Telos, Chronos, and Hermēneia:

The Causal Role of Metanarrative in Leadership Effectiveness through the Production of Meaning

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In this paper it is argued that there is a relationship between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness that is mediated by personal meaning. This point is argued through an analysis of the relevant literature and by presenting a model that attributes this correlation to metanarrative's capacity to produce meaning through the interpretive frames of Telos (teleological context), Chronos (historical-narrative context), and Hermēneia (interpretive context). To accomplish this the following are provided: (a) an overview of the concepts of meaning, metanarrative, and leadership effectiveness, (b) a set of hypotheses for how these variables are interrelated, (c) a recommendation for how research may be designed to evaluate this model and its associated variables, and (d) recommendations for further study and final considerations.

The topic of leadership effectiveness has often been addressed within the academic journals of social science. McCormick's (2001) evaluation of leadership effectiveness in light of self-efficacy, Chemers, Watson, and May's (2000) in light of dispositional affect, and Sogunro's (1998) in light of personality characteristics of group members illustrate the breadth of interest in leadership effectiveness within the field of leadership studies. However, though leadership effectiveness has been evaluated in light of many variables, it has never been evaluated in light of its relationship to metanarrative. Though several authors (Phillips & Zyglidopoulos, 1999; Kilduff & Mehra, 1997; Thompson, 1992; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) bring a postmodern critique of metanarrative within their respective areas of organizational studies, none of these works have addressed the function of metanarrative on the individual level of the leader or the specific role metanarrative plays in the production of meaning and greater leadership effectiveness.

Due to this gap within the literature, the author presents in this paper a model that represents the causal role that metanarrative serves in leadership effectiveness through the production of meaning. To present this model and argument, the author provides (a) an overview of the concepts of meaning, metanarrative, and leadership effectiveness, (b) a set of hypotheses for how these variables are interrelated, (c) a

recommendation for how research may be designed to evaluate this model and its associated variables, and (d) recommendations for further study and final considerations.

Conceptual Overview
Viktor Frankl (1984), a survivor of imprisonment in a concentration camp during WWII, wrote a book entitled *Man's Search for Meaning*. Within this work, Frankl identified meaning as a central factor enabling people to endure horrendous torture and injustice. Writing of his conceptualization of "the will to meaning" within his system of logotherapy, Frankl states that, "Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a 'secondary rationalization' of instinctual drives" (p. 121). Frankl (1992) also analyzes what he calls purpose-in-life (PIL). Of PIL, Sosik (2000a) writes, "PIL represents a positive attitude toward possessing a future-oriented self-transcendent goal in life. PIL can be described in terms of its depth (strength) and type (content) of meaning associated with the goal" (p. 4).

Founded on Frankl's work, Wong and Fry (1998), in their volume entitled *The Human Quest for Meaning*, explore the area of personal meaning. As the literature on personal meaning has expanded concepts similar to Frankl's "will to meaning" and PIL have found a place in contemporary leadership and organizational literature. Examples of this are (a) Hodson's (2002) engagement of the topic of meaning and satisfaction at work, (b) Howard's (2002) consideration the function of spiritual ideologies in offering meaning and purpose of work, and (c) Sosik's (2000a, 2000b) treatment of personal meaning and leadership.

Sosik (2000a) notes that the leadership literature has identified personal meaning as a source of motivation for both charismatic and non-charismatic leaders. Not only do leaders benefit from personal meaning as a source of motivation, but followers and employees do as well. On this point, Eisenberg and Goodall (2001) write, "Employees want to feel that the work they do is worthwhile, rather than just a way to draw a paycheck," and to see work have, "a transformation of its meaning—from drudgery to a source of personal significance and fulfillment" (p. 18). Regarding follower personal meaning, Sosik (2000a) writes, "followers who experience high levels of personal or collective stress search for leaders who give meaning to their experiences" (p. 4). Additionally, Sosik (2000b) notes that, "numerous theoretical explanations of charismatic leadership highlight the importance of providing meaning to followers" (p. 60). Sosik supports this assertion by pointing to several benefits associated with the presence of personal meaning. These are (a) the promotion of hardiness or persistence in challenging situations (Antonovsky, 1983), (b) the enhancement of group effectiveness (Conyne, 1998), (c) an increase in faith and pro-social values (Wong, 1998a), and (d) the reduction of personal or collective stress (Wong, 1998b).

With the intent of approaching a definition for personal meaning, I note Korotkov's (1998, p.55) definition of meaningfulness as, "the degree to which people's lives make emotional sense and that the demands confronted by them are perceived as being worthy of energy and commitment." Sosik (2000b, p.61) defines personal meaning, "as that which makes one's life most important, coherent and worthwhile." As noted above, Conyne (1998) asserts that personal meaning enhances group effectiveness. If personal meaning possesses the capacity for enhancing group effectiveness (and the author makes the hypothesis that this is true for leadership effectiveness as well), a question may be raised: "How is personal meaning produced in the life of a leader?" Sosik (2000a) argues that self-concept is a source for personal meaning. In the remainder of this paper, the author argues that metanarrative possesses a unique capacity to produce personal meaning, and thus greater leadership effectiveness, in the life of a leader.

The Peril and Promise of Metanarrative
Though the literature associated with metanarrative runs through several disciplines (i.e., education, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, history, literature, gender studies, theology, philosophy, and leadership and organizational studies) the study of metanarrative is largely associated with the dialogue between modernity and postmodernity. Identifying postmodernity as both a perspective and a historical period, Bloland (1995) notes Derrida (1981, 1988; Derrida & Caputo, 1997) and Foucault (1977a, 1977b, 1979) as being associated with postmodernism as a perspective consistent with poststructuralist thought, and Lyotard (1984) and Buadrillard (1983) as associated with postmodernity as a historical period. Consistent with Bloland's observations, Foucault (1979) addresses the postmodern perspective connecting, "the formation of knowledge and the increase of power" (p. 224), as regularly reinforcing one another in a circular process, and Lyotard addresses postmodernity as a historical period, writing that, "our working hypothesis is that the status

of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is know as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is know as the postmodern age" (p. 3). In this work of Lyotard, he is one of the first to use the term "metanarrative" in his defining of "*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarrative" (p. xxiv). Imbedded within the metanarrative dialogue between modernity and postmodernity lies both peril and promise in considering its role in meaning production and leadership effectiveness. This paper now turns to a brief consideration of both.

Peril. Foucault's (1979) above-cited statement on the circularly reinforcing connection between knowledge formation and the increase of power is rooted in Nietzsche's will to power conceptualization. Evidencing this point, Sandage (1998) notes that Foucault and Derrida possessed a particular interest in, "unmasking power agendas that lurk behind authoritative social institutions and interpretations of texts" (p. 67). Citing Foucault's focus on modern institutions such as prisons and hospital's, Sandage identifies Foucault's suggestion, "that modern institutions are shaped by power but disguise the power dynamics behind a humanitarian façade and claims to objective knowledge" (p. 68). It is what Moore (1994) refers to as power wearing a white coat and a professional smile.

It is based on such abuses of knowledge and power that Lyotard (1984) makes such bold assertions as postmodernity being defined as "incredulity toward metanarrative" (p. xxiv). Though some of those who are modernistic might like to quickly dismiss such a critique by labeling this as a postmodern hermeneutic of suspicion that is characterized by unrelenting negativity and skeptical deconstruction, it would be wise to not do so too quickly. On this point Sandage (1998) notes that, "postmodernists are largely accurate in their suspicion of the power dynamics inherent in the human social structures" (p. 66). The author admires Sandage's personal candor in stating, "I do seem to gravitate toward the use of knowledge to gain power over others" (p. 69). Those willing to take the proverbial honest look in the mirror likely could say the very same thing as their own use of knowledge to gain power is exposed and owned.

Erickson (2001) argues that though metanarratives are not necessarily oppressive, "there is…a strong measure of historical truth in this contention" (p. 276). Within the critiques of Foucault (1979), Derrida (1981, 1988), and Lyotard (1984), the peril of metanarrative is identified and exposed. This peril of oppression must not be quickly overlooked, for pre-modern, modern, and postmodern thinkers alike can learn valuable lessons from its examination and evaluation. Nevertheless, as Erickson observes, "The fact that this use is [even] frequently made of metanarrative does not mean that repression must invariably happen" (p. 273). As such, the peril of metanarrative must also be examined alongside its hope and promise.

Promise. Having acknowledged some of the perils of metanarrative, particularly in its use for oppression, this paper argues that metanarrative also holds out great hope and promise especially for the production of meaning and its result of greater leadership effectiveness. Though there have been no studies to aid in answering the question of how metanarrative produces meaning, Schwartz (1998), Domanska (1998), and Sandlos (1998) affirm the role of metanarrative in the production of meaning in the fields of education and history.

Addressing the nature of oral narrative, ethics and environmental education, Sandlos (1998) argues that, "to merely explain…relationships as just another series of facts [such as where food comes from] is to explain them away; to tell them as a story adds…an ordering principle and a structure of meaning that is, at its root, fundamentally moral" (p. 5). Sandlos further notes that in light of the contemporary nature of the information age, which offers few narratives to encode the vast amount of information, people are tending to communicate without context or meaning. On this connection between narrative and meaning, Sandlos writes, "Narrative does not simply represent historical events and empirical facts; it also encodes these facts into a mode or structure of expression that not only conveys information *but also produces meaning*" (p. 6, emphasis added).

Addressing White's (1975) book *Metahistory*, Domanska (1998) refers to it as a "post-postmodern *post mortem* to postmodernism" (p. 173). In a refreshing statement, Domanska notes the tiring nature of living with the ontological insecurity and epistemological chaos of postmodernity by boldly declaring, "I need order. I miss metanarrative" (p. 173). Domanska's providing an honest affirmation of the need for order and a missing of metanarrative address the personal and cultural felt consequences of the idea of life without metanarrative ordering history.

Also approaching metanarrative through the lens of history, Schwartz (1998), through analyzing the memory of Abraham Lincoln in late 20th-century American culture, argues that postmodernity has eroded America's historical metanarrative. Noting the decline of metanarratives as, "the single most distinguishing feature of postmodern culture" (p. 63), Schwartz comments on the societal implications of this in light of the role metanarratives have played in providing frames within which the meaning of the larger societal experience can be grasped. Domanska (1998) and Schwartz, as well as Klein (1995), point toward the danger of a wholesale abandonment of metanarrative. Though postmodernity provides a caution against allowing power to neglect and oppress the histories of those who have been neglected and oppressed, according to Schwartz history without story becomes a history absent of meaning.

Metanarrative and Leadership Effectiveness

According to Yukl (2002) leadership effectiveness is often measured by the consequences of the leader's actions in reference to outcomes. Outcomes such as successful task performance or goal attainment are two categories of outcome measurements identified by Yukl. Conyne (1998) argues that personal meaning enhances group effectiveness, and in so doing establishes a connection between meaning and effectiveness. Schwartz (1998), Domanska (1998), and Sandlos (1998) argue that metanarrative plays a role in the production of meaning, and in so doing establish a connection between metanarrative and meaning. Based on these arguments, the author concludes and makes the hypothesis that meaning serves as a mediating variable between metanarrative (IV) and leadership effectiveness (DV) (see Figure 1).

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│  Metanarrative  │ ───► │   Meaning   │ ───► │    Leadership    │
│                 │      │             │      │   Effectiveness  │
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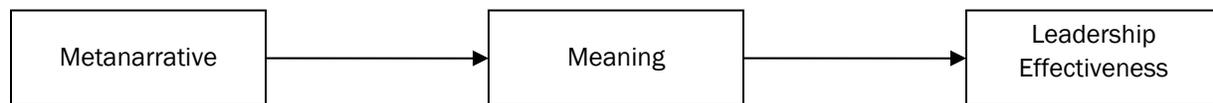
Based on the author's study of the literature on metanarrative, there have been no studies on the correlation between metanarrative and greater leadership effectiveness. Additionally, there have been no studies on the specific role metanarrative plays in the production of meaning. There appears to be gap in the literature of metanarrative studies that could be filled through a study of the role metanarrative plays in greater leadership effectiveness through the production of personal meaning in the life of the leader. The author would make the hypothesis that this would also be true at the levels of small groups, organizations, and societies, though each of these would necessitate its own study or set of studies.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is a non-spurious correlation between leadership effectiveness and the presence of an integrated metanarrative in the life of a leader.

Based on the conceptual overview of metanarrative, meaning, and leadership effectiveness, the author makes the hypothesis that there is a non-spurious relationship between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that a metanarrative must be owned and integrated in the life of a leader for this correlation to be demonstrated.

Hypothesis 2: The correlation between the presence of an integrated metanarrative in the life of a leader and leadership effectiveness is causally explained by metanarrative's capacity for the production of personal meaning

Schwartz (1998), Domanska (1998), and Sandlos (1998) argue that metanarrative possesses a unique capacity to produce meaning. Based on these arguments, the author makes the hypothesis that metanarrative's role in leadership effectiveness is mediated by the presence of personal meaning in the life of a leader. As such, personal meaning, resulting from metanarrative, mediates metanarrative's influence on leadership effectiveness.

Hypothesis 3: Metanarrative produces personal meaning through the mediating variable of *Telos* – teleological context

As represented by the model in Figure 2, the author argues that there are three mediating variables between metanarrative and meaning. Beyond asserting that there is a relationship between metanarrative and meaning (based on the arguments of Schwartz [1998], Domanska [1998], and Sandlos [1998] that metanarrative possesses the capacity to produce meaning) this model seeks to provide an answer for how meaning is produced by metanarrative. The first mediating variable providing an answer for this question is *Telos*.

Telos, the Greek work for "end," is related to the area of philosophy know as *teleology* which explains the future in terms of the past and the present based upon the study of purpose, ends, goals, and final causes. The role of *Telos* in the production of meaning is derived from one's possession of ultimate purpose, goals, and concerns in their life based on the metanarrative they possess. The Pauline teaching in 1 Corinthians 10:31 serves as an example of meaning derived of *Telos*: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (NASB). Another example is found in Jonathan Edwards' *The End for Which God Created the Earth* (1765/1974). In this work, Edwards argues that the glory of God and increasing fellowship with Him is the ultimate end or purpose for which humans exist. A final example of *Telos* is the work of Emmons (1999) related to ultimate concerns. Emmons associates personal strivings as representative of "enduring concerns, in that they pertain to states of mind that persist over time and across situations. This is contrast to 'current concerns' (Klinger, 1977 p. 94)."

In this hypothesis the author argues that one of the ways meaning is produced in the life of an individual possessing an integrative metanarrative is the dimension of *Telos*. Possessing a metanarrative that is an all-inclusive "comprehensive explanation of all that exists and occurs" (Erickson, 2001, p. 271) provides a macro or master story capable of addressing the ultimate concerns and purpose necessary for individuals to contextually orient the events and circumstances throughout their lives in light of the ultimate purpose provided by a metanarrative. Through this variable of *Telos*, a teleological context is provided in which personal meaning may be produced within individuals possessing an integrative metanarrative.
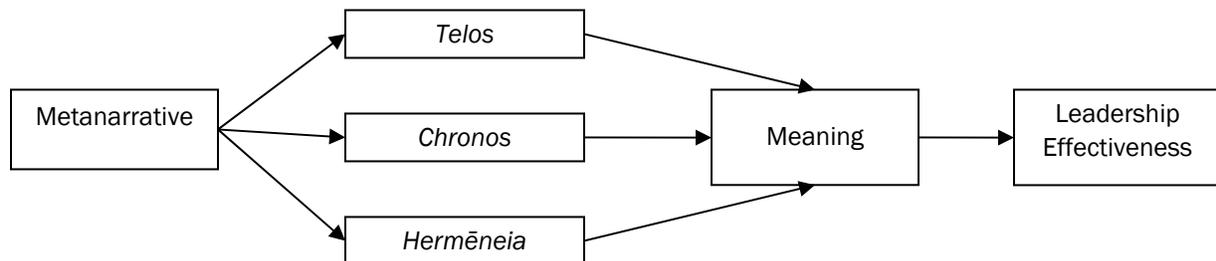
Hypothesis 4: Metanarrative produces personal meaning through the mediating variable of *Chronos* – historical-narrative context.

A second mediating variable providing an answer for how meaning is produced by metanarrative is *Chronos*. *Chronos* is the Greek word for "time." The role of *Chronos* in the production of meaning is derived from metanarrative's capacity to provide historical context for leaders. Leaders owning an integrated metanarrative possess a historical framework with which to understand the events of their lives and the events within their organizations and world. An example of this type of historical-narrative framework is the metanarrative of redemptive-history (Johnson, 2000), which provides leaders with a historical reference in the framework of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

Such a historical-narrative context possesses the capacity to provide meaning for a leader in its ability to provide a historical frame of reference. Rather than individuals seeing events and circumstances in their lives devoid of significance, this dimension of *Chronos* is able to provide a historically interpretive context. As

Schwartz (1998) argues that history without story becomes a history absent of meaning, so leaders who do not possess metanarrative may lack the historical-narrative context of *Chronos* necessary to frame meaning.

Hypothesis 5: Metanarrative produces personal meaning through the mediating variable of *Hermēneia* – interpretive context.

The third and final mediating variable providing an answer for how meaning is produced by metanarrative is *Hermēneia*. *Hermēneia* is the Greek word for "interpretation." Not only does metanarrative possess the capacity to produce meaning through *Telos* and *Chronos*, but metanarrative also provides an interpretive framework in which the part may be understood in reference to the whole. The four questions related to worldviews addressed by Walsh and Middleton (1984) may address such an interpretive framework or conceptual context. These four questions are: (a) Who am I?, (b) Where am I?, (c) What's wrong?, and (d) What is the remedy? An integrated metanarrative possesses the capacity for answering these questions related to worldviews.

Apart from such an interpretive context, leaders may find the events and circumstances of their lives and work divorced from answers to these central questions. As previously cited, Eisenberg and Goodall (2001) write, "Employees want to feel that the work they do is worthwhile, rather than just a way to draw a paycheck," and to see work have, "a transformation of its meaning—from drudgery to a source of personal significance and fulfillment" (p. 18). Apart from a metanarrative providing the interpretive context of *Hermēneia*, individuals may lack the interpretive frame of reference with which the discrete activities of their lives may be interpreted with meaning and significance in light of an integrated metanarrative.

Research Design and Associated Variables

The models and hypotheses presented in this paper are essentially representative of a process of theory building. The next step is to move toward a process of theory testing around the above stated hypotheses. At least three discrete parts to this theory testing are necessary to evaluate the hypotheses. First, it is necessary to confirm the correlation between leadership effectiveness and the presence of an integrated metanarrative in the life of leaders asserted in Hypothesis 1. To accomplish this, a survey may be utilized to identify leaders possessing an integrative metanarrative and leaders not possessing an integrative metanarrative. Once an experimental and a control group have been identified, Campbell and Stanley's (1963) *posttest-only control group design* may be utilized to compare the leadership effectiveness of each group.

Second, it is necessary to confirm the mediating roles of *Telos*, *Chronos*, and *Hermēneia* in Hypotheses 3-5. As variables mediating the relationship between metanarrative and meaning, the presence of *Telos*, *Chronos*, and *Hermēneia* may be tested in a *posttest-only control group design*, utilizing the same experimental and control groups from the first part. Third, it is necessary to confirm the mediating role of meaning in Hypothesis 2. In order to do this, the leaders evaluated in the first part of this study may be evaluated for the presence personal meaning in order to determine if personal meaning is a mediating variable between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness.

Recommendations for Further Study and Final Considerations

Though there is some overlap with the previous section on research design, the following questions serve as recommendations for future research in reference to meaning, metanarrative, and leadership effectiveness. In the literature on metanarrative, research has not been conducted to address these questions.

1. Does the presence of an integrated metanarrative in the life of a leader result in greater leadership effectiveness?

2. Does the presence of a metanarrative produce meaning in the life of a leader?

3. Does metanarrative produce meaning for groups and organizations?

4. *Does the presence of meaning derived from an integrated metanarrative in the life of a leader result in greater leadership effectiveness?*

5. What role does *Telos*, *Chronos*, and *Hermēneia* play in mediating metanarrative's role in the production of meaning?

Final Considerations

Though metanarrative is a concept centrally located in the heart of current discussions between modernity and postmodernity in the literature, metanarrative has received very little attention in the area of leadership studies and virtually no attention in the areas of its capacity to produce meaning and, thereby, its capacity to bring about greater leadership effectiveness. This fact creates a ready opportunity for further research on metanarrative.

In this paper the author has argued that there is a relationship between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness that is mediated by personal meaning. He has further argued for a model that attributes this correlation to metanarrative's capacity to produce meaning through the interpretive frames of *Telos* (teleological context), *Chronos* (historical-narrative context), and *Hermēneia* (interpretive context). Because meaning is a key variable in explaining leadership effectiveness, it is import to research the relevant causes of personal meaning. The author believes metanarrative holds out great promise on this particular point, and looks forward to seeing, and participating, in more work on this area of research in the future.

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