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God-like or just like you?

A qualitative study on how CEOs portray themselves in their autobiographies

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Abstract

Title:	God-like or just like you?
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Authors:	Carolyn Fox and Jelle Vonk
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Keywords:	Management autobiographies, CEO, management books, guru literature, management fashions
Purpose:	Management autobiographies are an important discourse in today's management literature and we believe that they have become a great influence on management practitioners. In this study we aim to analyse how CEOs portray themselves in their autobiographies.
Methodology:	Our data consists of four selected autobiographies from the criteria that they should be bestsellers, written by a CEO and have been recently published. We have used a hermeneutical approach and techniques to find potential themes.
Theoretical perspective:	Studies on management fashions, management gurus and management autobiographies.
Empirical data:	The empirical data consist of written texts represented by four popular management autobiographies.
Conclusion:	The authors portray themselves in a continuous interplay between the familiar and the exceptional, where they are god-like. The authors do this by telling different stories from their lives, which also illustrate their ideas about life and business.

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För mamma och pappa. Tack för ert fantastiska stöd och goda råd. Ni är en otrolig källa av inspiration som jag drar styrka ifrån varje dag.

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Voor Pap, Mam en Maarten. Jullie zijn fantastisch. Bedankt voor alle steun en wijsheid de afgelopen jaren. Op een hele mooie toekomst!

Jelle

Carolyn Fox Jelle Vonk

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1 Introduction

In this chapter we aim to give a short introduction to the background of our thesis. We will present our problem formulation and why we have decided to investigate this problem. We will also briefly introduce our methodology chapter and outline how the thesis is structured.

1.1 Background

Management autobiographies have become an important discourse within management books for the last decades. Since the 1980's these books have become increasingly popular among management practitioners and also the general public. Some refer to the authors as gurus or as setters of management fashions and are considered significantly influential in today's management.

This increasing popularity is becoming visible in many places. Management autobiographies become bestsellers and are available at convenient places such as airports, train stations and bookstores. Any given management practitioner probably has at least one of these books in their bookshelf. However these management autobiographies are not only aimed at management practitioners. They are written for the broader public and due to the books' great visibility and availability anybody who is interested in this field could be a part of this audience.

Authors of management autobiographies are often celebrated as heroes among practitioners and are almost becoming brands in their own right in management society. As students of organizational studies, we are very interested in who and what influences people and managers today. We are fascinated about what these books are saying about the current times and the authors themselves. We are not so much interested in what specific management ideas these books introduce but have an interest why these books have become so popular among the public.

1.2 Problem formulation

We have found that management autobiographies have a great deal of influence on managers practitioners and the broader public beyond. There is, however, very limited specific research done about management autobiographies. Most research in these topics so far have been very broad and focused on management fashions and management gurus in general. There have only been a few studies done on management autobiographies and we do not know that much about management autobiographies yet. However, as explained management autobiographies have become a very important discourse in management literature as they are accessible and available to a broader audience.

We are interested in what these books convey to the reader and why they are so influential. Why do people keep buying these books so they become bestsellers? In order to gain insight on these issues we believe that it is essential to investigate how the author portrays themselves in their autobiographies. In this research we will specifically focus on autobiographies written by CEOs. To conduct our research we have formulated the following research question:

How do CEOs portray themselves in their autobiographies?

Through this question we hope to gain more insight in the portrayals within management autobiographies. This will increase the insight to management autobiographies and hopefully contribute to the current research literature. We will look at the role or roles that the CEO portrays to the reader rather than the business models that are advocated in the books. We will do this by researching potential themes related to portraying the author across the books rather than look at metaphors and symbols.

1.3 Methodology

To answer the research question we have selected four autobiographies. They have all been published recently, been on the top of bestselling lists and are all written by CEOs of large organizations. In order to answer our research question we will be researching potential themes and trends across these books. We will be looking for similarities in portrayals and see how different portrayals in the books relate to each other. We will for example be looking at how the CEOs portray themselves, but also their relation with their colleagues, their company and society. How does the author relate himself to the reader? There might be portrayals that help them to establish themselves or the story that they tell. We hope to find different themes and trends that relate to these different portrayals.

We are using a hermeneutical approach in our research. Hermeneutics is the art of text interpretation and will therefore be used in our research to give us assistance in analysing our data. It can help us to relate different portrayals to each other by having a continuous interplay between our understandings and pre-understandings of the books. It can also help us to relate one book as a part of the whole of all four autobiographies and the management autobiographies as a discourse in general. When we found something which might be a portrayal we went back to our pre-understanding, which then influenced our understanding of the whole book. When we were for example analysing the third book we found a strong portrayal of the use of emotions, something we also found in the first two books. By reconsidering our pre-understandings of the first two books in relation to the third book we could understand that this was a theme which might be present across all four books and later on understand that this was something presented in the genre as a whole. Besides this we have continuously reflected upon the pre-understandings in literature review to our own findings in the analysis.

In order to assist us in finding specific themes such as writing techniques we also used some techniques introduced by Ryan and Bernard (2003). They introduced several techniques to identify themes drawn from across epistemological and disciplinary boundaries suited for several types of studies. Identifying themes is one of the most fundamental but hardest tasks in qualitative research and we therefore find it useful to keep these techniques as a background and as a starting point.

We used the techniques of Ryan and Bernhard (2003) to find similarities in the use of language by looking at the style of writing, how they tell tales and involve the reader. They also helped in finding repetitions in how the authors establish themselves in the books using similar narrative techniques. An example of this type of repetition was when one of the authors starts his book by disclosing the results of their company to establish credibility. Once we established and understood the basic characteristics of the book such as audience, language and writing style with the techniques of Ryan and Bernhard (2003) we continued with a more hermeneutical approach to find and relate several portrayals across the books such as the use of emotions or the entrepreneurial portrayal. Our approach was not a strictly technical analysis as we instead based the analysis on our own interpretations of the examined literature.

1.4 Relevance

As stated, management autobiographies influence management practitioners. Our study focuses on bestsellers, which we believe greatly influences practitioners.

There is a limited amount of studies that have been done on management autobiographies. Previous studies in this research area have mostly been focused on the characteristics of management autobiographies or on their narrative strategies. These studies have been a great contribution but do not go into detail about the way the author is portrayed in his book.

We believe our study has relevance and can contribute to current research. Our study will provide deeper insight into the different portrayals of the authors and how they are connected to each other. We therefore believe that this will give a relevant contribution to the existing literature.

1.5 Structure

1.5.1 Literature review

We will start this thesis by providing the reader with a chance to gain deeper insight to the existing literature and how this is related to our own research. The main area of literature that we use is on management autobiographies. There is however only a limited amount of research done in this area. We have therefore chosen to complement this by also including literature on management fashions and gurus.

We will therefore start the literature review by reviewing literature on management fashions since this is the background to the literature on management gurus and management autobiographies. This will increase the readers understanding of the origin of studies on management autobiographies as management fashions are often started in management autobiographies. We will begin by reviewing Abrahamson (1996), the most influential authors on management fashions. He claims that management fashions are very similar to aesthetic fashions but need to appear rational and progressive. We will then continue to review Kiesser (1997) since he has done research about what characteristics of management fashions which might also be found in management autobiographies and is therefore relevant to our study.

We will continue by introducing management gurus since writers of management autobiographies are often related to as gurus. Clark and Salaman (1998) did research on why gurus appeal to managers. This can help us to understand why autobiographies are so influential. Huczynski (1993) makes a distinction of three groups of management gurus, of which the third is most related to our research. This group is referred to as 'hero managers' since they have established themselves by reaching something extraordinary.

We will then finish our literature review by introducing previous studies on management autobiographies. Schoenberger (2001) for example found that management autobiographies are often mixed with stories of life of the author and that it is this duality which is what makes the books interesting. Clark and Greatbach (2004) claim that these books are written with predesigned messages in order to have an impact on the reader. They also tend to involve a certain degree of theatrics (Clark and Salaman, 1998).

1.5.2 Methodology

After reviewing the most influential literature we will continue with our methodology section. In this section we will describe how we conducted our research and which methodologies we used. As stated earlier we used a hermeneutical approach to our text interpretations. The analysis of the books will be based on our own interpretations relating to the different books. We will, however, use Ryan and Bernhard's (2003) techniques on identifying themes as a background and starting point. In this section we will give some more insight in the 'how' of our research.

1.5.3 Analysis

The analysis has been divided into two parts. The first part focuses on more technical aspects of the examined books. This is to provide a more hands-on understanding and we believe that this is needed to explain later how different portrayals are established. We will first discuss which audiences are targeted, the use of language, how the reader is involved and how the authors establishes their credibility. We will then continue the analysis by presenting the different portrayals we have found. Some of the themes that we have found are portrayals of the authors as survivors, revolutionaries, entrepreneurial and as someone being guided by emotions. They also use alter egos and appear to rely strongly on their gut instinct.

1.5.4 Discussion

In the discussion, we will discuss how the different themes and portrayals found in the autobiographies relate to each other. Is there a common thread, and how do they form an overall portrayal of the author? This is what we intend to answer in the discussion.

Furthermore, we will also discuss how our findings relate to current existing literature. Does our research add something to the existing claims? What we can learn from the style of these autobiographies and what further research might be relevant which will also be discussed.

1.5.5 Conclusion

We will finish our study with a short and clear conclusion of our main findings. We will reflect upon the thesis as a whole and conclude what we have learned from our study.

2 Literature Review

We have chosen to focus our research on management autobiographies. Literature on these theories will therefore be examined. There is however a limited amount of research done about management autobiographies. We have therefore also chosen to use literature on management fashions and management gurus as a complement and as background. We believe that this will increase the readers understanding of the literature and of course the research itself.

The connection between the areas is as follows. Management fashions are often started through the distribution of management books, which influence management practitioners. The particular types of books that we examine in this study are management autobiographies. Authors of these books are often referred to as management gurus. The methods that these gurus communicate are often short-lived in the public interest. They are therefore described by many as management fashions.

In this chapter we will be looking at what has been written before in these subjects, while at the same time also positioning this to our research problem.

2.1 Management Fashions

Management fashions are an important influence in business administration. Consultants, business magazines, business schools, public speakers all take part in the waves that are referred to as management fashions. Think for example of BPR, Lean production, Quality circles and other fashions which have passed over the years.

2.1.1 Fashion, Trends and Settings

Fashion is everywhere; clothing, cooking, lifestyles. In all forms that we pass by in our lives there are fashions, rages, trends etc. So is there fashion in management. Abrahamson (1996), the most influential theorist on fashion in management studies, argues that management fashion should not be treated otherwise than aesthetic fashion although there are two important differences. Aesthetic fashions only need to appear beautiful and modern. Management fashions on the other hand need to appear both rational and progressive (Abrahamson, 1996). They need to appear rational because this is linked to efficiency. They also need to appear progressive, which marks improvement from older techniques. Efficiency and improvement are found as the most important aspects in businesses because they imply continuation and progress of the company. Abrahamson even claims that consulting firms, mass-media publications, management gurus and business schools compete to define which management techniques lead to rational management progress (Abrahamson, 1996). We have chosen to investigate management autobiographies written by CEOs, which we consider to be one of these channels.

Management fashions are experienced as swings in popular management techniques, but there may also be other factors that influence such a swing (Abrahamson, 1996). Abrahamson suggests that such swings can only be named management fashions if they happen in a management fashion setting process. Abrahamson defines these management fashion settings as:

> “The process by which management fashion setters continuously redefine both theirs and fashion followers' collective beliefs about which management techniques lead rational management progress” (Abrahamson, 1996: 257).

Clark (2004) also describes the setting of management fashions. Since management autobiographies can be an important setting for management fashions we take this into account. As written by Abrahamson (1996), several important players in the business world such as entrepreneurs, CEOs, management consultants, business school professors, management gurus and mass media publishers are in a race to set management fashions. Kiesser (1997) claims that in order to produce management fashions the object must be in the public discourse. All the players compete in this race to get public attention (Abrahamson, 1996; Clark, 2004). Management autobiographers are one of the players in this race. Management magazines must pick up the key points that are produced in bestsellers. Consulting agencies must present themselves as founders of a management fashion or employing an author publishing a management fashion. They must represent a unique approach. University professors also make a contribution because they provide legitimacy for the fashion. The authority of academics can in such cases replace the need for evidence by empirical research (Kiesser, 1997: 63).

We believe that management autobiographies could be a potential place for these settings. Abrahamson (1996) also claims that these shared beliefs about management progress can never remain stable for too long because otherwise progress will not seem to occur. He defines management fashions as the following:

> “A management fashion, therefore, is a relatively transitory collective belief, disseminated by management fashion setters, that a management technique leads rational management progress” (Abrahamson 1996: 257).

Abrahamson suggests that fashions are experienced in swings. He does however not describe which phases these swings go through. This is something which can be complemented by examining Gill and Whittle (1992) who state that every management fashion goes through four phases. The first phase is the birth, the invention of the fashion. In this phase the inventor, the charismatic leader usually writes several books. We believe that management autobiographies could be considered one category of these books. The second phase is the adolescence phase in which consultants promote the packaged intervention. In the maturity phase the management fashions is routinely used by management consultants and internal staff. The fashion is then spread further through how-to-manuals and seminars to larger audiences. At the final stage the management fashion is decreasing in popularity again. Costs exceed the benefits, substitutes are popping up and the new management fashions are taking in places. Thus the cycle starts over again (Gill and Whittle, 1992). We believe that the studies described by Abrahamson (1996) and Gill and Whittle (1992) complement each other. Abrahamson focuses on the broad expansion of management fashion i.e. what Gill and Whittle describe in the adolescence and maturity phase.

Kiesser (1997) defines that management fashions are often linked to success stories of extraordinary performances or personalities. We believe that this is something which might be relevant to management autobiographies as they are often written because the author is seen as someone who has achieved something out of the ordinary. We also assume that this is the underlying factor to why the examined books have been written in the first place. We will therefore continue to examine Kiesser’s work. He suggests that it is here that management fashions turn into myths. He mentions the example of how lean production (the fashion) is tied to the success of Toyota. Management fashions thereby get a status which cannot be explained and becomes a legend. Kiesser (1997) suggests that this is the same as in clothing fashion in where women are portrayed as unreachable and has ultimate elegance. Critical views might claim that managers think rationally and do not believe in myths. Kiesser however claims that myths replace anxiety with fear. According to Kiesser the trick of the myth creator, the bestselling author now lies in the replacement of the unfamiliar with the familiar. The guru writes the text so that the text has meaning for the audience to which their actions are addressed (Clark and Salaman, 1998). Only the author can explain the inexplicable and give a name of the unnameable.

Panic and paralysis are presented to be rational and easily resolved. Myths are all about the creation of fear and replacing it with a prospect of relief (Kiesser, 1997). One could question why people and managers keep buying these stories. They should be able to recognize the use of rhetoric and storytelling while at the same time be rational enough to be sceptical. Many managers face hard competition every day and are constantly put under large pressure (Kiesser, 1997). Kiesser suggests that under such big pressure and competition managers' wish to find that one idea will revolutionize the business is intense. To find a quick fix that excels their own business is to many a very tempting thought. "The wish becomes the father of belief." (Kiesser, 1997: 62). Managers are in search for doctrines of salvation. "Managers ironically describe bestselling authors as gurus and then entrust themselves into their advice" (Kiesser, 1997: 63). This aids in understanding why these types of books appeal to managers and also why their ideas are introduced into organizations.

As we have seen management fashions are not that far related from clothes fashions: "Fashion performs the function of introducing order into a chaotic world and reducing ambivalence in the face of a multitude of trends." (Blumer, 1969 quoted by Kiesser, 1997: 63). This is something that can also be seen with management fashions. Kiesser suggests that managers can fight their fears with management fashions without being criticized because they are part of a recognized group and make use of a recognized technique. Fashion in this situation opens up the possibility to follow others and be relieved from responsibility. As in general fashion, management fashions can therefore be said to be anxiety reducing.

Benders and van Veen (2001) claim that Abrahamson's definition (1996) that management fashions need to be rational and progressive is lacking since it does not take interpretive viability into account. They assume that most concepts have a lack of material components and are therefore often found ambiguous. It is difficult to point out their exact meaning. Concepts are instead characterized by ambiguity and do not consist of clear hands-on instructions to solve problems (Benders and van Veen, 2001). They draw upon Kiesser (1997: 59) who even states that fashion setters should keep their concept ambiguous to a certain degree. It is suggested that management fashions are kept simple and ambiguous in order to increase flexibility and applicability to all kind of organizations. Simple concepts are often more powerful, they appear clear and convincing (Kiesser, 1997). "If a new idea can be shown to a version of common sense, its threat to the potential adopter is reduced." (Huczynski, 1993: 108). We believe that this clever mixture of simplicity and ambiguity is something that might be relevant to management autobiographies and is therefore useful to keep in mind.

Benders and van Veen (2001) claim that such interpretative viability increases the size of the potential market because different buyers recognize their own situation in the description (Benders and van Veen, 2001:37). The simplicity of the concept makes it attractive to apply while the ambiguity opens up the ability for interpretive selection among managers to apply to their own situation (Benders and van Veen, 2001). Management fashion concepts are therefore always a combination between simplicity and ambiguity (Kiesser, 1997; Benders and van Veen, 2001; Clark and Salaman, 1996). We believe this definition adds a layer to Abrahamson's definition as his view of management fashions is that they only need to appear rational and progressive. Our view is instead that fashions not need only to appear rational and progressive (Abrahamson, 1996), but also simple and ambiguous. This is because the books that we examine are aimed at a large audience and for that to be possible all readers need to be able to apply the concepts to their own situation. We therefore do not see this as a contradiction but rather as a development.

2.1.2 Traits

Kiesser (1997: 57-61) describes that management fashion always consist of ten traits. These traits help to understand not only fashions, but also management autobiographies and are therefore worth looking at. First (1), management fashions are always based upon one crucial success factor. Second (2), the implementation of the new principles are portrayed as unavoidable because old standards do not work anymore and will fail. Third (3), the new principles are linked to very high intrinsic values such as employers satisfaction, flexibility, innovations, creativity etc. Fourth (4), the author of a management book never instructs the manager directly but instead points out outstanding solutions that were achieved by successful and extraordinary managers. Fifth (5), the author reduces guilty feelings for not taking action earlier, even though managers are rarely directly blamed. The manager is invited to radically make a jump forward and thus dramatically changing the current circumstances. Sixth (6), potential bestsellers are characterized by a clever mix of simplicity and ambiguity, as seen before (Kiesser, 1997; Benders and van Veen, 2001; Clark and Salaman, 1996). Seventh (7), the author points out that only a few can be successful and that the new concept is a challenge. However those who will be successful will gain enormous improvements. By pursuing this way the author binds the manager to the fashion and as the manager wishes for success, he or she will try hard. Because of its presented selective success the manager will listen carefully and follow the fashion. The message is that if you do not believe it or fail to follow the instructions, you do not belong to this group. Eight (8), the author links the concept up to science and empirical data. A link is often made to a prestigious university so that the results gain credibility in the readers' eyes. Kiesser does however claim that this data can often be manipulated. Ninth, (9) the book is often easy to read, no foreign words, no jargon, direct and short sentences. The text is often written in a lively and compelling way. In addition to that the book is often translated into several languages. Lastly (10) the book is always related to current events and thus hits the 'nerve of today's managers' (Kiesser, 1997). Benders and van Veen (2001) further suggests that management fashion setters can never be successful if management fashions are not portrayed realistic, they need to feel real for managers in order to identify with them (Benders and van Veen 2001). We consider these traits to be important when we are looking for characteristics in data and will investigate further if all of them are applicable to our texts.

Another often made claim is that management fashions are often portrayed as new wine in old bottles (Abrahamson, 1996:266; van Veen, 2002; Benders and van Veen 2001: 82). In this assessment it is claimed that presented management fashions are portrayed as new and revolutionary business ideas but are in fact merely a reinvention of old ideas. Benders and van Veen (2001) comment that from an academic perspective this is often perceived as negative since there is no progression in knowledge. On the other hand this old wine might be useful to re-address potential solution that might help to solve management issues. It does not really matter if management ideas are old as long as they appear new to managers (Benders and van Veen, 2001). Abrahamson (1996: 266) suggests that management fashion selection both looks at new ideas but also at a bevy of old and forgotten management techniques. This is also illustrated by the following quote:

> "If there is any added value in management concepts, it has to be found in the local context of use and not directly in the absolute added value in the total collective knowledge base." (van Veen, 2002: 40)

We therefore agree that it is the way the management fashion is packaged that is the most important, especially in this study as we are studying how CEOs are portrayed. The way in which they tell their stories will of course also affect this image. Issues concerning whether a management fashion is truly new or not are therefore not examined in this study.

2.2 Management Gurus

As authors of management autobiographies could be and often are considered gurus, we in this section examine what characterizes a guru and their appeal. We will also look at what different types of guru there is and what factors influence the way the guru appeals to his or her audience.

We refer to several prominent writers within the management guru research area. Clark and Salaman have written several articles and their review article 'Telling Tales' (1998) has been particularly influential. We also use Huczynski (1993) who is also one of the most cited theorists in this area of research. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1996) provide a very good summary of why gurus became so successful in the first place, whereas ten Bos and Heusinkveld (2007) give a contemporary development of these theories.

2.2.1 Guru Theory

'Guru theory' is today a paradigm in its own right, but it did not exist until the 1980s. It all started in 1982 with the publication of *In Search of Excellence* (1982) by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman. The book reached several bestselling lists, stayed there for many months and has been republished many times. This publication led to a plethora of new literature and started a wave of what has later become known as 'guru literature' (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996; Clark and Salaman, 1998).

According to Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1996) there are many different factors that contributed to the success of *In Search of Excellence*. It was practically laid out with advice and the simple formula that later became known as the 'Peters phenomenon' only consisted of four parts, making it easy to take to heart. The book was based on data that was presented as evidence of what the authors had learnt from their work in consultancy, which appealed to the masses as it made it seem reliable. It was also a case of first class timing. At the time there was high employment in the USA and businesswise there was had been a lot of focus on Japanese management styles. This was an American book, focusing on American companies and how they could move forward. One key element was also that it was focused on getting quick results, which was what many wanted to achieve. At the same time using what Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1996) called 'breathtaking marketing'. All this in combination with 'pure luck', as Peters himself put it (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1996:82). The combination of factors that made *In Search of Excellence* such a success is now some of those that have later become characteristic of guru management.

Clark and Salaman (1998) state that there are a few things that characterize guru theory. Firstly, they conclude that it is a management fashion and also fashion-setting, in accordance with Abraham's (1996) definition. The reason that management gurus are in fashion at the moment is according to ten Bos and Heusinkveld (2007) very simple. It is "the tastes of players who are successful determine what is true in the world" (ten Bos and Heusinkveld, 2007: 216). Gurus should thereby be seen as tastemakers. This also supports our assumption that this type of literature in which we include management autobiographies is highly influential on management practitioners today. The second trait of guru theory is the way in which they communicate with their audiences. Some gurus such as Tom Peters give seminars and lectures, but books have always been the most traditional way of guru communication. Three types of books can be distinguished within this area of literature; (1) generic models of management, (2) ways of improvement on a specific organizational function and (3) specific cases of both individuals and organizations that against the odds became successes. Books are of course what we will be investigating in this research and we will be focusing our research on the latter of these three types. The final characteristic of gurus is that they break away from the established. They advocate new processes, ways of thinking and leaving the old and outdated behind (Clark and Salaman, 1998).

Clark and Salaman (1996) recognize three distinct features of work done by gurus especially when dealing with consultancy roles. To begin with, the guru's work is aimed almost exclusively towards the people in the audience. The guru focuses on making an emotional connection with them as individuals instead of just a cogwheel in a machine. By doing this the guru hopes to influence the audience's attitudes and beliefs. As most among the audiences are senior managers, organizational processes and structures will hopefully be influenced in extension. Since we are investigating autobiographies we cannot assume that books have the same effect as a personal performance given to a selected few in the top management. The whole point of choosing popular autobiographies is the fact that they are available to a broader audience. We do still however believe that the guru wants to establish an emotional connection with the reader.

The second feature of the guru's work is the content. This is something that is viewed as being very hands-on and is aimed at improving the organization's current working methods.

This is done by improving skills and capabilities among managers relating to defining problems and finding solutions. This is however something that cannot be translated in the same way to books. As discussed under management fashions, Kiesser (1997) and Benders and van Veen (2001) for example state that in order for a fashion to seem attractive to readers they need to be presented in a simple yet ambiguous way. We believe that as books are aimed at a broader audience the concepts have to be more ambiguous. This is something that is necessary in order to make the content seem relevant to all readers. The author otherwise risks reducing their potential audience and also the sales figures of their book. Concepts still need to appear simple and hands-on. We therefore believe that where direct advice is offered in the books, it will be concerning rather generic topics. The books are not adapted to a specific context, which means that certain interpretation will be required of the reader.

The last distinctive feature relates to the way in which the guru communicates. This is the most important feature for our research as it can be translated to the way in which a CEO portrays himself. Gurus work in a very one-way direction, guru to audience. This is of course not strange when it comes to books, but it is also true in physical performances, workshops and presentations. The guru is the main figure and takes centre stage throughout most of the performance. Relating this to autobiographies, we believe that this will mean that the author will put a lot of emphasis on himself and how events affect him. In order for him or her to influence their audience in their intended way, it is important that they control the environment where the performance takes place (Clark and Salaman, 1996). These lectures are referred to as performances as they involve high levels of theatrics. During these performances Clark and Salaman (1996) made a number of observations that all point to quite extreme positions. The presenter keeps high levels of energy throughout the session and shows very strong conviction in what he is talking about. He is interesting, challenging and something out of the ordinary, making the audience feel intrigued with both the performance and the guru himself. Again, this is something that we believe could also be seen in the autobiographies.

2.2.2 Guru Types

Huczynski (1993) describes ‘guru theory’ as consisting of three different types of guru. What separates them are the ways in which they gain credibility among their audiences. The first are the ‘academic gurus’, who as the name suggests have a strong background and usually a position in an academic setting. This is where they develop their ideas, which are then made available to the broader masses outside of academia. The second group are the ‘consultant gurus'. If the academic gurus cover the theoretical field, then the consultant gurus cover the practical. They gain their knowledge through practical experience with top management consultancy firms. Tom Peters is for instance an excellent example of this. The final group and focus of our research are the 'hero managers'. In contrast to the previous groups, these people tend to come from humble backgrounds. They do not need to have any specific type of training or background, but are referred to as gurus because they have achieved something out of the ordinary. It is this last type of guru that we will focus upon in this study. We believe that it is these gurus who write autobiographies as they are the ones that have something unique to tell.

Hero managers can be said to rely on gaining credibility through certain results where academics and consultants rely on authority from institutions and reputations from 'institutions' within the consultancy field. Despite the fact that gurus are often dismissed by academics as superficial, ten Bos and Heusinkveld (2007) stresses that it is usually these who influence practitioners, a view that we share. The world is described as dependent of social contexts and that management gurus have a natural place.

In 'Telling Tales', Clark and Salaman (1998) review how researches previously have explained the appeal of management gurus by dividing them into three different groups; management users, the gurus themselves and socioeconomic and cultural reasons. In gaining a certain amount of knowledge of who the books are written for, we believe that we could increase our understanding for how the examined books are written and more importantly how the authors portray themselves in them. In the group management users you have managers and all those who in some form use management in organizations. From a market perspective these can be seen as the customers of guru literature and similar services. Explanations relating to this group can therefore be seen as the market demand. Clark and Salaman (1998) mention several reasons to why this apparent demand exists. The main argument is that it is due to psychological explanations and that gurus fill some sort of need. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1996:7) point toward fear and greed whereas Jackson (1996) argues that they are needed for sense-making needs. Managerial tasks and learning are have also been used to explain this demand in that guru ideas are easy to apply. The gurus that know this can thereby adjust their rhetoric to fit this. Ten Bos and Heusinkveld (2007) note that the guru's ability to communicate in a way that fits in with 'managerial tongue' is central to spreading their ideas to managers. Again this emphasizes that the guru must be able to relate to their audiences. Clark and Salaman (1998) also point to socioeconomic and cultural aspects as contributing reasons for guru appeal. That these types of performances work better in cultures where optimism and entrepreneurship is highly valued, such as in the USA. Being a good communicator is a matter of reading the audience, something which is very difficult to do (Clark and Salaman, 1996). A guru must therefore be aware of what underlying factors may influence their audience (ten Bos and Heusinkveld, 2007). Having this insight does however mean that the presenter can shape stories and insights after the audience. This makes him or her relatable as well as perceptive and understanding to the audience. Cleverly masking messages in this type of narrative helps the presenter to seduce the audience (Clark and Salaman, 1996). This is something that we believe that we will find in the way in which the examined autobiographies are written.

2.3 Management Autobiographies

We now turn to the literature that explicitly discusses CEO autobiographies. Several studies on autobiographies of CEOs have been done before. Even though there only is a limited amount of research on the genre, it is becoming an important discourse in today's management literature (Schoenberger, 2001; Freeman, 1985).

CEO autobiographies often portray certain success stories. They can therefore be classed in Clark and Salaman's (1998) third category of guru books i.e. the ones that portray someone who succeeds against the odds. As Schoenberger (2001) describes; "they are narratives of self-realization trough passionate engagement in which the realized self becomes a catalyst for corporate change" (Schoenberger, 2001: 277). This quote categorizes autobiographies perfectly, which is in the growing tradition of celebrity CEO books (Phillips and Rippin, 2010). Managers are found to be inspired by these books and might use and apply techniques from these books in their business practices. According to Abrahamson (1996), books like these can therefore be said to be used to set management fashions. This also means that CEOs can through their autobiographies also be fashion setters. As mentioned above, writers of these books are often also seen as management gurus (Clark and Salaman, 1998). It is of course also under this category that our selected books are to be classed.

We will focus on the category of books focused on reports of success stories including studies of firms and individual accounts and their achievements. Popular autobiographic management books tell the personal life of the successful leader intertwined with how the company succeeded during its hardships. According to Schoenberger (2001) these two are linked and it is this duality that makes the book interesting. “The fate of the corporation is understood through the life of the man who ran it.” (Schoenberger, 2001: 277).

Furthermore it must be acknowledged that these types of books that our research is based on are socially influential texts and present strong normative control. These texts are however not what they initially seem. They are intended to send a specific type of message and are written by somebody in order to have a predesigned impact on the reader (Clark and Greatbach, 2004: 398). It is of course this message that we intend to investigate.

Management autobiographies are therefore much more than just a dry exposition of texts, something which they share with guru literature (Clark and Salaman, 1998). They involve highly theatrical play and behaviour. They consists of anecdotes, exhortation, challenge, threat, confrontation and humour across the book. Even though a book is a one-sided story, it is this that is experienced as the truth by the reader (Clark and Salaman, 1998).

2.3.1 Characteristics

There are a few common characteristics that are often identified in management autobiographies which are described in this section. These all relate to how the author portrays himself. This is done in relation to other people and rituals as well as through roles that the author creates for himself. The observant reader will also note that several aspects of the autobiography characteristics resemble the way that management gurus portray themselves.

The first important character of these texts is the presence of the significant other (Philips and Rippin, 2010) or the father figure (Schoenberger, 2001). It has been argued that in an autobiography the author often portray him- or herself by portraying the relationship they have with other people. They could also write about their reactions to how others have previously portrayed the author (Schoenberger, 2001; Philips and Rippin, 2010). The significant other plays an important role here, often in the form of a father figure. This can also be in the form of an anti-figure, such as Philips and Rippin (2010) analyse Schultz’s father in the biography by Schultz from 1997 *Pour your Heart into It* (Philips and Rippin, 2010).

Religious metaphors are often used and portrayed as important rituals to success (Philips and Rippin, 2010). CEOs describe their action as a religious ritual up to salvation and reaching an almost god-like success. For example, Philips and Rippin (2010) describe in their analysis of *Pour your Heart into It*, how the co-founder of Starbucks (Schultz) refers to the making of coffee as a ritual. The author makes use of these metaphors to share and initiate others into their cult (Philips and Rippin, 2010). They need to get rid of what disturbs identity and strive towards authenticity and purity (Philips and Rippin, 2010).

The relationship between love and power is another important characteristic of autobiographies (Schoenberger, 2001). Love and power are often wrapped up in each other. These books often portray the struggle for love as the struggle for power and vice versa (Schoenberger, 2001: 289). The authors usually portray themselves as very passionate people. It is extraordinary to see how these emotions are played out in such an unconstrained way. There seems to be no distinction between capital and emotional ownership. They represent a turbulent mixture of passion, power and rationality (Schoenberger, 2001).

Another important theme that is described in Schoenberger (2001) and Philips and Rippin (2010) is the god creation and the own alter ego. CEOs often portray themselves as quasi-religious leader of the company (Philips and Rippin, 2010: 494). Taking the centre stage is of course something that Clark and Salaman (1996) also identify as one of the striking characteristics of the management guru.

In order to create this alter ego image, they first create an underdog position, such as a student with low grades (Schoenberger, 2001: 290). This might create some sympathy and identification with the leader, maybe even admiration. This opens up the possibility to describe oneself from an underdog to top CEO and all the steps who took them there. This often goes along with referring to stories from his life, which contributes in establishing the author’s self-approval. Some statements here might be somewhat contradictory to earlier ones and strengthen the alter ego. By positioning himself as the founder of the company, the author takes credit for the success of the company and establishes himself as the creator and god (Schoenberger, 2001; Philips and Rippin, 2010).

Lastly CEO autobiographies make an important use of storytelling. Without going into too much detail it can be discussed how this technique is being used. Stories make information easier to believe and to memorize. The author uses storytelling to use powerful means of communicating values, ideas and norms (Morgan and Dennehy, 1997). Storytelling is a much more powerful than just explaining management techniques. The key of this idea lies in that we unconsciously link up stories with our personal lives. This causes an unconscious continuous interplay relating between the story of the author and our own experiences, which also makes the story easier to remember. This is also something which is found in the guru literature. The guru can in this scenario be equated with the author as it is very important for the guru to seem interesting and intriguing to the audience (Clark and Salaman, 1996). It is through this rhetoric that their appeal comes through as the stories that they tell not only appeals to peoples' logic, but also to their emotions. In management development stories entertain, trigger emotions and visualisations. Stories can be used to illustrate almost concept in management (Morgan and Denney, 1997). This means that the author of an autobiography can use his story to illustrate his own ideas about management and even introduce his own management fashion.

2.3.2 Ghost-Writing

Another aspect of CEO-written autobiographies is that they are often ghost-written or with the help of named co-writers (Schoenberger, 2001; McKenna, 2006). We will in this section explain how we deal with issues concerning ghost-writing and how this might impact our research.

McKenna (2006) claims that we should be careful in directly assuming that management autobiographies are written by the author themselves and not ghost-written. In order to understand how these books really work the first step should be to reveal the ghosts (McKenna, 2006). We acknowledge that these books might be ghost-written, but will however not be taking ghost-writing into account. First of all, we have no means of investigating these issues. More importantly we believe that even if one of the books is ghost-written, the content would still have been approved by the author in question. As we are investigating the way in which the author is portrayed, we believe that this is sufficient.

Schoenberger (2001) does however discuss if this is legitimate and if these books should be treated as written by the CEO himself. We agree with Schoenberger who states that the answer is yes. The CEOs that publish an autobiography are assumed to really believe they have something to tell and share with the world about themselves and their company. This is not something which could be left to hired help. The authors' sense of self is too strong to allow themselves to be portrayed by others (Schoenberger, 2001). Furthermore Schoenberger suggests that they do not only speak for themselves but also for giant organizations.

Schoenberger (2001) finally claims that the authors are used to holding others responsible for their wishes. He claims that ghost-writers must always succeed in capturing the CEO in the way he wants to capture himself (Schoenberger, 2001). The author will have to agree to full level until he will put his own name on the book and approve it. This will contribute to the brand of the author and help to get instant recognition (Clark and Greatbach, 2004: 408). We therefore believe that the ways the authors are portrayed in their books are in accordance with their own view of themselves.

Discussing how the books are influenced, if they are ghost-written and which might be the right approach is therefore not relevant to our research. The most important thing is to acknowledge that these books could be ghost-written as it is part of this category of books. The truth of an autobiography is selective to question, i.e. the author's truth (Schoenberger, 2001). The basis of the analysis should be how the narrative is structured to present the author, his story and how the self is fashioned through this narrative approach (Schoenberger, 2001: 281). "We read the text not for the truths it claims overtly to offer but for how it offers them and what that reveals about the author/subject of the narrative." (Schoenberger, 2001: 281). Our research will follow Schoenberger's approach and our intent in this research is thereby to focus on what is written rather than by whom.

2.4 Summary

In this summary we will briefly mention the theories and theorists that we will use most frequently in later parts of the essay. Our main focus of literature is on management autobiographies. But due to the limited amount of research done in this field we have extended our literature review to include management fashions and management gurus as a complement and background. The connection between the areas is as follows. Management fashions are often started through the distribution of management books, which influence management practitioners. The particular types of books that we examine in this study are management autobiographies and authors of these books are often referred to as management gurus. The methods that these gurus communicate are often short-lived in the public interest and therefore described by many as management fashions.

The most important author on management fashions, Abrahamson (1996), has stated that management fashions are much like aesthetic fashions, except for the important difference that they need to appear rational and progressive. Benders and van Veen (2001) however add to this perspective that management fashions also need to appear as a smart mixture of simplicity and ambiguity. We believe this must rather be seen as a contribution rather than contradiction. We as well believe that management fashions are often linked with extraordinary success stories or extraordinary personalities found in Kiesser's study (1997). The management fashions here appear mythical and replace the fear and anxiety of the manager with prospect of relief. We agree with Kiesser (1997) that under such big pressures the wish to find that one idea becomes very tempting. The wish here becomes to father of the belief.

From the guru literature we believe that the most important bit is the way in which gurus communicates with their audiences which Clark and Salaman (1998) discussed in 'Telling tales'. They state that a guru's performance is filled with charm, confidence and conviction. The reason for this is that the audience must be intrigued by the guru and the story that is being told. Otherwise, the performance will lose its appeal. By using Huczynski (1993) we have also been able to identify that the type of 'guru' that we are investigating is the 'hero manager' who gain credibility by achieving something out of the ordinary.

As pointed out there is a limited amount of studies done on management autobiographies. It is however become a really important discourse in management literature (Schoenberger, 2001; Freeman, 1985). It is Schoenberger (2001) who pointed out that management autobiographies are narratives of self-realization. They are books that tell the personal life of the leader in combination with the success stories of the company. It is this duality which features these books. These books are written to have an impact on the reader (Clark and Greatbach, 2004) and include highly theatrical play and behaviour (Clark and Salaman, 1998).

Schoenberger (2001) pointed out that these books often wrap power and love into each other. They play out emotions in an unconstrained way and portray the author as very passionate. Besides this the author can make use of an alter ego. They portray themselves as a quasi-religious leader (Philips and Rippin 2010). Schoenberger (2001) points out that to make their story extraordinary and in order to identify with the reader they can also portray an underdog position. This opens up the possibility to describe them from underdog to top CEO and tell about their stories along the away. All the authors make an important use of storytelling. Stories make it attractive to read and make powerful means which makes it easier to believe and memorize (Morgan and Dennehy, 1997).

Another characteristic of management autobiographies is that they are often ghost-written. We however agree with Schoenberger (2001) that this is not really relevant to our studies since the basis of our analysis should be how narratives are structured to present the author.

3 Methodology

In this chapter we will discuss the ‘how’ of the thesis. We have chosen to work with a hermeneutical approach, which will be explained. Analytical techniques for finding themes will also be disclosed. We will discuss how we have used these techniques in order to analyse our data. Techniques of this kind might be seen as contradictory to a hermeneutical approach but we will explain our reasoning behind this. Our data selection and the criteria that were used in deciding this will be made clear in 3.3. Lastly we will reflect upon our methodology and summarize what we have done.

3.1 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the art of text interpretation. As we will be working with four printed autobiographies, this method will assist us in analysing our data. We believe that it is important to explain the concept of hermeneutics before we move on. Not only will this provide the reader with a better understanding of hermeneutics, but also gives insight to our views on hermeneutics and how we are planning to use it in our research. We make the distinction between two types of hermeneutics, objective and alethic hermeneutics. These can however to some extent be seen as complementary according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), which is how we will use them. We will come back to this later but will first have to explain the concept of hermeneutics before we can elaborate this complementation.

The origin of hermeneutics was found in interpreting different texts in the bible. Traditionally this method has also been used to interpret other religious or historical texts, literature or juridical and law texts. Hermeneutics has all to do with interpretation and understanding the meaning of texts. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) describe hermeneutics as analysing texts using intuition, interpretation and insight, rather than factual and logical studies of texts. Intuition plays the most important role here. Alvesson and Sköldberg use the metaphor of a road to knowledge whereby patterns in complex wholes are illuminated by a mental flashlight. Knowledge is here experienced as self-evident.

The first, objective hermeneutics is explained by Alvesson and Sköldberg using the German word of ‘Verstehen’ which indicates basically the philosophy of understanding. This results in understanding the underlying meaning of the author, not the functional explanation of the text.

By using objective hermeneutics one can understand the frame of the author and get to agreement with the established interpretations.

Objective hermeneutics claims that there is a strong difference between studying an object and a subject, something that alethic hermeneutics discusses later on. Intuition is here seen as a sort of self-conciseness, something that can reveal, at least within borders a sort of truth.

The basic idea of hermeneutics is here that one can by using empathy imagination himself in the role of the writer to understand the meaning of the act more clearly. The idea is that the creative part of the mind (of the author) is not accessible by the reason of others; this can only be replaced by intuition. Because the interpreter has a different or even broader set of knowledge it is possible for the interpreter to understand the author even better than the author understand themselves (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

We will use this hermeneutic approach by having another mind-set and set of knowledge than the writers of the texts. We are different ages, have different lives, history and thinking processes from the authors of our examined autobiographies. We believe that this will help us to analyse the texts from a different perspective and help us to understand the writer. In addition to that our own lives also differ; we grew up in different countries and have different lives and views. We are convinced that this will give us something extra. Having a different background can help us to relate to the texts differently. As we have read several autobiographies and earlier studies before commencing this research, we believe that we could see these texts through a broader perspective than the author. In extension this also means that we have the possibility of gaining deeper understanding than what the author might have of himself.

Alethic hermeneutics has some contradictions to the use of objective hermeneutics. Objective hermeneutics claims that there are objective and subjective findings; alethic hermeneutics completely counters this approach. Alethic comes from the Greek word 'Aletheia' which means uncoveredness. The use of alethic hermeneutics can lead to new insights for the interpreter.

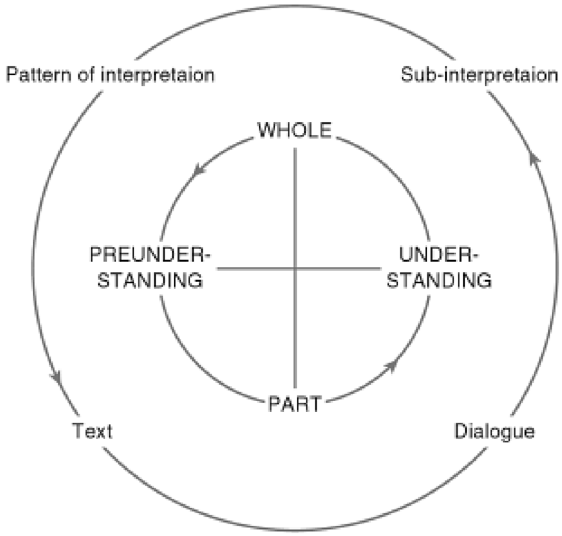
Alethic hermeneutics questions the objective hermeneutics by addressing if there is really a sharp line between the object studied and the interpreted. Alethic hermeneutics does not necessarily see understanding a pure form of science but more as a way of living.

> “Understanding is a basic way of existing for every human being, since we must continually keep orientating ourselves in our situation simply in order to stay alive.” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009: 95)

Athletic hermeneutics fits into the social constructionism paradigm. We believe that knowledge is a social construction. The popular management books which are studied must be seen as social knowledge or pseudo knowledge. They represent certain social ideas about management and are socially constructed and written by CEOs that are seen as successful. We therefore find the use of alethic hermeneutics the best to use for this study. The basic alethic hermeneutic process exists of pre-understanding and understanding and their relation. The understanding of a text demands pre-understanding which is again influenced by an earlier understanding. Pre-understandings and understandings will continuously follow up each other and thereby form the basis of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle also models the interplay of interpretations of the text between the part and the whole. By understanding a part of a text, say a paragraph one must place it in the context, i.e. the text as a whole. The interplay between those understandings will cause the interpretation of the text. This occurs on all levels, not only within the text. For example, one must also consider looking at the text as a part, and the author and its social and historical context as a whole. This makes a circle, and in the final analysis the entire world history becomes the whole, relevant to understand the part (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

These two views upon hermeneutics, the objective and the alethic seem to be quite contradictory and conflicting. However, Alvesson and Sköldberg argue that they can also be seen as complementary to each other. Rules for interpretation are rejected by both schools. What are interpreted are not facts or data but texts. The interpreter must become aware of that his or her frame of reference will change during the hermeneutic process and that new facts might emerge and old ones will disappear. In the process of interpretation there will be a continuously formulation of sub-interpretations (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). This is a view that we intend to follow. Besides this, opinions might change overtime and influence the construction of meanings. All these things form patterns of interpretation together with the two circles.

The circles must be seen more rather different than contradictive and can according to Alvesson and Sköldberg be combined in the same research process. Alvesson and Sköldberg create a circle that is displayed in figure 1.



(Figure 1. The Hermeneutic Circe
Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009)

We can find ourselves in this circle and will use it as our view on hermeneutics during the research. Our pre-understandings will influence our understandings, which will then become our new pre-understandings. We will continuously look at parts of a text as well as the whole. Later on, the whole will become a part of what we consider to be a book as a part of the whole autobiographical book selection of corporate leaders. Around these circles we will look for patterns, have sub-interpretations and dialogues. This will all influence our interpretation of the text.

We will for example start our research with the literature review. This will give us some first basic pre-understanding of the discourse and background of management autobiographies. Throughout our process of analysing we will continuously make interpretations and understandings of the texts. We will thereby continuously reflect upon our pre-understandings that we have gained from writing the literature review and relate these to our findings during the analysis. In the later stages of the analysis and discussion we will then reflect upon our earlier understandings and relate this again to our current understandings. By keeping on rotating the circle we get to deeper and deeper understandings.

As mentioned in connection to the research question, we are not going to analyse the business models that are described in the texts, but instead analyse how these books are written. The analysis will be focused on how the authors portray themselves in relation to their story.

While reading the books we will continuously relate to pre-understandings of the literature review but also to other books that we have read. While reading our second book we related our understanding to our interpretation of the first book we read. This is something that goes for all of the examined books.

When we found a certain theme in the first two books, say for example the portraying of a strong intuition or the portrayal of emotions we are more likely to find these themes in the other books since these themes have become part of our pre-understanding. This might involve some limitations to our research since we influence our own pre-understandings. However to avoid influencing each other's pre-understandings we both read all the books in a different order in time. In addition all books were read twice so that they could be examined under the same pre-understandings. This helped to gain an even deeper understanding. It is however logical that our pre-understandings will influence our understandings since this is the key to the hermeneutic circle. It must be acknowledged that this study will represent our understandings and interpretations of these autobiographies.

3.2 Identifying themes

In contribution to our hermeneutical approach we will also make use of some of the techniques that have been identified by Ryan and Bernard (2003). These techniques will help us to find more specific characteristics such as the use of language by looking at the style of writing, how the authors tell tales and involve the reader. Ryan and Bernard introduced several techniques to identify themes from across broad epistemological and disciplinary boundaries. This might not entirely fit into the hermeneutical approach but we believe they help create background to our research and are applicable since they are based on a broad set of epistemologies. They are also a good starting point in how to approach the examined texts.

Identifying themes is a fundamental process in qualitative research yet it is one of the hardest. We believe Ryan and Bernard can add something to our research since they have provided some hands-on techniques how to identify themes. We will use for example their techniques on identifying themes by looking at repetitions and missing data.

As stated our research will not be based on very strict technical analysis but will be based on the analysis of our own interpretations using the hermeneutical approach. The techniques identified by Ryan and Bernard can however help us and give us some more specific guidance and background. We believe that hereby these techniques will become part of our pre-understanding and will thereby become part of our hermeneutic circle. We will therefore not see and use these techniques as contradictive but as a contribution to our pre-understanding of our hermeneutic circle. Furthermore it must be acknowledged that the analysis is based upon our own interpretations and is not a technical analysis.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) outline twelve techniques for identifying themes. These have been collected from several theoretical paradigms and are therefore suited for different types of studies. We will thus not be working with all of the techniques, but have come to the conclusion to work with five of these as an outline when analysing our chosen data. Ryan and Bernard also point out that the techniques are often used in combination, which is in line with what we intend to do.

When analysing the individual sources of data, one of the most important parts will be to look for repetitions. It is a basic technique, but can point towards different themes. The repetitions that occur more often are likely to be major themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). We will among other things look for what key ideas are put forward and if a specific type of behaviour is recommended in contexts.

Comparisons between data will be the main technique for analysis. We will look for similarities and differences between the results of the other techniques, but also intend to look for factors such as characteristics, behaviour, relationships with other members of the organization and how the authors themselves believe that they are different from other leaders. This is because it relates to the research question, but also to the chosen literature.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) also state that a researcher can look for missing data. This is of course more difficult to do. It will however be considered as a part of the analysing process. It is something that could be used in combination with comparing data as something that might be highlighted in some sources could be missing in others.

Cutting and sorting relates to identifying illuminating quotes and expressions. These are then sorted in order to make themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). We will also be looking for key words in context (KWIC), which basically means to look specifically at certain words (Ryan and Bernard, 2003).

3.3 Data selection

Our choice of data is four popular management books chosen on the basis of three criteria.

1. Being a bestseller

There are a plethora of popular management books available today. We believe that in being writing a bestselling book, the author achieves greater impact. They reach a larger audience and are better known. They have a great influence on management fashions. Besides that they are found most persuasive, otherwise they probably will not be bought in the quantities necessary to become a bestseller (Clark and Greatbach, 2004: 401).

2. Written by a CEO

Books by CEOs are becoming increasingly popular. By extension this means that they are becoming increasingly influential. Authors often use these types of books to establish their (personal) brand among the masses (see literature review and Clark and Greatbach, 2004:408). Yet there is only a limited amount of research done about them, something which we find very interesting.

3. Recently published

We believe that it is the most recent books that have the largest influence on management today. As discussed in the literature review, gurus want to stress how they are relevant at the moment, since many claim to have something new and innovative to communicate.

As also mentioned in the literature review books need to be seen as new and innovative by managers. They need to seem relevant to the manager who is reading them. We however found it more interesting to work with newer books since they have not been researched to the same extent. It may also possible spot new trends in the chosen literature although this is not the focus of our research.

We have therefore selected books that were written and published in the last four years.

On the basis of these criteria we have chosen to work with the following books;

1. Branson, Richard (2009). *Business Stripped Bare: Adventures of a Global Entrepreneur*. 2nd edition. St Ives: Virgin Books.

Business Stripped Bare is a book by the famous English entrepreneur Richard Branson. In this book he gives an insight in his life and tells stories about the success of various Virgin companies. It tells the creation of the first mail-order company to the launch of Virgin Galactic, the world's first commercial space company. The book was an international bestseller and follow-up of his autobiography *Losing My Virginity* and his book *Screw It, Let's Do It*. Branson has a remarkable celebrity-like status and a well-known entrepreneur. (Amazon, 2013a, Branson, 2009)

2. Schultz, H. and Gordon, J. (2011). *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul*. West Sussex: John Willey & Sons Ltd.

This book tells the story of Starbucks' CEO Howard Schultz and how the global coffee company made its comeback. The book was listed as 'New York Times #1 bestseller' and as Amazon.com's 'Book of the month'. It was published in various forms as paperback, hardcover, e-book and audio-cd. (Amazon, 2013b, Schultz and Gordon, 2011)

3. Hsieh, Tony (2010). *Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose. New York: Business Plus.*

Delivering Happiness by Tony Hsieh published in 2010 is a book about his life as an entrepreneur and CEO of his companies LinkExchange and Zappos.com (hereby after referred to as Zappos). It was listed as 'New York Times #1 bestseller' for 27 weeks and number one at the bestsellers lists of Amazon.com, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today. It also has been covered in big mass media in the USA by the Washington Post, CNBC, The Huffington Post and the Wall street Journal. (Amazon, 2013c, Hsieh, 2010)

4. Nayar, Vineet (2010). *Employees First, Customers Second: Turning Conventional Management Upside Down. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.*

In *Employees First, Customers Second*, the Indian CEO of IT company HCL Technologies introduces his management philosophy. The book has been praised by some of the world's leading business leaders including the late C.K. Prahalad, Tom Peters, Gary Hamel, Ram Charan, and Victor Fung. Nayar has been selected to the 'Thinkers 50 List 2012', Selected in Fortune Magazine's 'Executive Dream Team' List 2011, Ranked '#2 HR Influencer in India' by SHRM India and adjudged as the 'CEO of the Year 2011' by Bloomberg. He is also involved with the World Economic Forum. (Amazon, 2013d; Nayar, 2010)

3.4 Reflections and summary

Now that our research has been done it might be useful to reflect upon the use of our methodologies and summarize what we have done. We started our research by identifying and reading the most important authors in the subjects of management autobiographies. As there is only a limited amount of research done in this field, we decided to expand it by also looking at management fashions and management gurus. These studies influenced our pre-understandings of management autobiographies.

We both had some ideas about management autobiographies before even knowing that we would start this research and we believe that this is where the hermeneutic circle started. Our pre-understanding of management autobiographies was that they were simplified messages about business so that even people without a business degree would understand the context. We do not believe that the motives behind writing these books were knowledge sharing, but rather to sell the most amount of books. During this research we have not only confirmed our pre-understandings but also developed them further.

After having started with the literature review and having our first pre-understandings in mind we selected and read four management autobiographies. We both read the books in a different order and at different times. Our understandings of the books were formed upon the pre-understanding of the research literature we read, but also upon previously read books, discussions with our supervisor and of course with each other. After having read all books once, we started a long brainstorming session in which we both openly spoke what potential themes and interests we found in the books. We also used some techniques of Ryan and Bernhard to identify the use of language and the writing styles by looking at repetitions. However this was more used as a background and the main part the analysis is based on our own interpretations. This process combined our understandings as a team based upon the pre-understandings of us as individual readers. We then started with the analysis by writing our thoughts upon several potential themes. During these times we continuously read back some chapters in the book and had a reflection of our understandings. In the discussion we reflected upon all our understandings so far and made an open reflection in order to come to our final conclusions.

4 Analysis

The analysis chapter is where we begin to disclose our findings. We have split the analysis into two parts. The first part of the analysis will focus on more technical aspects of the examined autobiographies. This is to aid in the understanding for this category of books and will examine audiences, use of language and how the authors attempt to establish credibility towards the reader. We believe that these steps are necessary in order to move on to the second part of the analysis. This part is where we begin to disclose our findings and what themes we found in our data. It is in this part that we will discuss how the authors portray themselves in relation to their organizations, employees and the struggles that they have faced. Each theme in the second part stands for a different portrayal of the author.

Part 1 Audiences, Style, Language and Credibility

As stated above we will begin the analysis by analysing the characteristics of the examined autobiographies. This part will begin with discussing the audiences that the authors targets. We will then continue with how they use language, which will include the style of writing, telling tales and involving the reader. We will finish this first part of the analysis by examining how the author establishes his credibility.

4.1 Audiences

Throughout the analysis we will refer to the reader or readers and how the author portrays himself towards them. We would therefore like to start by identifying who the books seem to be written for.

To start with the authors have different cultural backgrounds and come from different parts of the world. Schultz and Gordon (2011) are from the USA and so is Hsieh (2010), but the latter also comes from Asian heritage. Nayar (2010) is from India and Branson (2009) has grown up in the UK. As a reader you can see this in three of the books, but not in *Employees First, Customers Second* (2010) by Nayar.

References to popular culture are mentioned in both *Onwards* (2011) and *Business Stripped Bare* (2009). In the latter case there are a lot of references to British culture. One such an occurrence is when Branson describes how he was regularly referred to as a 'Del Boy' when he started out (Branson, 2010: 38). Throughout these three books there are these types of little hints that remind the reader of where they come from. However, in the fourth case this is something that is missing. There is very little about where Nayar comes from and about his culture. The main focus is almost exclusively on the process instead of the author himself. Due to this we believe that the books have been positioned towards a western audience i.e. Europe and North America. The authors that have grown up in these regions use this to make references that the reader might share with them. Nayar cannot do this since he is from India and therefore abstains from such cultural references. If he had, western audiences might find it harder to relate to Nayar than the other authors.

4.2 Language

4.2.1 Style of writing

All books have as stated before reached bestsellers lists and have been published in many different countries. They obviously have an audience beyond managers. This is something which is represented in the style of writing. They all employ language that is easy to follow and that has a certain flow to it. All authors are quite concise and write to the point.

There is however a slight difference between the levels of language that are used. In *Employees First, Customers Second* (2010) and *Onwards* (2011) a more formal language is used than in the others. The authors use terminology and concepts that are typically linked with business, such as ‘value chain’ and ‘Blue Ocean Strategy’. Yet neither books are management books per say. They are stories on how one specific business transformed in order to stay as the market leader in their respective industry. In *Business Stripped Bare* (2009) and *Delivering Happiness* (2010) on the other hand a much more informal language is used. Below Hsieh explains why:

> “I’m not a professional writer, and in many cases I purposely chose to do things that would probably make my high school English teachers cringe, such as ending a sentence with a preposition. I did this partly because I wanted the writing to reflect how I would normally talk, and partly just to annoy all my high school English teachers (who I appreciate dearly).” (Hsieh, 2010: xiii)

As Hsieh describes, his writing could probably be grammatically better. There is however a point to this, namely that he wants to tell his story in the same way that he would communicate with the people that he works with every day. He can obviously write better as he knows that this style of writing might annoy his former teachers. He does this in a humoristic way and one gets the sense that he is very genuine. According to Clark and

Salaman's observations of guru behaviour (1996), this furthers Hsieh's appeal to the audience as he seems to have a different approach and provides something more interesting than the typical corporate leader. Of course internal communication is a reoccurring theme within the books. Especially on having similar frames of reference with the employees, which of course include how formal the language will be.

4.2.2 Telling tales

Whether the language is formal or not, a certain type of writing is very prominent throughout all the books. They all work a lot with some form of storytelling. The books in themselves are of course examples of how to use an overall story to illustrate a method or a change process. The authors do not only state a dull method, but a dynamic story that explains the underlying factors of why certain decisions were made. Not only does this make the process more believable, but by relating the process to one's self, the author makes the lessons learnt easier for the reader to remember and apply to their own lives.

The authors also tend to use stories of experiences that the reader might also have had. Hsieh (2010) talks a lot about his childhood and about how he at an early age tried different ways of making money (see also chapter on entrepreneurship). He also mentions pressures from his parents and how it was very important for them that he achieved high academic results:

> "The SAT is a standardized test that is typically only taken once, towards the end of high school, as part of the collage application process. But my parents wanted me to start preparing for it when I was in six grade." (Hsieh, 2010: 11)

Hsieh's parents take quite a significant role throughout his book. Hsieh describes himself as a child of Asian immigrants who demanded the very best of their child. That is also the reason why Hsieh went to Harvard. This story is used to increase the readers understanding of the author's background. This will help the reader understand his personality better and why he takes certain decisions later on.

All the authors tell some stories about their youth. In *Onwards* (2011) stories are for example told about Schultz's youth in the poor projects of Brooklyn and how he grew up. These stories contribute to how the identity of the author is portrayed. They first construct the basic background of the author, where he comes from. By understanding the authors background the reader might find it easier to identify with him or her as they may share similar experiences.

On the whole the use of telling tales seems to be related to the survival of the company. All authors seem to tell some story about survival. All the authors portray the survival of their company and in some cases also the survival of the author personally. This makes the story more like an adventure and more interesting to read for the reader. We will come back to this survival theme later on in this chapter.

Hsieh tells a story in the middle of the book about climbing the Kilimanjaro. He planned it as a holiday to escape work, but cannot stop thinking about Zappos. He describes the climbing as a very difficult physical and mental challenge.

> "I remember thinking that this entire experience was by far the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. It was testing every ounce of will power I had." (Hsieh, 2010: 131)

> "In that moment I thought to myself, anything is possible. Tears welled up in my eyes." (Hsieh, 2010: 131)

These stories have not so much to do with the business ideas Hsieh wants to share or with tales about Zappos. They do however say a lot about Hsieh himself. By telling that he could not stop thinking about Zappos the reader might observe that he is a very committed man. Reaching the top of the Kilimanjaro could be seen by the reader as an extraordinary performance and Hsieh is probably perceived as an extremely will-driven man.

These kinds of tales within the books and the tale of the book as a whole are found in every book. Nayar (2010) starts for example his book by a story how he meets a race car driver in the plane which made him realize that in order to survive he needed to speed up instead of slowing down. These stories speak to the imagination of the reader. Telling tales is a technique that is used by the authors across all books, either to portray them or to illustrate their ideas.

4.2.3 Involving the Reader

Books are a very one sided way of communication. There are however methods that can be used in order to involve the reader in more ways. We have found three methods that are used in this data. The first is by talking directly to the reader and thus bringing the reader into thinking about how he or she can adapt the lessons learned to their own life and problems. This is done by using of words such as 'you' and 'yours'.

> "Don't waste your precious time. Phone calls and emails can eat your day. Don't let them. No one will think less of you for getting to the point." (Branson, 2009: 96)

Offering direct advice by creating a general rule is another way of using language:

> "I only urge you to find your own catalysts, push them hard and then find new ones and push them even harder still." (Nayar, 2010: 87)

> "I'd advise every owner of a company to keep a notebook and jot down the things that need doing." (Branson, 2009: 97)

Lastly, the reader could be encouraged to engage in exercises.

> "So far, you have been a passive reader. As we near the final pages of this book, I'd like to ask you to actively participate and think about the answer to this question: "What is your goal in life?" When I ask different people this question, I get a lot of different answers. Some people say that they want to find a boyfriend or girlfriend. Others say that they want to be healthy. Whatever your response is, I'd like you to think about your answer to the follow-up question: "Why?"" (Hsieh, 2010: 259)

All these methods help the reader relate to the processes that have been described in the book. It gives an indication to how they practically can improve their own working methods. In using exercises the reader is also given the opportunity to evaluate where they are in relation to the process.

4.3 Establishing credibility

According to Clark and Salaman (1996) it is very important for the guru to establish him- or herself to the audience. As they tend to promote quite radical ideas, they need to show confidence and that they are something out of the ordinary. Basically explain why they are worth listening to.

4.3.1 Results

All four authors start their books off in a similar way. They all have an introduction and/or a preface explaining the main points of their books, something which is not found in fictional writing. There is also another common characteristic; they all disclose the effects of their efforts. Results based on tangible facts such as sales figures, awards and ratings.

Hsieh (2010), who started and sold both his companies with a large return, uses this to establish the value of what he has built.

> "In 1996, I co-founded LinkExchange, which was sold to Microsoft in 1998 for $265 million." (Hsieh, 2010: xi).

> "We grew from a company of almost no sales in 1999 to over $1 billion in gross merchandise sales, annually." (Hsieh, 2010: xi)

These two quotes are from the first ten rows of the preface. It is to the point and factually based. Hsieh has with two sentences shown that even though he started from scratch, he has built two companies that have a considerable market value. It shows progression, something that was also done in a short amount of time.

Nayar (2010) also uses growth and progress over time as a way to show success.

> "HCL became a leader in its chosen businesses and markets, growing from about $10 million to $5 billion over a twenty-five-year period..." (Nayar 2010: 4)

This is despite the fact that he also uses the introduction to describe why the organization needs to change; the reader is regularly reminded that HCLT is a success story. Growth, revenue and other achievements are highly present. This is mainly done through using rather casual side notes.

> "One fine day, we at HCLT (now a family of fifty-five thousand people and around $2.5 billion in revenues) made the decision to change..." (Nayar, 2010: 5).

It is also in this way in which he points out that HCLT just happen to be;

> "(... one of the few companies in the world to grow during the 2008-2009 recession)" (Nayar, 2010: 5)

Nayar (2010) continues on stating that as a result of the transformation HCLT has won awards for being the 'Best Employer' in India, Asia and the United Kingdom. He also brings up that the organization has been named in 'Fortune' and 'Business Week', where they were praised for their style of management and as a 'Top 5 company to watch' (Nayar, 2010: 6). By pointing this out, Nayar draws attention to the fact that several institutions have named HCLT as something special.

As mentioned in the section on management fashions, Kiesser (1997: 63) argues that in order for someone to be a legitimate source for a management fashion, they need to either be seen as the inventor of the idea or link themselves with an established institution such as a university. Nayar (2010) does both of these things. By using expressions such as "unique approach" (Nayar, 2010: 5) in combination with these types of awards, Nayar establishes himself and HCLT as a founder of their method of working. Further, Nayar mentions that Harvard Business School used HCLT as a case study and that they also have received acclaim in several business publications. He thus also links the organization to industry institutions.

Like Nayar, Schultz and Gordon (2011) also starts by describing that Starbucks needed to change in the preface. Then, like the others they are also very conscious about pointing out that that was in the past. By implementing certain efforts they suggest that Starbucks were able to return form, as illustrated by the quote below.

> "Today, Starbucks has more than $10 billion in annual revenue and serves nearly 60 million visitors a week in 16,000 stores in 54 countries. More than 200,000 people, whom we call partners, represent Starbucks." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: x)

Branson (2009) however takes a slightly different approach to the other authors. He does not use revenue in the same way as the others to impress. This it however explained as the Virgin Group consist of 300 companies that are independently responsible for their own finances (Branson, 20009: 4-5).

> "...the combined Virgin Group is the largest group of private companies in Europe even though they are all relatively small in its sector." (Branson, 2009: 5)

It is indicated that Branson himself has an overall responsibility to questions relating more to strategy, organizational culture and new start-ups. He therefore needs to impress the audience by different means such as by stressing the sheer size of Virgin.

> "Today the Virgin Group spans the world. It is truly an internationally recognized brand name, trusted and enjoyed by many hundreds of millions of people across the continents of the world." (Branson, 2009: 4)

The size issue relates to geographical spread and brand recognition, but Branson also mentions that Virgin also provides 50,000 jobs worldwide (Branson, 2009: 5). As mentioned in the literature review, management gurus must take quite extreme positions in order to get noticed by the broader audience (Clark and Salaman, 1996). By being the front figure of a global brand Branson attracts a lot of media attention and thereby probably has a head start on many other corporate leaders. Introducing concepts such as commercial space travel is also something which attracts a lot of attention. Being such an interesting person is probably one of the most prominent reasons why this book has reached the bestsellers list. His style of working and the attitude that he promotes is also portrayed as something out of the ordinary, which is necessary for the audience to be interested in what the author has to say.

4.3.2 Linking up with famous names

One common feature throughout all four books is that they all try to link themselves to famous names and icons. Hsieh is the only one who has links himself up with brands, whereas the other three authors tries to link themselves to celebrities in different ways. By doing this the authors achieve different results. Branson and Schultz are both portrayed as generally 'good guys'. Nayar gathers inspiration and thus also shows how one could apply types of thinking to different scenarios. Lastly Hsieh shows the value of a good network and creates credibility by linking the network up with leading industry brands.

Branson (2009) not only meets famous people in business, but stresses that he even has a strong personal connection. The following quote shows his relationship with Nelson Mandela.

> "I am proud to say that Nelson Mandela has become a close friend. As we pass his ninetieth birthday, he has remained an inspiration to me as a human being and I have many cherished memories of time spent in his company." (Branson, 2009: 272)

He goes into great detail about this relationship. It led him to invest in a holiday resort and a personal estate in South Africa. Even though there actually is a business connection, it is only a minor part of this story. The relationship Branson has with Mandela seems to be the priority in this text.

Schultz talks about his relationship with Bono. Starbucks was involved in the so called (RED) project, which was a co-operative project between several companies to fight Aids in Africa. Bono was a spokesperson for this project and according to Schultz they connected over their common interest in African countries (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 198).

Onwards (2011) is the only book in our study to include pictures. Under the heading 'Taking it personally' in the picture section, there is even a picture of Schultz and Bono, each with an arm around the other's back. Even though it is a formal setting on a stage, it shows a certain amount of informality and friendship.

> "Bono, lead singer for U2, global activist, and someone I consider a friend..." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 198)

Again we see the phrase ‘friend’, which indicates a personal connection. In both these cases the CEOs have linked themselves with people who are known for their humanitarian values and fighting for improving the quality of life for people. These celebrities have a longstanding history of these types of issues and involving them therefore creates a certain amount of credibility. As they are also well-known it also means more publicity towards the projects that they were involved with. These connections in combination with putting a strong focus on taking social responsibility and portray the authors as ‘good’ people. This also illustrates how both authors believe in that life is about more than merely business. In addition, they also give the impression that in order to be a good businessman, you also need to be a good person. The following quote shows the involvement that Starbucks had in the (RED) campaign exemplified organizational culture outside the company, which was something that many employees (so called partners) appreciated.

> “Like all monies collected through purchases of (RED) products at Gap, Apple, Converse and Dell, our contributions would go directly the Global Fund for AIDS programs in Africa. The announcement thrilled many of our partners who had been disappointed that Starbucks had not “gone (RED)” sooner, given the natural synergy of our organizations’ values.” (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 199)

Nayar (2010) on the other hand does not use personal relationships with celebrities in his book. It may be because he does not have these relations or he might simply not want to use them if he did. He does however describe how he gathers inspiration and also how he applies this as a private person:

> “As we went through this process at HCLT, I thought about my three heroes - Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. – and how they had created transformation in their societies.” (Nayar, 2010: 43)

> “...these leaders were known for far more than their specific actions. They had also changed the mind-set of their people, and the new way of thinking had lasted long beyond their lifetimes.” (Nayar, 2010: 43)

These three are of course all known for their fights in for human values in different contexts. All very noble causes of course and they are portrayed in a positive light as he talks about them as his ‘heroes’. They are widely known and the potential reader probably already has some sort of relationship toward these figures. Nayar goes on to describe how he is personally inspired by them. By doing so, Nayar shows that everybody can indeed be inspired by great people. He thereby also hints to the reader that iconic actions of heroes can indeed be used as inspiration for lesser problems then for example stigmatizations of whole societies. By hinting at this he further promotes the idea that his ideas could be used by whoever the reader might be.

Hsieh (2010) does not talk about people that much, but instead puts larger emphasis on different brands. The following quote refers to the days when he was expanding his company LinkExchange and needed to hire more people:

> "He [Hadi] told me that it definitely sounded exciting, but he was busy in Seattle working at Microsoft, heading up the team that would launch a Web browser called the Internet Explorer to compete with the Netscape browser, so he wouldn't be able to join." (Hsieh, 2010: 50)

In the end they ended up hiring Hadi's brother Ali, which of course also illustrates the value of the friend network. What the quote mainly illustrates is Hsieh has connections with people in high positions in the largest companies in their industry. Even if nobody knows this one particular person, they will most likely know of Microsoft and the Internet Explorer. The fact that Hsieh does not mention Hadi's surname also indicates that he probably does not expect people to recognize his name.

On the following page Hsieh describes how Yahoo! co-founder Jerry Yang made an offer for LinkExchange (Hsieh, 2010: 51). Yahoo! is mentioned several times in connection to Yang's name, which indicates that he might not either be recognized without being mentioned in connection with his company.

Developing and utilizing your network is something that is shown here to be very useful. By linking himself and his network with large industry brands, Hsieh creates further credibility because of the brands good reputation.

4.3.3 Current events

In the literature review we discussed how it is important for gurus to seem relevant to their audiences, both in time and in actions. One way to do this is by relating to current events, something which all the authors do in some way. It is the major current event discussed by the authors and something that they spend several pages discussing. By doing this the guru relates to events that probably have affected every member of the audience in some respect. All the authors mention the financial crisis that started in 2008 and how most of them were taken by surprise. The following quote is an example of this.

> "As the global economy tanked towards the end of 2008, our growth rate slowed. Even though we were still growing, we realized that our expenses were too high for the revenues that we were bringing in. We had planned for faster growth and instead found that we had overhired." (Hsieh, 2010: 217)

The hardcover version of *Business Stripped Bare: Adventures of a Global Entrepreneur* was published in 2008. The version that we used as data is however the pocket version and that was published a few months later, which is noted in the preface:

> "The publishers have asked me to bring this book up to date, in the light of recent events. 'About ten pages should do it,' they said. Ten pages?! Six months have passed since the hardback came out, and you don't need me to tell you that six months is a long time when the world is teetering on the brink of financial ruin." (Branson, 2009: xiii)

Branson's book was published in the initial stages of the recession, which means that it was still probably very relevant to the larger audience. Schultz and Gordon (2011) start by describing what a shock it was and illustrate this by using the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers bank:

> "On September 15, 2008, the economy spun into free fall. Lehman Brothers Holdings, the investment bank founded in 1844 as a general goods store, declared the largest bankruptcy in US history despite last-ditch efforts by the US Federal Reserve and competitors to prop up the failing institution." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 179)

> "Few people understood, myself included, the degree to which the complex risky investments made by the world's biggest banks were dangerously intertwined, but at the end of the day we would all have an idea." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 180)

These quotes illustrate how that Schultz was as surprised as everybody else, even though he was a big corporate leader. By doing this it illustrates how Schulz is just the same as the average person and that he thereby can be related to.

Onwards: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul was published in 2011. As it had gone three years from the start of the crisis, they have had more time to evaluate what happened with Starbucks in relation to this. In fact, for several chapters this is a major theme. Nayar (2010) on the other hand does not talk about it for the same length, but it is still present. Throughout the book, the reader is reminded that it is recent events that are described and how HLCT managed in the recession. This is for example done by stating that HCLT was one of the few companies in the world to grow during this time (Nayar, 2010: 5). Likewise, Hsieh also takes about these events and how they affected Zappos. He explains that it first of all took them by surprise, but also that the recession forced Zappos to large layoffs.

> "I was amazed that things had changed very quickly. Just eight months after giving everyone their surprise bonus, we made the tough decision to lay off 8 percent of our staff. It was one of the hardest decisions we ever had to make for the company." (Hsieh, 2010: 217)

Part 2 Portrayals

In this part of the analysis we will focus on the different portrayals we have found in the examined autobiographies. In order to answer our research question, we will take an in-depth look into each portrayal. As stated in the introduction, each theme stands for a different portrayal. How they relate to each other will be studied in the discussion.

4.4 Being a survivor

The companies represented in the books all have to battle and survive for their existence. No story knows the single simple road to success, but has to pass through different obstacles along the way. In *Onwards* (2011) for example, the story of Starbucks' survival is told. Schultz returns as CEO to save Starbucks from going into bankruptcy. Branson's and Hsieh's stories are more focused on building new business rather than rebuilding existing ones. These do however also know their struggles and one of the moments is described quite well by Hsieh:

> "The situation was dire. Everything I was involved in was running out of money, including the restaurant, the incubator, Zappos and myself personally." (Hsieh, 2010: 113)

At this point Hsieh is close to bankruptcy and needs to take important decisions to save Zappos but also save his own personal finances. He tells us the story on how he managed to survive together with his closest colleagues. Once he established balance again he writes the following.

> "Zappos was saved. We signed the documents and breathed a collective sigh of relief. I think we all felt like we had lived through a scene from Indiana Jones, just narrowly escaping certain death by rolling under a falling stone door at the very last second while somehow still managing to keep our hats on. We had done it. We had somehow survived. It still didn't seem real. But it was." (Hsieh, 2010: 145)

The same type of stories is told in *Business Stripped Bare* (2009). He portrays every start-up as a survival and struggle against the existing competition. Every company seems to have limited budget and time constrain and are always fighting against the other established corporations.

> "The airline was a start-up minnow fighting the legacy sharks that wanted to keep its planes grounded. This do-or-die mission was motivating." (Branson 2009: 224)

All books use the survival of their business somehow to tell the story how they saved it from bankruptcy and which 'methods' they used to do so. They also represent the authors' struggles with their companies and how it motivates them to work. Nayar's book (2010) is based on the survival of HCL through change. By telling the story of how he had to change the company for survival he introduces his concept of 'employees first, customers second'. Branson (2009) tells us how he used the 'survival mode' to fight his different companies into different markets. It is part of his business strategy. Every small Virgin start-up will try to challenge existing players and establish its way through fighting. Schultz's story takes place at the moment when he returns as CEO at Starbucks to save it. He uses the story to illustrate and share his vision upon how to run a business. The same goes for the Zappos' CEO Hsieh (2010) who uses the tale of survival to introduce his happiness philosophy.

Telling the tale of survival makes the success stories extraordinary. From going almost bankrupt to the status of world-leading company makes the story almost mythical (Kiesser, 1997). This creates the image of outstanding performances. This makes the books a sort of legend. It creates the feeling that anything can become possible and that you could also achieve such extraordinary performances provided that you use the right method. It is the tale of David against Goliath. This will create sympathy and maybe identification with the reader. It also gives the feeling that how small you are right now does not really matter. You can still make it to the legendary status of a global company, as long as you apply the right tools. The story of survival also makes the reading more interesting and dynamic. There is an interesting line of thought to follow besides the techniques and ideas about the businesses being told. A small company which follows a straight line of growth, becomes bigger, grows more and then goes to top might not be that interesting. Following the tale of the hard way, growing, fighting, going down and fighting back again is much more interesting to read and provides a certain tale that can help to establish certain ideas of the author. The struggle of the own company can then be used as an example to illustrate the survival.

4.5 Revolutionizing against conventional management

The authors portray their own ideas as new and revolutionary. They often create an image of the rest of the existing knowledge and theories about management as 'old'. They portray this as 'conventional' or 'traditional' management. They create an image and distance themselves to portray their own ideas and themselves as revolutionary. This portraying is used throughout all the books and even in the title of Nayar's book (2010) *Employees First, Customers Second: Turning conventional management upside down.*

The question which should be raised here is what Nayar (2010) and other authors mean by conventional management. Management has known many fashions over history and practice contains different philosophies across different companies. One could easily claim that there no such a thing as conventional management. It is neither defined nor explained what conventional management actually is. The author makes a large generalization of ‘conventional’ management and leaves it completely empty and ambiguous. The reader will instead probably replace this ambiguity with his own views and thoughts of conventional management. As mentioned in the literature review, Kiesser (1997) states that being ambiguous is thereby very useful for an author. It means that his book becomes applicable to almost every situation. This is something that Benders and van Veen (2001) mean could increase sales of the book since different buyers recognize their own situation.

By using words such as ‘conventional’ and ‘traditional’ for philosophies that are not in line with their own ideas, the authors frame the ‘conventional’ as outdated. This gives a rather negative image to other ideas, something they use to portray their own ideas very optimistic and revolutionary. Through this portrayal they try to establish themselves as gurus.

> “The conventional wisdom, of course, says that companies must always put their customer first. In any services business, however, the true value is created in the interface between the customer and the employee. So by putting employees first, you can bring about fundamental change in the way a company creates and delivers unique value for its customers and differentiate itself from competitors.” (Nayar, 2010: 9)

In this quote Nayar (2010) portrays his idea as new and revolutionary. It is the key to its remarkable success. Although later on he gives part of it credit to C.K. Prahalad which he describes as the well-known author and management guru by acknowledging he took inspiration from his book. Although by doing so he also links himself up to an established name which gives his own work credibility in return, which is in line with our earlier statements on using famous names in this way. C.K Prahalad even writes the foreword and recommends to book as the following.

> “A narrative of organizational transformation and a practical guide for managers who wish to achieve similar results, as well as a story of the personal transformation of a CEO.” (C.K. Prahalad in Nayar, 2010: viii)

The name of C.K. Prahalad is then linked up to the University of Michigan. C.K. Prahalad is apparently also a distinguished university professor. The approval of C.K. Prahalad is used to establish Nayar’s his credibility. As we have discussed in the literature review (Kiesser, 1997) the university professor’s authority provides legitimacy.

Hsieh also portrays his ideas as revolutionary. He portrays his company as leading to happiness and satisfaction to both employees and customers instead of focusing on short-term profits. They portray this as something revolutionary and as something that would never have been attempted in a ‘traditional’ business. This is visible in the phase of the book in which Hsieh and his partner talks about how they want to build their Zappos brand. They decide that they want the Zappos brand to be about the very best customer service:

> “Customer service had always been important at Zappos, but making it the focus of our brand would be a bold move, especially for an online company.” (Hsieh, 2010: 140)

One could ask if this move if really so “bold” as it is portrayed by Hsieh. He also makes use of portraying other ideas as ‘old’ and outdated. Other retailers are for example described as just focusing on profit and squeezing their vendors in order to expand their margins:

> “‘Sounds good’, Fred said. ‘You know, we could apply the whole service mentality to our vendors as well. That’s never really been done before in the industry. We already treat our vendors well, but we can build our reputation within the vendor community even more by really treating our vendors as true partners in the business. Most vendors aren’t happy dealing with most retailers because the retailers, especially the department stores, usually try to squeeze every last dollar out of them. We could be the first major retailer that doesn’t try to do that.’” (Hsieh, 2010: 140)

By claiming that this has never been done before in their industry, their actions are portrayed as revolutionary. Hsieh further claims that most retailers do not treat their vendors very well. The other retailers are portrayed as ‘old’ in contrast to Zappos.

Delivering Happiness (2010) is full of stories how they applied this happiness philosophy. He for example claims his revolution by having a ‘unique’ spot just fifteen minutes away from the UPS world hub and having their warehouse always open. Hsieh writes that this is very expensive, something the ‘conventional’ retailer would never no because it is not the most efficient way to run a warehouse. However by doing this, they are able to provide the customers with fast delivery and by doing so they create happiness for them. He also claims that they do not measure call times at the customer department and mentions that their longest phone call was almost six hours long. Hsieh refers to these actions as the ‘wow’ experience. He also mentions that their customer support employees do not use scripts because they trust their employees to use their best judgement when dealing with the customer. Mentioning these specific things is likely to create sympathy with the reader since the reader probably has some experience with customer service in their own lives. This makes it easier to relate their own experiences to Zappos and makes it more likely that the reader will be impressed by those statements. They may even be tempted to try it themselves, which of course also makes the book good advertisement for Zappos. The philosophy of Zappos is a very positive one and therefore easy to buy.

This revolution theme is something that fits in very well with how Richard Branson portrays himself. His portrayal his revolutionizing ideas are also directly connected to his business. He tells for example the story how they launched the biggest record store in the world in Dublin. “The press thought we were mad” (Branson, 2009: 117). Later on Branson tells more stories of his revolutionizing business, the best example is the launch of his commercial space project.

Schultz and Gordon (2011) also portray the revolutionary theme. However in this case it is more related to the coffee which they produce and the stores and experience of Starbucks. The following quote is about their new coffee blend:

> “The taste was significantly different from anything Starbucks had ever brought to market. “It’s smooth, like butter”, I remarked. Really balanced. Somewhat acidic and bright. Drinkable. Easy.” While the flavour was a bit light for my personal preference, I thought it was fantastic because of what the coffee represented: Starbucks’ renewed effort to play to win as opposed to playing not to lose.” (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 80)

Schultz and Gordon (2011) portray their use of coffee as revolutionary throughout the entire book. Of course this is logical since coffee is Starbucks’s key product. It is then used to give a broader perspective on how to revolutionize business. It is then connects it to life experiences. A story about Schultz’s youth in the poor projects of Brooklyn is for example used. It is about him beating bigger and stronger boys and how that ‘taste of glory’ felt. He then takes a sip of the new introduced coffee and describes that he felt exactly the same and felt the potential for

Starbucks to win again. Further on he also claims that Starbucks revolutionized the world of coffee.

The author uses their actions to describe themselves as extraordinary and their ideas as new and revolutionary. Their stories illustrate that the authors actions can lead to magnificent results. Although the ideas in themselves might not be so revolutionary, this portrayal sparks the interest of the reader. Besides this the authors also establish themselves as revolutionary leaders and as gurus.

4.6 Being guided by emotions

> "Work should be personal. For all of us. Not just for the artist and the entrepreneur. Work should have meaning for the accountant, the construction worker, the technologist, the manager, and the clerk." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011:14)

A reoccurring portrayal in the autobiographies is about how emotional the authors are. They do not only talk about their business in an emotional way but also seem to see emotions quite important when it comes to doing business. Our assumption is that conventional business theories and workplaces tell us that we should leave emotions at home; our data does however seem to represent another voice, namely that this conventional wisdom is outdated and we should include emotions in our work.

> "Engage your emotions at work. Your instincts and emotions are there to help you. They are there to make things easier." (Branson, 2009: 166)

> "Throughout my career, I have been puzzled by the way that businesspeople separate themselves into two parts. Each morning, we say good-bye to our families, come to work, hang our coats on a hook, and in that comfortable coat we wore from home, we leave behind all our emotions, subjectivity, personality and connections to family life. We don our stiff white collars and put our heads down and go to work. We abide by the system and practices and unwritten rules of the workplace: Don't trust your manager. Don't get too emotional about anything. Remember, it's not personal, it's only business. These are outdated thoughts left over from the early years of industrial age, when jobs were largely mechanical and business organizations felt they had to protect themselves through command and control methods." (Nayar, 2010: 64-65)

> "When we love something, emotion often drives our actions. This is the gift and the challenge entrepreneurs face every day. The companies we dream of and build from

> scratch are part of us and intensely personal. They are our families. Our lives." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 9).

There is an example of Schultz's (Schulz and Gordon, 2011: 55) emotional connection to Starbucks in the introduction of *Onwards* where it is described how he still has the key to the door of the very first Starbucks shop. He states that it might not be something expected for the CEO to carry around, but he kept it in his pocket as a reminder of the responsibility and heritage he carries. However by telling this he also portrays his emotional relationship with the company.

The authors all advocate that emotions are the key to being successful both in life and work. They also describe their own relationship to work as quite emotional. This is also a way of portraying their passion for entrepreneurship.

> "We certainly didn't want to sell the company and move on to something else. To us Zappos wasn't just a job or something to build our careers. It was a calling. We had too much of an emotional investment in the company to just give up." (Hsieh, 2010: 240)

> "The blend of craftsmanship and human connection, combined with the warm aroma and energizing flavours of fresh coffee, struck and emotional chord." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 10)

> "It was an emotional experience for everyone, including me." (Nayar, 2010: 63) [About a blueprint meeting].

We found that having emotions at work does not seem to be a restriction anymore. In fact, it seems to be preferred, which could indicate a potential management fashion. In older times having emotions at work was certainly not seen as strength. As discussed in the literature review, management was mainly focused on being rational and progressive. Management fashions also needed to appear that way. One could however say that by using emotions at work a different type of rationality is touched as it is no longer seen rational to leave personal feelings at home. The fashion assumes that by using emotions one can increase one's personal strength and use that in a business environment. Not using your emotions is portrayed as not using your intuition. Emotions can in this case help us to sense things we otherwise would not understand. It is portrayed as something positive which can help you reach your goals in business and in life. Using and being aware of your emotions is presented as the new rationality.

In this new potential fashion the employee seems to be more involved in work. There is no longer a strict distinction between private life, personal emotions and life and work. This makes the employee more engaged at work. The manager in the context of this new fashion wants people to engage more in work and invests much more in the emotional relationship with work. The fashion contributes to the idea that investing with the relationship of the employee will make the employee want to invest more into his work as well. This will make the employee strive for success for both the company and for themselves. Connecting work with personal life will make the employee want to perform better since they now have a much stronger emotional relationship with their work and the company that employ them.

The value of this fashion is throughout the books also shared with the reader. As discussed in the literature review the guru focuses on making emotional connections with the readers as individuals (Clark and Salaman, 1996). Through the use of emotion the guru wants to engage the reader and hopes to influence the audience's attitudes and beliefs. The guru plays with emotional connection so that it links up with the readers' life. These actions can also be transferred to the authors. Through the use of emotions the author does not only convey a story but also portrays himself as a character. It is through this emotional connection that the reader might identify himself with the author.

4.7 Being an entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship is another theme that can be seen in all books. All the authors portray themselves as entrepreneurs. Several of the authors are founders of their companies and are thus considered entrepreneurs. But they are not only entrepreneurs, they are also CEOs of very large companies. Being a CEO is often not paid too much attention to and it seems like the authors prefer to portray themselves as innovative entrepreneurs. Hsieh (2010) is starts his book by telling tales of his youth in when he was a young entrepreneur. He tells stories of the different ventures he used to have as a child, from a worm farm to selling Christmas cards and having his own button-making enterprise. Being a CEO, leader of the enterprise which is steering the conglomerate, is not something which is represented in the book, although all companies being discussed make large turnovers and belong to the larger companies.

The CEOs do not have the image of the big corporate leader who is only providing capital, does financial analysis and makes major strategic decisions. Instead, they portray themselves as entrepreneurs, which seem to be more or less the opposite of the traditional view of a CEO. The image of the entrepreneur is focused upon positive aspects such as ideas, innovations, creations rather than words such as finance, capital etc. The quotes below illustrate this attitude:

> "These groups tend to sit back and simply provide capital. That's not the Virgin way of doing things. We like to get our hands dirty." (Branson, 2009: 83)

> "Virgin considers everyone involved, regardless of their capitalisation, as an entrepreneur." (Branson, 2009: 236)

> "But we wanted to run our own business and be in control of our own destiny. This wasn't about money, it was about not being bored." (Hsieh, 2010: 44)

> "I prefer to visit stores in person rather than read spread sheets." (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 31)

These are just some quotes of a larger theme that can definitely be found throughout all the books. We interpret being portrayed as an entrepreneur as something that will create positive connections to the reader. The authors give the impression that they would rather be seen as the entrepreneur than the manager. The authors might be afraid that the reader associates themes like managers or boss as something negative, which might be influenced by personal work experience of the reader. The writer might think that the reader is more likely to identify himself with entrepreneurship than management.

4.8 Believing in friendship

Friendship is a repeated portrayal visible in the books, especially in *Business Stripped Bare* (2009) and *Delivering Happiness* (2010). In these books, friendship is portrayed as a key success factor in business. This goes further than just being colleagues. Neither Branson nor Hsieh makes the distinction between friends from work and friends in private life and have come to the conclusion that it is far more productive to develop friendships rather than a specific business network. This is exemplified through the following quotes:

> "So put people together in a way that will have them bouncing ideas off each other, befriending each other, and taking care of each other, and suddenly they are coming to you, not with gripes and problems but with solutions and great ideas" (Branson, 2009: 20).

> “So my advice is to stop trying to “network” in the traditional business sense, and instead just try to build up the number and depth of your friendships, where the friendship itself is its own reward. The more diverse your set of friendships are, the more likely you’ll derive both personal and business benefits from your friendships later down the road.” (Hsieh, 2010:96).

As Hsieh so eloquently puts it, is that people should not only be considered as assets for potential business deals in the future. It is easier to succeed in business if one also manages to be successful privately. An example of this is how Hsieh bought several apartments so that his colleagues and friends could work and live in close proximity to each other.

> “Without realizing it, we‘d created and developed our own tribe, and the most common meeting point became the loft that I lived in” (Hsieh, 2010: 88).

After buying in and moving into the apartments he bought also the so called 810 loft next door. This place became their own private nightclub and a sort of meeting place for the so called “tribe”. Later on when business is slowing down Hsieh even moves the corporate offices to these apartments. There seems to be a very close link between private and working spheres.

> “I told other ex-LinkExchangers about the space. I thought back to my college years, when there was a core group of us who always hung out together. We could create our own adult version of a college dorm and build or own community”. (Hsieh, 2010: 66)

The same theme of friendship is also portrayed in *Business Stripped Bare* (2009). Branson considers friendship to play an important role in business and describes how he hosts an annual party for all Virgin employees in his own house. He writes how he personally shook every hand there, which left him with a sore hand by the end of the day. Greeting employees as friends seems to be important also in this case:

> “In my view a boss who is willing to party with all of their people – and pay attention to their personal concerns – has the makings of a great leader. They will earn their colleagues’ loyalty and trust, for a start. But just as important, they will make friends.” (Branson, 2009: 29)

4.9 Having alter egos

As discussed in the literature review, Schoenberger (2001) states that sometimes an alter ego is used to portray the author in management autobiographies. This is something that showed in the examined autobiographies. Although all authors are CEOs of large established companies they tend to refer to themselves as small entrepreneurs (See 4.7). This is of course to tell the story of their lives and how they build up their company to what it is now, but it is also used to create an alter ego. It opens the possibility of describing themselves in the process from underdog to top CEO. In accordance with Kiesser's view (1997), it also opens the possibility to create a legendary mythical story. The use of an alter ego makes it easier for the reader to relate to the author. The reader might not identify with the CEO who runs a large corporation but identifies easier with the entrepreneur alter ego.

At the start of his book, Nayar (2010) presents himself as a fresh graduate who joined HCL because he wanted to join a small company so that he could help it grow. At a smaller company he would be able to have a larger impact on its results than he would in a larger organization. He portrays the larger organization as something that he at first finds negative, although HCL is in its current state a very large company. However, by telling this story he portrays HCL as a small company again, which gives HCL and him an alter ego. Besides this he also portrays himself as the underdog.

> "After only three weeks of training, however I was approached by a senior executive who took me aside and told me that I probably did not have a future with HCL." (Nayar, 2010: 32)

By portraying himself as the fresh graduate who was about to get fired he presents the underdog position. This portrait makes it very unlikely that he will become the CEO later on. However, one month later Nayar makes it to business manager in Mumbai. Later he of course becomes the CEO and in the end HCL is one of the largest IT firms in the world. Other ways of portraying underdog positions are for example stating that they did not go to university (Branson, 2009) or grew up in poor areas (Schultz and Gordon, 2011).

As mentioned earlier Kiesser (1997) states that by starting from the position from underdog the story becomes a legend with mythical characteristics. This opens the possibility of describing how the author goes though the process from being an underdog to becoming a top CEO. This might create some admiration and sympathy with the reader. In accordance with

Schoenberger (2001) and Philips and Rippin (2010) we believe that this also helps to create a god-like status later on. This is something that we will be discussing in depth in chapter 5.

Another alter ego which his being used is the one of youth. Hsieh for example portrays himself as a small child growing up, having all kind of different companies and being a young entrepreneur. This does not only help Hsieh (2010) to portray himself as an entrepreneur, but also to make the reader identify with him. Many readers have probably had a similar youth experience such as having a lemonade stand. Having the reader understand what entrepreneurship is will help them to understand the more complex entrepreneurship portrayed later on in the book. The audience interested in those entrepreneurial characteristics are those who are more likely to be entrepreneurs or looking for entrepreneurial ideas. Entrepreneurship is a visible fashion here.

4.10 A passionate man who doesn’t exercise power?

Passion is a returning theme across the books. All entrepreneurs describe themselves as incredibly passionate men and describe their work with a lot of passion and enthusiasm. There seems to be a very strong emotional relationship between the CEO and their companies. They speak lovingly about their company and work as a parent would speak about their child.

However, there is almost exclusively talk about emotions. There seems to be missing data about the power the CEOs have in their companies. There seems to be no distinction between corporate ownership and emotional attachment. Schultz for example returns as CEO because he feels emotionally responsible:

> “I have always loved this company. Love is why I had to come back CEO and why I feel so personally responsible for its failure and its success.” (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 203)

Schultz does however not describe what power he still had as a founder and former CEO. The book is rather focused on his emotional relationship with Starbucks. When he decided to take over the steering wheel again he has to inform Jim who at the time held his position. He describes this by writing the following:

> “One of my biggest concerns was how and when to inform Jim Donald. I dreaded the prospect of telling Jim. He is a good person and I did not question his love for Starbucks.” (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 44)

How Schultz was actually able to take over again as a CEO is not portrayed at all. It is only the passion and love for the company that is described. Schultz writes that he did not question Jim his love and passion for Starbucks but clearly he questioned Jim is power to save Starbucks. Schultz had a reason to come back as a CEO. Power and love is here wrapped up in each other.

The other authors also portray a lot of passion about their work. They do not speak about power struggles within the company, something which is we believe is quite common in many companies. For example when Hsieh (2010) speaks about the selling of his company he portrays it with rather emotional terms than factual legal or financial terms. When Zappos is in the end sold to Amazon, Hsieh portrays this as a marriage. In this way his emotional ownership of the company keeps intact.

> "Initially, Amazon wanted to literally buy Zappos using cash because that's how they had done most of their previous acquisitions. That didn't sit well with Alfred, Fred or myself. In our minds, that felt too much like we were selling the company. Selling our company wasn't our goal. We wanted to continue building the Zappos brand, business and culture. And we wanted to continue to feel like owners of the company. So we pushed hard for an all-stock transaction, meaning that Zappos shareholders would simply trade in their stock in exchange for Amazon shares. In our minds this way much more in the spirit of the marriage then we were envisioning, analogous to when married couples get a joint bank account." (Hsieh, 2010: 243).

He wrote the following memo to his employees:

> "Over the next few days you will probably read headlines that say 'Amazon.com acquires Zappos' or 'Zappos sells to Amazon'. While those headlines are technically correct, they don't really properly convey the spirit of the transaction. (I personally would prefer the headline 'Zappos and Amazon sitting in a tree….'" (Hsieh, 2010:245)

The question remains why writers use the words passion and love so much. They obviously want to portray themselves as passionate, engaged entrepreneurs. This theme is more likely to be seen as positive aspects than power. Words like power, passion and love are all quite ambiguous. By that ambiguity it might try to hide that data is missing and no corporate ownership is presented.

4.11 Relying on intuition

All authors are portrayed as having a strong sense of intuition, a sort of gut instinct. They seem to have a very strong feeling to tell them what is right or wrong, which decision to make or which path to choose. It is portrayed as some sort of sixth sense here.

> “Yet when it comes to hiring, I have antennae about people’s characters, a sixth sense that I often follow even if my choices raise other’s eyebrows.“ (Schultz and Gordon, 2011: 173)

> “I haven’t peddled any theories, because I don’t follow any. Instead, I keep my eyes open.” (Branson, 2009: xiii)

With every decision that needed to be taken in the book they portray this intuition. This is often portrayed by the use of the words “I knew it”, “I knew we had to …”, “I realized that we had to...” or “I saw that we needed to ….”. The use of these sentences is found repeatedly across the books;

> “Was this the way to build the competitive advantage we so desperately needed? I knew the answer was yes.” (Nayar, 2010: 41)

Hsieh opens his book with a blank page with a quote from the movie ‘The Matrix’. This quote has a strong sense of intuition. It is a message that Hsieh wants to give to the reader before starting with any word in the book.

> “There’s a difference between knowing the path and walking the path.”
>
> - *Morpheus, The Matrix* (Hsieh, 2010: blank)

At certain points the authors seem exactly to know what to do. Their senses tell them so. They are portrayed to have very strong gut instinct that they all rely on. It almost seems unnatural here. Did they really know what to do? This portrays a strong image of self-confidence. However, they also portray their insecurities:

> “I obviously did not have all the answers myself. I didn’t even know all the questions to ask. Nor was I familiar with the specific issues in every one of our businesses or country operations.” (Nayar 2010: 48)

By stating these words and portraying themselves with such an intuition they portray themselves as quite powerful. The average reader might not have such powerful qualities. The author therefore also describes themselves sometimes as insecure and not sure which decision he needs to take. By portraying these insecurities they portray a more human side of themselves. The reader is more likely to identify with this more human side. The probably have experienced these insecurities themselves and therefore unconsciously or consciously link up these events to the story of the author.

There seems to be a continuous interplay between those two sides. Of course every human feels insecure sometimes and it is therefore not more than logical that these insecurities are portrayed. By stating their intuitions the author portrays themselves as strong leaders. This intuition might impress the reader and is therefore more willing to acknowledge their story. It is the basic function of a leader to select priorities, make decisions and take actions. Intuition can be an easy way to portray themselves as good leaders in this context. Their appearance becomes wise because they know what to do. Having a strong intuition is portrayed as a strong characteristic of a leader, not a skill that can be easily achieved. The author is therefore portrayed as special, not everybody has such a good intuition.

> "I am not good at theory. Almost everything I've learned, I‘ve learned by doing." (Branson, 2009: 16).

4.12 Summary

The analysis is split into two parts. The first talks about more technical aspects of the examined literature. Here we establish that the books are most probably aimed at a western audience due to the cultural references that are used. They are also aimed at a broader audience than merely management practitioners, which can be seen through the informal language that is used. In order to involve the reader, all authors make use of storytelling and also gives advise by speaking directly to the reader. Lastly we also discussed how the authors try to establish credibility. Several techniques are used to do this and often in combination. All authors state the fantastic results that they have achieved, but some also try to link themselves to celebrities and famous brands. They also try to make themselves relatable by showing that they are also affected by the same current events as the average person.

Part two of the analysis is where we start to answer our research question on how the authors portray themselves in their autobiographies. Each theme in this section stands for a different portrayal of the authors. In our study we have found men who are highly committed to their companies and their employees. We find that the authors all portray themselves as entrepreneurs who listen to their intuition and go for it. They all face struggles, but survive because they are not afraid to break the rules of so called conventional management. They are very passionate, but yet the power that they must have is not portrayed at all. Focus is instead on emotional relationships. Lastly we have also seen a duality in the way the authors portray themselves. The authors actually have different personas that they portray, which allow them to connect with the reader in different ways. This is something that will be explored further in the discussion.

5 Discussion

In the analysis we found several themes that span across all four autobiographies in our study. We have investigated how the authors portray themselves towards their audiences and in relation to their organisations and employees. During the analysis we have found several themes in the books. We will first shortly go over them once again before introducing the general trend that we have found.

We started by researching their audiences, the language the authors use and how they establish credibility. We found several other similarities related to portraying a survival story, a revolution against the conventional management, the use of emotions, entrepreneurship and friendship. We also found that the authors use alter egos and that there is a strong portrayal of their passion and intuition. We will then continue with by discussing how all these themes relate to each other and why they are used. What does the author want to portray by using these themes? We will also discuss what we can learn from the style of these autobiographies.

We started this research with the assumption that all four authors focus on the general public and are not limited to just managers. We believe that our findings on language and audience have confirmed this. The audience of the books is therefore very broad. Anybody interested in these books belongs to the audience. The books are written in an informal language which is easy to read and follow. This provides high accessibility to the books. They are thereby attractive to read as they are not only easy to read, but also provide excitement through storytelling. These findings are in full agreement with the ninth characteristic of Kiesser (1997) who state that these types of books are usually easy to read and follow and are written in a lively and compelling way.

All these techniques contribute to the sales figures of these autobiographies. Simple language, a broad public and an exciting story greatly increases the potential market than if they were like other management books. One could question whether these books are written to share knowledge or to sell as many books as possible. These books provide a very positive view of the authors name and their company. It is very good advertisement. Our goal of this thesis is of course not to judge the author upon this, but it is still something worth noting as it probably has affected the style of writing to a certain degree.

We decided to investigate how the authors establish their credibility towards their readers. It is vital that they can show the reader that they are relevant and worth listening to. We have found that they do this through different techniques. As shown in the analysis all the authors start their books by establishing their own accomplishments and their name. In order to do so they link themselves with their results, current events and already established names of other brands and celebrities. Through these methods, the authors establish themselves as something out of the ordinary and as people who achieve extraordinary results. They show confidence and conviction in their methods, which is important when trying to convince the reader that they are reasonable advisors. They also show that their processes are relevant in relation to current world events in agreement with the findings of Kiesser (1997). An example of this is that all the authors mention the recession that started in 2008 as it has affected millions of people all over the world. As mentioned in the literature review Benders and van Veen (2001) state that they do this to feel real for managers. We agree upon this argument and feel the authors use this technique in order to increase the reader's identification with the story. By doing so, they show that they went through the same events and reacted in similar ways as the reader.

When they have caught the reader's attention, the author can start to explain their ideas about business and how they have become so successful. Their ideas are portrayed as new, special and revolutionary. Other business views that are not in line with the authors' are often portrayed as old and outdated. This makes the reader think that the author is bringing a new idea to the world. This new idea is of course always portrayed in a very positive light and as key to the success of the authors' story. These ideas are however often ambiguous, which means that they can be applied to almost every business situation. This is in line with the findings of Benders and van Veen (2001) who claim that management fashions must be simple and ambiguous in order for readers to recognize their own situation the story. Their research did however not go into detail how this was done.

By introducing their key ideas about doing business, the authors might be able to introduce a new management fashion. They try to establish themselves as the inventor of an idea and as a management guru. Their story is built upon the idea that if you (the reader) follow their advice and concept you should be able to achieve similar success in your own business.

A couple of alter egos are used in the books. Childhood is one example that is used by several of the authors. Everybody has been young and most of us have a romantic memory of youth.

The reader is therefore to relate to these stories and might identify himself with the author. By doing so, the reader is also aided in understanding author's the background and why certain decisions were made.

As mentioned earlier the authors tell tales throughout across their autobiographies. Not only does this make the book attractive to read, but also helps in portraying the author as a hero, which is Huczynski's third type of guru (1993). An overall tale across all of the books is the tale of the survival. As explained in the analysis, all books tell a story in which the company has to fight for their existence. The authors use this tale to illustrate how they saved the company, which enables them to convey their story in a convincing way.

The authors sometimes describe themselves as the underdog, a persona that is unlikely to win and competes against players under better conditions. The author is portrayed as the winner of a difficult struggle. This resembles the story of David against Goliath, where David against all odds defeats the giant. By winning in the end their story becomes almost mythical. The author thereby convinces the reader that almost anything is possible and that no matter how bad your run might be now or how small you are, it is possible to change your circumstances. By telling their stories in this way the authors manage to portray themselves as extraordinary and extremely successful. This is in line with Kiesser's perspective (1997) that claims that management fashions can look almost mythical.

The use of alter egos in management autobiographies is something that has been pointed out in before in the studies by Schoenberger (2001) and Philips and Rippin (2010). Their investigations of this trend is however very limited and they mainly focus on the alter ego of the quasi-religious reader. In this study we have shown that the use of alter egos is much more important and consists of more than just the quasi-religious reader. The use of alter egos is not just a characteristic but found to be a prominent feature in the genre of management autobiographies. The author portrays himself in a continuous interplay between the extraordinary and the ordinary. The use of alter egos makes a great contribution to this. We will come back to this aspect later.

The authors have a strong focus on emotions throughout the books. They portray themselves as emotional and passionate men, something which several researchers have pointed out earlier. Schoenberger (2001) for example stated that it is extraordinary to see how these emotions are played out in such an unconstrained way. They did however not point out how and why these emotions are portrayed. The author portrays himself as emotional to appear more human. In addition to this the author portrays that they believe that emotions are key to their success. This seems to be a fashion in business today, where the employer cares about their employees and their wellbeing. However, these statements also contribute strongly to portraying the author as having high intrinsic values. This is in line in Kiesser's third trait of management fashions (1997). We limit our research to the portrayal of the author and have therefore not focused on researching new management fashions. Further research will have to establish if this is really a potential management fashion or is just used to give portrayal to the author.

By caring about the employee, he or she will in return care more about their work and thereby perform better. This idea is also found in the returning theme of friendship. The authors seem to consider their colleagues to be their friends and as an important part of their success. This also helps to establish the author in these books. By portraying themselves as emotional and friendly the authors become more human. They become a friend of the reader and somebody that they can identify with. The author becomes like them, a man with emotions, who knows the pain of loss and the glorious feeling of success. Just like everybody else.

A similar sort of same idea is found throughout the books by the using the idea of entrepreneurship. All the authors consider themselves to be entrepreneurs. This is something that is portrayed in a very positive way, especially in comparison to words such as manager and CEO. The word entrepreneur is linked to creativity and excitement and therefore seems to be preferred. One could ask why, and the most obvious answer is that the reader is more likely to identify with these positive terms. The reader might consider themselves as entrepreneurs or identify with some of the characteristics associated with this persona. They also might simply admire them. The CEO identity is probably more difficult to relate to as many readers do not have any experience of this. The reader will not identify themselves with CEOs as the majority of them are probably are not in that position; they do not know them and will probably never become one. The image of the successful entrepreneur therefore fits better and is applicable on a smaller scale.

An important missing theme is the one of power relations. As pointed out by Schoenberger (2001), love and power are often wrapped into each other. He however does not explain why. We believe the author seems to be more interested in showing the emotional and passionate side of him and his business. The reader might find the power side cold and hard, which the author might not want to be identified with. They rather portray themselves as passionate men with a strong emotional relationship to their company. Their business is thereby something larger than just business and becomes more of a life story.

A last topic which was found in the books is a very strong sense of intuition. All the authors are portrayed as having a special ability that tells them what to do. Clark and Salaman (1998) for example pointed out in research about gurus that they appear very convincing but have not found and named this as intuition in management autobiographies. It is this strong instinct that leads the author's way to success. This road is however interspersed with insecurities. On one hand the author displays great confidence and shows how he makes incredible things happen. On the other hand he shares that he also has insecurities, just like any other person and that sometimes he also makes mistakes. It is a continuous interplay between these two alter egos. It shows the extraordinary sides, but also the human side that the reader can relate to.

All themes contribute in this interplay. The authors all portray themselves as extraordinary men, who have accomplished remarkable results through the use of revolutionary ideas. They portray themselves as winners of the story, men with god-like status but also with a god-like instinct. They however also portray themselves as emotional and passionate entrepreneurs, something that readers can identify with. The author is a friend, a human, a young boy and a man with insecurities. He is just like the rest of us. Throughout his life's story he shares his ideas about business and his tale of success. The story is however bigger than just business, the author is telling and teaching us something about life itself.

Why do the authors portray themselves in this way? They all authors portray themselves as god-like while at the same time being the ordinary person, just like you or I. By doing so the authors stays relatable to the everyday man. However, by playing their role they become god-like as the successful, the credible man, the revolutionary, and the guru and of course the winner. By combining these roles and continuously using this interplay, they can stay relevant to the reader and appear god-like to sell their story and inspire their readers.

> "The fate of the corporation is understood through the life of the man who ran it." (Schoenberger, 2001: 277)

This continuous interplay between the exceptional god-like and ordinary familiar man seems to be the major finding throughout all autobiographies. Schoenberger (2001) and Philips and Rippin (2010) have made limited claims before about the appearance of a god-like or quasi-religious leader. They only named the appearance of the god-like as a characteristic of the books. We have however found that all the described portrayals, themes and techniques contribute to this continuous interplay between the exceptional and the familiar. On one hand the author is the god-like, the exceptional man which achieved extraordinary success. At the same time he is also just like anybody else and tries to make the reader relate to him. These findings must be seen as new and as contribution the existing research literature.

It is this continuous interplay which makes the autobiographies interesting. On the one hand the author portrays himself as the exceptional god-like man who we are all supposed to admire, but on the other hand he portrays himself as just like us. To do this the author makes use of different techniques and portrayals. First of all, the author establishes his credibility by linking himself up with remarkable results, in most cases of his company. He then tells a story about the survival of his company and how he often personally saved it. This will make the author become a legend, which is line with the findings of Kiesser (1997). It also contributes in the portrayal of the author as god-like. The author portrays his ideas as new and as if he is revolutionizing against conventional management. This is presented as God is bringing his words. He is the one with the right ideas, all other ideas are portrayed as old and outdated. He however also portrays himself as a very human man in order to let the reader identify with him. He does this by having different alter egos but also by telling stories of experiences that the reader might have shared, such as those of childhood. The author also includes the use of emotions here, not only to portray himself as emotional but also as a man who believes in emotions. The same goes for believing in friendship. This shows that the author has highly intrinsic values. This fits perfect within the god-paradigm, where God is also linked to high intrinsic values and high morality. The author is thereby linked to positive attributes.

The same positive linking can be found in the finding that the author rather portrays himself as the entrepreneur instead of the CEO. By doing so he also finds more identification with the reader since the reader might be more likely to identify with the entrepreneur than the CEO. The entrepreneur is the good guy here and is portrayed as a very passionate man with a lot of love for this company and his work. It is the passion here which speaks to the reader and portrays the character of the author.

Their relationship with power is as discussed not shown here. Why does the author avoid the portraying of power? Is the author perhaps afraid that the reader will associate it with the darker side of business? All authors seem to prefer not to show power relationships and rather show passionate and emotional side. A reader might not identify himself with large amounts of power, but would rather like to see the passionate man. After all, these books are meant to inspire the reader. The portrayal of passion and love is therefore more likely to inspire than the portrayal of power struggles and hard business. This also helps to portray the author in a positive light, just like God is he there to inspire.

The portrayal of a very strong sense of intuition seems to guide the author in his life and his business. The author here portrays a gut instinct that is so strong that it can be seen as god instinct. With the portrayal of this intuition the author becomes even more god-like. However as pointed out earlier, the author also has insecurities. It is these insecurities which make the author seem human again and makes the story more realistic. It is also these portrayed insecurities that make the story real and make the reader more likely to identify with the author.

In general it is this interplay which makes these books interesting. It has been pointed out by researchers before that stories need to be convincing (Clark and Salaman, 1998) and that they are linked to extraordinary performances (Kiesser, 1997). It has also been pointed out that they sometimes take the alter ego of God (Schoenberger 2001, Philips and Rippin 2010). The interplay with the human side has however not been pointed out before. Our research has shown that it is this feature that stands out in these autobiographies. By having a continuous interplay between the human and the god-like side, the author is both able to sell his story in a convincing way but also remain familiar to the reader by showing his human side. It is this that makes these books so convincing. The reader is more likely to buy the story from somebody who seems familiar to him and who he can identify with. It is however the extraordinary side of the man which makes the author inspiring. By being both at the same time the author can convince and inspire the reader with his story. The author here uses his stories from his life to keep this interplay alive and the story attractive to read. All the portrayals found in the analysis contribute to this interplay between the god-like and the human. It is this interplay which is the main finding of our studies.

We believe this interplay is the important characteristic of management autobiographies. Our study has however only focused upon four management books published in the last years. As stated there is not too much research done about management autobiographies before. Management autobiographies however influence management practitioners to a great extent. We therefore believe that more research in this area is necessary. We hope our study has contributed to the evolution of this research area and that future research can take ideas of the trends we have found.

6 Conclusions

In the last chapter we intend to answer our research question. In this concise conclusion we will argue for our main conclusion; that all these CEOs portray themselves in continuous interplay between the familiar and the exceptional. We will do this by reflecting over our discussion and analysis.

In this study we have investigated how CEOs portray themselves in their bestselling autobiographies. In conclusion to our work we have found that authors portray themselves as exceptional and god-like men, but also as the everyday man so that they seem familiar to the reader. By doing this they not only become relatable, but also inspirational. In combination with compelling stories and a lot of confidence they engage the reader in their book.

The authors portray themselves as the exceptional men with god-like characteristics. They have strong gut instincts that guide them in the right direction and leads to exceptional results. They are portrayed as committed and passionate men who manage to save their companies from falling into the deep. This can be said to be portrayed as divine intervention. Their ideas are portrayed as revolutionary and something that brings enlightenment to the world. We find that these authors are portrayed as god-like and that the aim is for them to be worshiped. The reader is thereby expected to listen to the author, to be inspired by him and to follow his divine teachings. He has the results to prove it and is now spreading the word.

The other side portrayed by the authors is how they relate to their readers and make themselves someone that the readers can relate to. There are several ways that this has been done. By writing in an informal and accessible language for example, the authors manage to connect to a broad audience. They create engaging stories and communicate on the same level as many readers, which also plays on familiarity. Some authors also do this by trying to find common ground through experiences such as those from their childhood. Others talk about their cultural heritage and make references to popular culture. We also noticed that all the authors connected to current events and in particular the financial recession that started in 2008. With this action the authors make themselves relatable as they show that their individual reactions was just the same as everybody else's. This also emphasizes their portrayal as emotionally engaged and passionate men.

There is an ongoing interplay between these two sides; portraying the author as both god-like and familiar. The author shows this by telling different stories from his life. By relating to different events he can either relate to the reader or relate to the exceptional performances that he has achieved. By communicating in this way he shows the reader that he is just the same as everybody else, which in essence means that anybody could indeed accomplish great things. On the other hand, they also show that they have all done something extraordinary and are therefore special. They however give the reader the impression that if you listen to their ideas you might achieve the same glorious success.

This research has alluded that it is this interplay which must be seen as the main characteristics of these authors. By being both the god-like and the familiar man the author makes the book interesting to read and to study. Previous studies have touched upon that management autobiographies are convincing and persuasive and our studies have confirmed this. It is however the interplay with the human side which portrays the author in an interesting way. This has not been pointed out by researchers before. The human side of the author is portrayed through telling stories of life, showing their insecurities or their emotions and passion and friendship. Having this continuous interplay between the human and the god-like portrayal enables the author to establish himself as god-like but also to be still be relatable to the reader by showing his human side. It is this finding which is the most interesting in our research and contributes the most to the research about management autobiographies.

Our studies are in line with conclusions that have been drawn before, such as the portrayal of a mythical story (Kiesser, 1997), the use of alter egos (Schoenberger, 2001) and the portrayal of a quasi-religious leader (Philips and Rippin, 2010). The interplay between the human and the god-like side is however something new which has not been alluded in previous studies before. We believe that by making this our main argument we contribute the most to existing studies. It is this interplay between the god-like and the familiar man which is the distinguishing feature in the portrayals of these authors. If one would ask us to give a short and final answer to our research question, we would answer by stating that the authors portray themselves as god-like but also just like you.

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