic and unable to listen. (Ibid p.93). He/she is minimizing to the other and is extremely arrogant; Covey uses 'hubris' as a descriptive of such a leader (Ibid p.99), demeaning and disrespectful towards the other (Ibid p.93), he/she views him/herself as hardheaded realists, but impose dominance, division and hierarchy (Ibid p. 50) and are viewed as immature (Ibid p 98). A leader who goes for a "fight" when faced with a conflict is pictured as driven by scarcity mind-set,
meaning fear of a shortage of resources and solutions available, and he/she must therefore fight or
manipulate the other to get to the limited resources or solutions. This mindset is then opposed to the
abundance mind-set in a "good" synergetic leader, who sees unlimited potential resources and
solutions (Ibid p.96, p.19).

Leaders who choose to flee when faced with a conflict are as above mentioned, pictured as lacking self-
awareness and ability to make a conscious deliberate choice, they are pictured as insecure and fearful
(Ibid p.16) and have a tendency for giving up own responsibility and playing helpless victims (Ibid p 6,
190).

Those who deny conflicts are pictured as ignorant of reality and headed for a fall. They either take
positive thinking to extreme, where they just hope for something good to happen without their
involvement, or they are cynics, who lost hope that anything good can ever happen, and so they ignore
the conflict and do nothing (Ibid p. 6). Those who deny conflict are pictured as remote and indifferent
(Ibid p. 37). Those in denial state are characterized by blaming everyone else but themselves, and do
not see their own role in solving a conflict (Ibid, p.218)

Then there is the Great Middle, the compromisers. They also stopped hoping in creating a better
solution than anyone had thought of in a conflict. These leaders do not identify with either of the 2
sides of the conflict, they do believe in teamwork, collaboration and listening to the other, but the
problem with these compromisers is that they think that both sides have to sacrifice and surrender
some of their interests in order to be able reach any agreement with the other part, which makes both
parts losers to some extent. Compromisers are pictured as color blind, as "they can only see blue or
yellow, but never green" (Ibid. p.18). "They are good players but not game changers". They do not
contribute with much, they are uncreative. They are skeptical and cynical (Ibid p 21, 24).

4.3.3 Summary of a leader’s qualities and skills

I will now summarize the qualities and skills of a leader pictured in Covey's discourses, to show how a
'good' versus 'bad' leader is constructed.

A 3rd-Alternative leader is characterized in Covey's discourses as capable of independent judgment
and action, self-aware and self-knowing and at the same time self-confidant. He/she has ability to see
and treat the opponent as as a whole, unique, worthy, talented, strong human being, who deserves
dignity and respect. He/she is loving, generous, inclusive and honest. He/she is creative, productive,
effective, innovative, a paradigm shifter, a game changer, curious, open minded, and vulnerable and
humble enough to let go off own solutions, as he/she has the mind-set of abundance and is able to see
unlimited potential of solutions and resources.

The 2-Alternative leader is though pictured in much darker colors. He/she lacks self-awareness and
ability to make conscious deliberate choices, is insecure, fearful and defensive. He/she is unempathic
and not a very good listener. He/she is arrogant, demeaning, disrespectful, dominant, divisive and
manipulative. He/she is driven by scarcity mind-set, fearing shortage of resources and solutions. He/
she is irresponsible, self-victimizing, ignorant, cynical, remote and indifferent.

4.3.4 Analysis of Covey’s constructions of a leader’s qualities and skills

In analysis of Covey's rhetoric on qualities and skills of a leader, the analytical tool of binary use in a
text, suggeted by Berglund (2008), is specifically usefull. Using this tool helps to uncover
inconsistencies and weaknesses in Covey’s discourses, which will be discussed even later. The analysis of Covey’s text shows that the 3rd Alternative leaders workings through the ‘right’ paradigm of synergy are prescribed positive qualities and skills, whereas the 2 Alternative leaders working through the ‘wrong’ paradigms of fight, flight, avoidance or compromise, are prescribed negative qualities in Covey’s rhetoric. This is illustrated in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good 3rd Alternative leader</th>
<th>Bad 2 Alternative leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>self-aware</td>
<td>not aware of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-confidant</td>
<td>insecure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsible for self</td>
<td>self victimizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent</td>
<td>dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respectfull</td>
<td>demeaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honest</td>
<td>manipulative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curious</td>
<td>indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humble</td>
<td>hubristic/arrogant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generous</td>
<td>greedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind-set of abundance</td>
<td>scarcity mind-set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empathic</td>
<td>unempathic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good listener</td>
<td>bad listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vulnerable</td>
<td>defensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inclusive</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hopeful</td>
<td>cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transformational</td>
<td>transactional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative/innovative</td>
<td>mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>game changer</td>
<td>player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open</td>
<td>remote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intimate</td>
<td>indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reverence for other</td>
<td>exploitation of other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>synergising</td>
<td>divisive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus we see how Covey’s rhetoric is dividing between the desirable 3rd Alternative leader’s qualities and skills and undesirable 2-alternative leader’s qualities and ”disabilities”, creates exactly that which it claims to transcend: a 2-alternative thinking. In Covey’s discourses there does not seem to be any
"synergy" between the 2-alternative thinking and 3rd alternative thinking, only division and categorization in "correct" versus "flawed" thinking. This can thus be seen as discursive contradiction and logical inconsistency going through out Covey’s discourses. Derrida describes that deconstruction of a discourse is all about uncovering a hidden but crucial weakness in the analyzed text - a crack in it’s apparent entity. Apparent, because it does not draw conclusions from it’s own premisses and this negligence permeates the whole text. The aspects that are suppressed to almost non-existent, are revealed through deconstruction and made central (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p.235). Covey’s premiss is that the 2-alternative thinking is something to be avoided, but he himself divides leaders in 2-alternative thinkers and the 3rd alternative thinkers, which in itself is a two alternative thinking. This is a "crack" in his discourses, a hidden but crucial weakness, a crack in it’s apparent entity, as Derrida would say. Covey opposes himself, and describes the 2alternative leaders with only negative characteristics, where as the 3rd alternative leaders are described with only positive ones.

This division and categorization creates thus "heroes" and "villains", which can be related to Furusten (1999) research. Furusten shows that the authors of managerial books use institutional myths and beliefs, such as the myth that the key to organizational success is the omnipotence of the manager. This seems to be exactly what Covey does in his discourses: he creates a myth about an omnipotent, all-powerful, 3rd Alternative hero-leader, always able to synergyze in conflict situations, as the key to organizational success. This kind of rhetoric construct thus an institutional myth, or an unproven, unscientific belief that is used to justify a social institution (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/myth9). The justified social institution can in this case either be seen as religious beliefs, that as a “big narrative” gain such a great power over the minds of people, that it functions as absolute truth or dogmas, as Derrida (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p.242-243) would say. A social institution could also in this case be seen as American Popular Managerialism, or americanized managerial discoursive constructions, that according to Furusten (1999) and Berglund (2008) can be seen as constituents of social mechanisms, that together with for example government and business made laws and regulations, create and govern the institutional rules of organizational life in a modern society. Thus such managerial myths, or unproven unscientific beliefs can be seen as powerful constituents of organizations, which also goes in accordance with Foucaults reasoning, discussed later in the next chapter. Deconstruction is thus focused on deconstructing such myths that gain great power over the minds of people, and function as absolute truth or dogmas. The purpose of deconstruction is then to critically analyze these myths and analyze the structure of the discourse (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994 p.242-243), which I have done above and which also will be discussed further in the next discussion chapter.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Major findings of this study

The aim of this study was to analyze current discourses within the expanding popular management culture in modern society and to examine what these discourses carry to organizations in terms of worldview, knowledge, ideology, norms and values, and how these discourses shape leader's roles in modern organizations. That aim was fulfilled by conducting a case study on a conflict management book by one of the most popular management 'gurus', Stephen R. Covey. The three study questions concerned the ontology and epistemology in the analyzed discourses, the construction of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ conflict management strategies, and the construction of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ leader qualities and skills.

The result shows that popular managerial discourses, or more specifically Stephen R. Covey’s discourses, carry normative values, ideals, myths, beliefs, religion, and ideology–together with some scientific knowledge–to the learning organizations. I uncovered an objective reality worldview, that pictures the world as having a definite, truthful, and accessible knowledge of things as they are. Covey displays thus a naïve realism where universal objective principles originate from God. Principles that can be found and described with language are carried to the organizations through the analyzed managerial discourses. Covey claims himself to have found those universal principles which are taught in his book. Likewise, normative values, in terms of what is “correct”, “truthful”, and “good” versus what is “flawed”, “incorrect”, and “bad”, are carried to the organizations. Here I found a double standard and inconsistency in Covey’s discourses in that Covey does not draw conclusions from his own premises, as Derrida would say. For example, Covey's premiss is that a paradigm where one sees only two options is a flawed approach which should be avoided, yet he himself portrays a flawed and a correct way of resolving conflict. While promoting synergy as the only “right” way to solve a conflict, he himself does not provide any synergetic integration between the approaches that he rejects and the one he advocates. He claims synergy is the answer, yet all the scientifically validated conflict management styles (competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, collaborating) are devalued to different degrees by Covey and categorized as incorrect or incomplete 2 Alternative thinking. Only the 3rd alternative of synergy, for which I found no found scientific basis, is by Covey described as the right one. This idealized 3rd alternative and devalued 2Alternative way of solving conflicts thus creates a myth and with it also “heroes” and “villains”. Leaders who are “stuck” in 2 Alternative thinking are characterized as lacking self-awareness, as insecure, fearful, defensive, arrogant, irresponsible, self-victimizing, ignorant, scarcity minded, cynical, remote, and indifferent. Leaders, who have ‘lifted’ themselves above that less mature level and who are thinking and acting through the paradigm of 3rd alternative (i.e. synergy), are characterized as self-aware, self-knowing, self-confident, respectful, loving, generous, inclusive, and honest toward the other. They are seen as creative, productive, effective, innovative, paradigm shifters, game changers, open minded, and abundance minded. This black-and-white, wrong-and-right, good-and-bad idealistic polarization permeate all Covey’s rhetoric in his book, which seems to contradict his own principle of finding synergy between two sides.

5.2 Scientific or mythical knowledge - which should have the power in organisations?

These findings, that popular managerial discourses carry normative values, ideals, myths, beliefs, religion, and ideology–together with some scientific knowledge–to the learning organizations, are in consistency with previous research on popular management discourses (Furusten (1999), English (2002), McGill (1988 in Furusten 1999), Huczynski (1993 in Furusten 1999), and Jackson (1999).
Just as popular managerial ‘knowledge’ was consumed by the organizations with intensity back then, so it is today, despite it’s non-scientific nature. Likewise, just as managerial discourses were non-scientific but mythical, ideological, and normative 25 years ago, so they are today. It appears that organizations both then and today do not express a need for or high value in research based knowledge in their leadership education and that what current popular managerial discourses offer organizations in terms of worldview, ideology, norms and values, appear to be appreciated and valued by organizations. This raises some interesting questions. How come there is little demand for scientific managerial knowledge? How come, in (arguably) the age of science, myths are still winning out in organizations? From a pedagogical perspective, how come science cannot compete with myths on the market for organizational education?

The matter can be seen through the lens of some previous earlier mentioned research on popular managerial knowledge. Jacksson (1999) - who also argues that popular management knowledge which is not based on a solid scientific foundation, but often times on ideology, myths and religion - states that it is appealing to such a broad spectrum of people world wide because this ‘knowledge’ is able to address the material, existential and spiritual needs that are characteristic to postmodern individuals. It could then be argued, on the basis of Jackssons (1999) statement, that Covey’s advocated necessity for resolving all conflicts peacefully and synergetically, is fulfilling that existential and spiritual need that is characteristic to postmodern individuals. Even material need can here be seen as fulfilled, as conflict resolution could arguably lead to several material benefits.

Seeing the matter through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA) though, popular managerial discourses have a constituting power in organizations, in that they form and shape, transform and sustain organizations, leaders, workers and their roles in organizations. Popular managerial discourses, seen through CDA, function as generative mechanisms, which produce organizational realities. The implication is arguably that such normative values, myths and ideological beliefs that Covey advocates, are the same values, myths and beliefs that will be found in the organizations. Foucault would call this governmentality through the production of knowledge and ideology, where organizations –and the individuals in them– are subjects that are governed by the managerial knowledge that has power over their minds. Derrida would call these discourses myths, that gain such a power over individuals that they function as absolute truths.

The above discussion presupposes that the non-scientific nature of popular managerial knowledge is problematic. However, that too is an assumption that can be questioned. Yes, the study shows that managerial discourses have constituting power in organizations and that managerial discourses lack solid scientific base, and are instead based on myths, normative values and ideal. However, is it really problematic that non-scientific managerial discourses, that are characterized by normative ideals and myths, have a powerful impact on organizational life? On the one hand, I agree with McGill that managerial discourses such as Covey’s, which suggests that synergy is the only correct conflict resolution style (while condemning other styles), are very simplistic and do not correspond well with the reality that managers face, and therefore obstruct the understanding of the real complexities of management. On the other hand though, Charniawska Joerges (1988) raises an interesting counter-argument, which I find appealing. She argues that sometimes ‘wrong’ mythical ideals of how things should be serve as catalysts for needed change and action that otherwise would not be made.

An example of unscientific mythical ideals as Covey’s, serving as a catalyst for change can be found in previous research on the practical effect of popular managerial discourses, and here specifically Covey’s discourses in organizations. The research presented in the introduction to this study, shows for example that Covey’s leadership principles have shown successful application and that they were
seen as very useful in training and transforming leadership in today’s work-environment (Stemmle, 2000). Research also shows that Covey’s teachings have shaped the way the industry and community members engaged with each other and that communication, trust and transparency emerged after a crisis as the consequence of use of Covey’s teachings (Jahansoozi, 2007). Covey’s educational materials have also helped establish collaboration and overcome difficulties and distrust between the different parties (Birrell et al, 1998).

One could therefore argue, on the basis the above shown research and on the basis of Charniawska Joerges (1988) argument, that sometimes it is the ideal that can bring about desired change, even if it is mythical and non scientific, it is the ideals that move the world forward. To give a vivid example: altruism, which means selfless concern for the well-being of others, could be such an ideal. An altruistic ideal could move a leader to take a selfless action that benefits the organization, that science alone would not trigger or prescribe. In the same way, synergy as an ideal for resolving conflicts, might be capable of accomplishing results that science alone would not be able to. It is not difficult to imagine an ideal practically functioning as a “salvation” from a conflict that otherwise would be destructive for both parties.

Another example that sometimes it is the ideal and myth that can bring about desired change and move the world forward, could be the one that Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Company gives below. He exemplifies with Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King, Jr, Mahatma Gandhi, Thomas Edison, Pablo Picasso etc, who in their time were seen as disruptive and countercultural forces. Instead of rules they were guided by ideals and visions of changing the status quo and improving the world. Jobs says about these rebels:

“You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them, because they change things, they push the human race forward. While some may see them as the crazy ones, others see genius, because the people who think they are crazy enough they can change the world, are the ones who do” (Steve Jobs, 1997) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rzu6zeLSWq8

A sample of previous research presented earlier in this study, on the actual practical positive effects of Covey’s managerial discourses in the organisations (Birrell et al, 1998; Jahansoozi, 2007; Stemmle, 2000, Tyson Martin, 2013) can be used as a ground for the argument that Covey’s ideals and myths, have pushed the organisations forward, just as Jobs (1997) argues above.

This study, along with previously references studies, also in light of research and theories from other disciplines, like by Carl Jung (Segal, 1998) and Joseph Campbell (1991), show that the human species is powerfully motivated by myths and ideals. Stefan Arvidsson (2007) shows how myths can be understood through functionalist theoretical standpoints, where the idea is that myths and beliefs are constituted solely by their functional roles, that is they are causing certain desired outcomes, actions and behaviours, which means that they have a function and it is therefore they keep existing. Hence one could argue that the very use of myths and ideals is – in a sense – scientific, even though the specific myths and ideals may be constructed mechanisms, which produce organizational realities. The function of managerial myths can thus be seen as constituting desired behaviors and changes in organizations. Thus it is arguable, whether it at all is problematic that myths and ideals, packed in normative managerial discourses, have such a power in organizational world.

The findings of this study, and referenced studies (Furusten, McGill, etc.), presumes that science possess the authority to evaluate whether a certain knowledge is scientific and therefore valid and
reliable or non-scientific and therefore invalid and unreliable. However, that too is a proposition that
can be challenged with help of Foucauldian post-structuralistic theories. Foucault wants to question all
power-structures that portray themselves as carriers of truth. Science arguably sets itself up as an
authority on valid and reliable knowledge. Hence a question can be posed: Specifically in
organizations, is scientific and academic knowledge more ‘right’ than the idealistic mythical
managerial knowledge? Should scientific knowledge, instead of popular managerial ‘knowledge’, have
the power to govern it’s subjects minds, vis-a-vis Foucault? If we answer in the affirmative, and say
that scientific knowledge is more ‘right’ for the organizational world and should govern in
organizations, we are also saying in the same breath that there is some knowledge that is ‘wrong’,
hence implying that ‘truth’ is objective and universal, and is that not per se normative naive realism?
Followed to its logical conclusion, science arguably becomes guilty of what it accuses myth of, or as
Derrida would say, of not drawing conclusions from its own premises.

If on the other hand one argues that truth is relative, might one not also argue that it is up to the
organizational context and situation to find out what is the proper educational material to train leaders
and workers in organizations? If so, can it then be that the organizational ‘truth’ is that a manager’s
time and resources are limited, that demands on performance are high, and that they, pressed by this
stressful organizational reality, are making the most rational choice by choosing easily accessible
popular managerial knowledge over scientific knowledge, which is difficult to access, difficult to
interpret, and difficult to practically apply in a given organizational situation? Can it be that
managerial idealistic normative mythical ‘knowledge’ has earned it’s right to have power in
organizations, by making itself accessible, understandable, and applicable to the organizational
practitioner, which scientific knowledge has not done? In others words, science is subject to the laws of
supply and demand, just like everything else in the marketplace, and for scientific knowledge to
compete with current popular managerial knowledge it must adapt to the organizational demand for
an accessible product. What would happen if we took the popular managerial package, i.e. “5 steps”
and “7 keys”, etc. which is easy to interpret and apply, and wrapped research based science in that
popular managerial presentation form? Academic language is often complicated and coded in ways
only academics can grasp. Instead of insisting that organizations learn academic language, maybe
scholars could apply language used in the organizations? In other words, we come full circle back to
Covey’s 3rd Alternative: this conflict between science and myth, I suggest, may be best resolved
through synergy and collaboration between the two.
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Previous scientific research on Stephen R. Covey is available on:

[Source 1](http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.ub.umu.se/ehost/results?sid=c7441f32-e670-4d08-83de-91079385d7dc%40sessionmgr114&vid=2&hid=115&bquery=(Stephen+AND+R+Covey)&bdata=JmRiPWVyaWMmdHlwZTojNndGUxZWhvc3QtbgG2ZSxkY2rqWZt1zaXRI)

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