

FRAMING METANARRATIVE: THE ROLE OF METANARRATIVE IN LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING

**Irving, Justin A.
Regent University
justirv@regent.edu**

**Howard, Christopher S.
Regent University
chrihow@regent.edu**

**Matteson, Jeffrey
Regent University
jeffmat@regent.edu**

Abstract

In this paper the authors present a model for understanding the relationship between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness. By providing an overview of the literature and presenting a theoretical model, the authors argue that due to the capacity of metanarrative to provide interpretive frames for understanding the life experiences of the leader, metanarrative therefore possesses the capacity to produce meaning, and thus greater leadership effectiveness. Attention will be given to how the constructs of this model may be made operational and studied utilizing quantitative methodology.

INTRODUCTION

The authors propose that an instrument be designed to measure the degree to which metanarrative is present in the belief system of individuals, and that a correlation study be conducted into the interrelationship of metanarrative and leadership effectiveness by asking the following research question: "Is there a relationship between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness?" 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 relationship of metanarrative to leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, the literature presents no instrument for studying the presence of metanarrative in a person's belief system.

Due to this gap within the literature, designing a valid and reliable instrument for the presence of metanarrative within a person's belief system, as well as a study of the relationship between metanarrative

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and leadership effectiveness would provide an important addition to the body of research knowledge. This paper (a) overviews the literature, (b) presents a theoretical model, and (c) articulates a research methodology that may be used for a correlation study.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF MEANING

Viktor Frankl, a survivor of imprisonment in a concentration camp during WWII, wrote a book entitled *Man's Search for Meaning* (1984). 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."

Founded on Frankl's work, Wong and Fry (1998) 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 the 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 of 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, p. 18) 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." 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, p. 60) notes that, "numerous theoretical explanations of charismatic leadership highlight the importance of providing meaning to followers." 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, we 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 if it may be argued, based on the work of Wong (1998b), that this is true for individual effectiveness as well, then 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, we argue that metanarrative possesses a unique capacity to produce personal meaning, and thus greater leadership effectiveness, in the life of a leader.

LITERATURE REVIEW 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) makes two observations. First, Bloland associates Derrida (1981, 1988, & 1997) and Foucault (1977a, 1977b, & 1979) with postmodernism as a perspective consistent with poststructuralist thought; second, Bloland associates Lyotard (1984) and Buadrillard (1983) 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. Furthermore, Lyotard (1984) 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 known 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. We turn now to a brief consideration of both.

THE PERIL OF METANARRATIVE

Foucault's 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 (1998, p. 68) 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." This 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, p. xxiv) makes such bold assertions as postmodernity being defined as, "incredulity toward metanarrative" (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, doing so too quickly would be unwise. On this point Sandage (1998, p. 66) notes that, "postmodernists are largely accurate in their suspicion of the power dynamics inherent in the human social structures." Sandage's personal candor is admirable 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, Derrida, and Lyotard, 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" (273). As such, the peril of metanarrative must also be examined alongside its hope and promise.

THE PROMISE OF METANARRATIVE

Having acknowledged some of the perils of metanarrative, particularly in its use for oppression, we will be arguing 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 mine).

Addressing Hayden White’s (1975) book on “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 (1998) providing an honest affirmation of the need for order and a missing of metanarrative addresses 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 twentieth-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 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 (1998) history without story becomes a history absent of meaning.

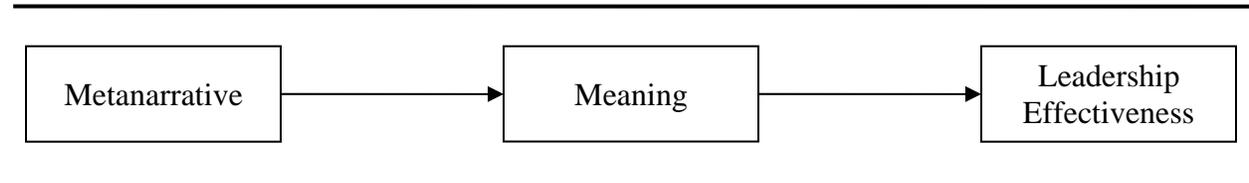
Based on this study of the metanarrative literature, it may be concluded that there have been no studies on the correlation between metanarrative and greater leadership effectiveness. Additionally, there have been no studies on the specific role metanarrative plays in the production of meaning, nor has any instrument been designed for studying the degree to which metanarrative is present within an individual’s belief system. There appears to be a gap in the literature of metanarrative studies that would be partially addressed through the development of such an instrument and through a study of the interrelationship of metanarrative and leadership effectiveness through the production of personal meaning in the life of the leader.

OVERVIEW OF MODEL

In order to provide a model of the relationship between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness it is helpful to explicitly state the logical connections made in the literature. 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, we conclude and make the hypothesis that meaning serves as a mediating variable between metanarrative (IV) and leadership effectiveness (DV) (note figure 1).

Figure 1



HYPOTHESIS 1

In light of the conceptual overview of metanarrative, meaning, and leadership effectiveness, the first hypothesis is that there is a 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

Schwartz (1998), Domanska (1998), and Sandlos (1998) argue that metanarrative possesses a unique capacity to produce meaning. Based on these arguments, we make the hypothesis that the correlation between the presence of an integrated metanarrative in the life of a leader and leadership effectiveness is explained by metanarrative’s capacity for the production 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

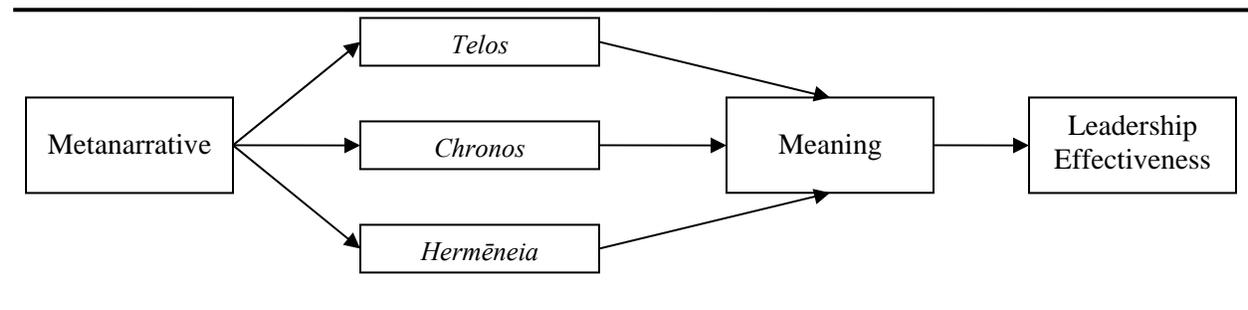
The third hypothesis is that metanarrative produces personal meaning through the mediating variable of *Telos* – teleological context. As represented by the model in figure 2, we argue that there are three mediating variables between metanarrative and meaning. Beyond asserting that there is a relationship between metanarrative and meaning, an assertion 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). A second example is found in Jonathan Edwards’ work on 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 we argue 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.

Figure 2



HYPOTHESIS 4

The fourth hypothesis is that metanarrative produces personal meaning through the mediating variable of *Chronos* – historical-narrative context. *Chronos* is therefore the second mediating variable providing an answer for how meaning is produced by metanarrative. *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

The fifth hypothesis is that metanarrative produces personal meaning through the mediating variable of *Hermēneia* – interpretive context. *Hermēneia* is therefore the third and final mediating variable providing an answer for how meaning is produced by metanarrative. *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. Walsh and Middleton (1984) address four questions related to worldviews that provide 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, p. 18) write, "Employees want to feel that the work they do is worthwhile, rather than just a way to draw a paycheck," and to see their work have, "a transformation of its meaning—from drudgery to a source of personal significance and fulfillment." Without 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.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study involves designing a valid and reliable instrument that will measure the degree to which the concepts of metanarrative, *Telos*, *Chronos*, and *Hermēneia* are present within an individual's belief system and then performing a quantitative examination of the interrelationship of metanarrative and leadership effectiveness by using a correlation research design. Because making the concepts of metanarrative, *Telos*, *Chronos*, and *Hermēneia* operational through measurable scales is essential to quantitative study, sample survey items are included in the appendix in order to demonstrate how these concepts may be made operational. Once the instrument has been designed utilizing a Likert-type scale, the construct validity may be tested both through inviting scholarly feedback and through testing the proposed hypotheses with the instrument. Due to the pioneer nature of this topic, establishing construct validity will be essential in the proposed instrument design and research.

Because the literature demonstrates that no research has been conducted on the interrelationship of metanarrative and leadership effectiveness, a correlation study could provide support for the direction, positive or negative, and magnitude, 0.0 to ± 1.0 , of the relationship. The research question, "Is there a relationship between metanarrative and leadership effectiveness?" could be studied among a population utilizing a self-selected random sampling technique.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Personal meaning. Personal meaning is that which enables people to make cognitive, emotional, and spiritual sense out of the events in their lives.

Leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is the measure of leadership performance based on one or more outcomes.

Metanarrative. A metanarrative is a comprehensive explanation of all that exists and occurs.

Level of integration. Level of integration refers to the level of conceptual incorporation. Low-level integration is associated with knowledge and comprehension. Higher-level integration is associated with application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Telos. *Telos* is the construct for teleological context—that which provides a teleological framework in which ultimate purpose, goals, and life-concerns may be understood.

Chronos. *Chronos* is the construct for historical-narrative context—that which provides a historical framework within which to understand the events of life.

Hermēneia. *Hermēneia* is the construct for interpretive context—that which provides an interpretive framework in which the parts of life may be understood in reference to the whole.

DATA COLLECTION

The data could be collected through a survey instrument to be designed and administered that will assess the following key variables, constructs, and information: (a) the degree to which a leader possesses an integrated metanarrative, (b) the degree to which the constructs of *Telos*, *Chronos*, & *Hermēneia* are present, (c) the degree to which personal meaning is present, (d) the degree to which leadership effectiveness is present, (e) essential demographic information about the individual leader, and (f) essential demographic information about the organization in which they lead. A website could be designed to house the survey, and those receiving a letter of invitation would also receive an access code which may be used to access the survey and insure that they are a sample of the population.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once the data has been collected it could be analyzed using the coefficient of correlation. The scale for the coefficient of correlation goes from +1.0, representing a perfect positive correlation, to -1.0, representing a perfect negative correlation. The score on this scale, r represents the coefficient of correlation, will be interpreted based on a scale offered by Guilford (1956): (a) $< .20$ = slight; almost negligible relationship, (b) $.20-.40$ = low correlation; definite but small relationship, (c) $.40-.70$ = moderate correlation; substantial relationship, (d) $.70-.90$ = high correlation; marked relationship, and (e) $> .90$ = very high correlation; very dependable relationship.

In the analysis, a matrix of intercorrelations will be utilized to present the coefficient of correlation between each of the following variable combinations: (a) metanarrative and leadership effectiveness (r_{xy}), (b) metanarrative and personal meaning (r_{xz}), and (c) leadership effectiveness and personal meaning (r_{yz}). In addition to analyzing the coefficient of correlation between these variables, the coefficient of multiple correlation calculation will be utilized to analyze the correlation of leadership effectiveness and personal meaning with metanarrative ($R_{X.YZ}$). Further, the coefficients of determination (r^2 & R^2) calculations will be made to examine the proportion of variance existing between variables.

At the level of design validity, external validity would be accomplished through a random sampling procedure that will ensure that the sample is not unrepresentative of the general population. Internal validity would be confirmed by accounting for factors such as age, level of education, and years of leadership experience, for each of these factors will likely influence leadership effectiveness, and thus accounting for these variables will help insure internal design validity.

At the level of measurement, both validity and reliability must be analyzed. By using a test-retest procedure with either a pilot group or a sample of the sample, the reliability coefficient may be determined. If this measure is at least $.90$, the instrument may be deemed reliable. Measurement validity is determined by one or more of the following: (a) criterion validity, (b) content validity, and (c) construct validity (de Vaus, 2001). Because no instrument has previously been designed to measure the presence of metanarrative within an individual's belief system, criterion validity is not an option. However, content and construct validity may be utilized to determine the instrument's validity. Content validity is confirmed by examining whether the instrument covers the multiple dimensions of each of the variables measured, and construct validity is confirmed by examining whether the results obtained using the instrument fit the theoretical expectations.

CONCLUSION

In this proposal the authors have provided an overview of the literature, presented a theoretical model,

and articulated a research methodology for a potential study of metanarrative. Because metanarrative possesses great promise, both the design of an instrument to evaluate the degree of its presence, as well as a study of the interrelationship of metanarrative and leadership effectiveness will provide an important addition to research knowledge in general and leadership practice in particular. Furthermore, the potential study would provide a basis for future research on metanarrative in leadership studies and allied disciplines.

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APPENDIX

For the measurement of personal meaning, the Life Regard Index (LRI) could be utilized (Battista and Almond, 1973; Debats, 1998). The LRI measures and makes operational the concept of personal meaning. In order to make operational the concept of metanarrative, and the associated concepts of *Telos*, *Chronos*, and *Hermēneia*, an instrument could be designed based on a Likert-type scale. The following statements provide an example for how these concepts may be measured on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Metanarrative. I believe in a comprehensive explanation of all that occurs.

Telos. I believe the events in my life have great significance and purpose.

Chronos. I believe that the best way to understand what is happening in my life today is to look at it in reference to the past.

Hermēneia. I believe the parts of my life are best understood in light of the whole.