

Phenomenological Reduction and Emergent Design: Complementary  
Methods for Leadership Narrative Interpretation and Metanarrative  
Development

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*Article***Phenomenological Reduction and Emergent Design:  
Complementary Methods for Leadership Narrative Interpretation  
and Metanarrative Development**

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**Abstract**

The author's intent in this paper is to discuss new methods for conducting research on and connecting the works of chaos and complexity theorists with interpretive, hermeneutical, and phenomenological theorists as a multiple-method mode of inquiry. He proposes a methodological design that incorporates a recursive process of phenomenological reduction to find connectedness and generate shared meanings among the research performed by leadership theorists. He also provides an emergent metanarrative method for presenting research results, using a complexity-based, interpretive framework.

**Keywords:** leadership, phenomenology, emergence, complexity, systems, hermeneutics, metanarrative, horizontalization

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## **Challenges of leadership research**

Research on leadership and organizational dynamics has not changed significantly since the advent of positivist philosophy in the field, albeit there are far more numerous and much more complex methods for measuring leadership effectiveness than there were 50 years ago. Advancements in analytical procedures have led us to incorporate quantitative techniques into studies of leadership and organizational dynamics, ranging from inventories of leadership attributes to advanced models of factor analysis.

However, we seem to have arrived at a period in leadership research when we are unsure of where to go next. As an example, the debate between inventory attribute theory (Blake & Mouton, 1981) and contingency theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993) has continued for more than 30 years now, yet each new study performed oftentimes shows conflicting, unsupported, or weak results (Yukl, 2002). Moreover, each of these subsequent studies lends to the argument that research on and the application of leadership theory contains a complex web of connected and disparate methods and techniques that often cannot be prescribed (Burns, 1979; Morgan, 1997). This is exacerbated by the social setting involved with organizational dynamics, for which all extraneous variables cannot be controlled (Gemmill & Smith, 1985).

During these debates on the quantitative side, suggestions for new qualitative methods have taken a back seat to the majority of research in leadership theory and organizational dynamics. Strong arguments have been made that organizational dynamics are also too complex for prescriptive leadership theories (Morgan, 1997; Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000; Stacey, 1992, 2003), and postmodernists would expound the social construction of reality in workplace settings and decision making (Doll, 1993; Feinberg & Soltis, 2004; Fleener, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Given these propositions, there still is little research on leadership theory that uses postmodern and complexity-based methods for discovery of phenomena, analysis, and meaning making. Equally, very few researchers have attempted interpretive or hermeneutical approaches to leadership theory. Therefore, my purposes for writing this paper are twofold: (a) to create a methodological framework that incorporates Moustakas's phenomenological reduction in my approach to data collection and analysis, modified by Doll's framework for educational research; and (b) to present examples of results in an interpretive and metanarrative framework. My intent is to show that the philosophical framework of complexity theory and interpretivism can lead to deeper meaning and subsequent understandings of the process of leadership rather than focusing restrictively on single biographical accounts of leadership effectiveness. This framework can subsequently be used by researchers in the social and behavioral sciences when exploring the process of leadership.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Meaning making on the horizon**

As scholars, we have viewed our approaches to leadership research primarily toward what constitutes effective leadership practice. Although we should not discard the important and extrinsic value of this phenomenon, it seems we might do this at the expense of losing understanding of how the intrinsic and interconnected processes of leadership take place in complex organizational settings. This is unfortunate, as one of our primary drives as humans within social situations is the search for meaning making (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004). Therefore, to give meaning to our research, in addition to studying leadership effectiveness, it would seem that we need to further our understanding of how we describe the process of leading.

Moustakas (1994) has seen this search for meaning through the eyes of the individual researcher. In his view, the reality of the world of organizational dynamics is subjectively created through the perceptions of each individual. As a result, “perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). Likewise, leaders’ perceptions of organizational dynamics become central to their construction of meaning, and every perception takes on new and equal meanings in the narrative descriptions of leaders. This is similar to Husserl’s (1931) description of transcendental phenomenology, or horizontalization, as Moustakas (1994) has qualitatively penned, whereby we view individual perceptions within the framework of the world around us—rather, the peripheral horizons that can be seen from the edges of our eyes. In a postmodern framework, richness, recursiveness, rigor, and relationships are critical factors of chaos and complexity theory method (Doll, 1993). Both Moustakas’s (1994) and Doll’s methods provide us with the ability to return recursively to these horizons of experience: We view and perceive each object on the horizon, which enables us to move closer to an understanding of the complexity of the entire phenomenon.

## **Interpreting the world of leadership through metanarrative**

Before speaking of metanarrative in more detail, it is important to distinguish between two common, and disparate, definitions of the term. Metanarrative has classically been defined in literature and philosophy as a “grand narrative” that attempts to narrow phenomena into a single, structured analysis of “truth” and, through Lyotard’s (1984) critiques of modernity, has subsequently become the subject of suspicion by postmodernists. For this article, however, I propose the use of the term with a different operational construct. As defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 2001), metanarrative “is concerned with the idea of storytelling, specifically one which alludes to other narratives, or refers to itself and to its own artifice.” It relates to the rich descriptions that emerge through conversation either with an individual or from within a text created by an individual. Rather than making generalizations about results, these metanarratives are subsequently important for their own sake.

Irving and Klenke (2004) have made compelling arguments for the use of metanarrative to explore leadership effectiveness. In their view, socially constructed patterns of behavior emerge during the evolution of leadership development, a view first proposed by Weick (1969). Metanarrative combines aspects of sociocultural and psychohistorical analysis, which lend to these humanly created constructs. To understand the complexities of the decisions and experiences of leaders, we need to search for the deep meanings that emerge through descriptions of organizational environments as an attempt to contribute to the research on leadership effectiveness. Thick description in interpretation can, therefore, provide the foundation for performing metanarrative research. It generates the meaning making necessary for understanding what leaders truly do to be effective leaders (Irving & Klenke, 2004), as during the process of leadership, “what is avoided in logic, turns up in practice!” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001, p. 996).

Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) have made a convincing argument for the use of narrative analysis in studying organizational dynamics through the lens of complexity theory. For many of the same arguments surrounding the social construction of leadership theory, I argue, an approach to metanarrative can be extended to the analysis of research written by leadership theorists in journal and monographic form. Each source is treated as part of a complex, interwoven, and recursive process of leadership theory development and, when interpreted through metanarrative, leads to an expanded *Weltbild*. These are not the grand narratives of postmodern suspicion; rather, they focus on finding connectedness in the process of making meaning (Doll, 1993; Fleener, 2002). From a hermeneutical perspective, critics might argue that this leads to a loss of social and historical context between the text and the intent of the author, or what Ricoeur (1976) emphasized as the alteration of ostensive reference. However, if we continue in this direction, we might contend that the sociohistorical context of the reading of the text by the reader would seem to be as significant a relationship to the interpretation of the text as is the sociohistorical context within which the text was written by the author (Doll, 1993; Muldoon, 2002; Ricoeur, 1974, 1976).

Schwandt (1998) contended,

We do not simply live out our lives in time and through language; rather, we are history. The fact that language and history are both the condition and the limit of understanding is what makes the process of meaning construction hermeneutical. (p. 224)

It is the being that becomes paramount to this argument on the reliance of the historical context of the text during interpretation. Meaning, on the other hand, cannot be gleaned from the text merely based off of a time-centric hermeneutic, and perhaps Burns's (1979) analyses of effective leadership throughout history furthers this point. Meaning is created by our dialogue with the text (Doll, 1993), implying that we become active participants in actually giving meaning to the text we interpret. Although we experience the texts in time, this is only through a relative, human-focused time as opposed to the hour or date in which we interact with them (Ricoeur, 1974, 1976; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). Our interpretations of the texts, however, cannot be extricated from our interaction with these narratives; rather the becoming of the texts leads to their meaning.

In egalitarian form, Irving and Klenke (2004) have presented possible arguments that are critical of this approach as propagating an emic suspicion of leaders and the process of leadership. Through a deconstructivist lens, they concede that the dualism of position power can magnify "the unmasking of power agendas that lurk behind authoritative social institutions and interpretations of text" (p. 7). As Denzin (2001) would describe, this exploitation of position power is "the force or interpersonal dominance actualized in human relationships through manipulation and control reward" (p. 49), relating directly to contingent reward theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993), transactional leadership theory (Bass, 1998), and the feedback mechanisms of systems and chaos theories (Checkland, 1999; Pascale et al., 2000; Stacey, 1992; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Moreover, power is a component of leadership that seemingly cannot be extricated from the systemic process of organizational dynamics, (Blake & Mouton, 1981; Burns, 1979; Hersey & Blanchard,

1993; Yukl, 2002). Therefore, it appears that this suspicion of position power is unavoidable but perhaps emerges mostly from a focus on abuse of position power.

Having confronted the paradox of power dilemmas in narrative contexts, Irving and Klenke (2004), conversely, have argued that relying fully on this perspective causes one to lose sight of the referencing that, indeed, takes place during the process of telling leadership stories and subsequently lends support to the hermeneutic of metanarrative. Likewise, in Ricoeur's (1974, 1976) view, if we are to describe hermeneutical interpretation as merely explaining text and the intentions of the author, then we have confined ourselves to a structuralist approach. If we are able to transcend our interpretation of the actual world (*Umwelt*) in our move to understanding the symbolic world (*Welt*) (Muldoon, 2002), we can break free from the structures that prevent us from understanding more fully our being. This process leads to the "power of the work to project itself outside itself in the representation of a world that I could inhabit" (p. 54). In other words, I desire to interpret leadership dialogues in ways that describe the complexities of the organizational world in which I do, and would like to, exist.

Transcending the roles of hermeneutics in the realization of the symbolic world, Irving and Klenke (2004) have contended that metanarrative holds great promise for studying leadership, because it presents more than just facts. Metanarrative describes a story that involves the people being studied, leading to an increased understanding and appreciation of personal meaning making.

If personal meaning, indeed, leads to enhanced group effectiveness and performance (and, by extension, to increased leadership effectiveness), then the question of how personal meaning is produced in the life of a leader takes on special significance. "We argue that the answer to this question is found in metanarrative, and more specifically, the capacity of metanarrative to produce meaning in the life of the leader, which is instrumental in facilitating and enhancing his or her effectiveness" (Irving & Klenke, 2004, p. 12).

This is a recursive research enterprise wherein the individual returns repeatedly to past understanding to create new personal meaning; interpretation, effectively, is *being* in the process of *becoming* meaning (Doll, 1993). As a result, a time-centric focus becomes less important, because referring to the past changes both the past and the present with each iteration. In effect, "we are history" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 224).

I contend that when analyzing the journal article and monographic research literature of leadership theorists, we are able to understand how these authors have critically arrived at the meaning they make out of their research on leadership. We are able to see how the researcher has scanned and included theory bases to strengthen arguments for propositions or description of phenomena. We are also able to see how their collection and analysis of data furthers support of different and sometimes conflicting theoretical constructs. When this literature is viewed through the use of metanarrative, the multiplicity of systems that lead to the further creation and diffusion of knowledge

become a holistic system. This transcends individual and conflicting views and leads to a pluralistic understanding of the nature of leadership and organizational dynamics.

The use of narrative has already shown to be a powerful tool for exploration and discovery of deeper meaning and interpretation (Denzin, 2001; Irving & Klenke, 2004; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). Because many of the phenomena that emerge within organizational dynamics are nonlinear, it becomes difficult to approach leadership theory through a logicocentric focus. Tsoukas and Hatch subsequently argued that narrative becomes a more complex method for understanding how these phenomena emerge. Moreover, the “narrative approach falls within interpretive studies rather than the other way around” (p. 985). Denzin has also argued that the thick description used in narrative approaches elicits thick interpretation. This consequently strengthens the value of using an interpretive approach to understand leadership and organizational dynamics through the lens of complexity-based interpretations and the descriptions elicited through metanarrative.

## **Research design**

An interpretive and emergent design will be used for this study, focusing on Feinberg and Soltis’s (2004) construct of shared systems of meaning. From their perspective, people interact in social settings through an understanding that socially constructed rules govern systems. These rules are ostensible, as opposed to universal laws, and lead to the framework for understanding the social system. Equally, there is a cyclical nature of knowing the language needed to understand these rules but simultaneously knowing the socially constructed rules that lead to the understanding of the language. It is Feinberg and Soltis’s contention that the knowledge and language of these rules cannot be extricated from one another. Likewise, this framework of shared meaning will be used to explore the social nature of leadership theorists in understanding more the connectedness of the literature through metanarrative interpretation.

Data analysis used for the process of metanarrative interpretation followed a multiple-method design. This design incorporates phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994) and both modifies and complements it through Doll’s (1993) emergent design for educational research, including richness, rigor, relationships, and recursiveness. The data sources for this study include notes from 91 journal articles and books from major leadership theorists that were collected by this researcher in an EndNote database over two years. These sources are drawn from the works of commonly known writers and their schools of thought, such as Burns (1979, 2003) and Bass (1998) in transformational, transactional, and charismatic leadership theory; Blake and Mouton (1981) in normative leadership theory; McGregor (1960), Argyris (1964, 1990), Argyris and Schön (1978), and Senge (1994, 2004) in organizational learning theory; Checkland (1999), Flood (1999), and von Bertalanffy (1968) in systems theory; Stacey (1992, 2003), Pascale et al. (2000), and Morgan (1997) in complexity theory leadership; and Hersey and Blanchard (1993) and Carew, Parisi-Carew, and Blanchard (1986) in situational leadership. These theories form the basis of much of the current literature and research studies on leadership. Therefore, the research literature of many other leadership theorists in related

or similar schools of thought was also incorporated into analysis, including studies, spanning theory and application.

This research began with the *epoche* stage described by Moustakas (1994). I suspended—but did not eliminate—my initial biases and analyzed a wide selection of both quantitative and qualitative studies of leadership and organizational dynamics. I furthered this process by incorporating Doll's (1993) rigor, whereby the researcher seeks out alternatives to research bias and assumptions. I then performed open coding of the data to identify relevant experiences. Moustakas (1994) illustrated this stage through horizontalization, whereby the possibilities for new discoveries of experiences take place with each return to the original horizon of data, while treating each phenomenon as having equal value. I complemented this process through Doll's description of richness, bringing out "layers of meaning . . . and multiple possibilities or interpretations" (p. 176). I also used constant comparison to generate new categories or move data into existing categories as applicable, incorporating an iterative process of phenomenological reduction to reorganize data that were not identified as horizons of experience. This is a process similarly described by Doll as recursive, whereby the researcher continually returns to the horizon of experience to generate new meaning. After I created several categories through the broad coding of the literature—or, as Moustakas (1994) explained, as invariant constituents—data were subsequently coded and recoded to identify invariant qualities that emerged during horizontalization and were reorganized into thematic categories, or, as Doll argued, relationships.

At first glance, there appears to be a paradox between the simultaneous use of Moustakas's (1994) reduction and Doll's (1993) emergence. If we attempt in ever more certain terms to find an ontological truth in Moustakas's use of the word *reduction* through what Dewey and Bentley (1949/1975) described as specification, we realize the absence of truth both in the word and in Moustakas's meaning. Yet if we view the word transactionally, it becomes necessary to take into account its interaction with the multiple methods in use in the study (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/1975). By complementing phenomenological reduction with emergent complexity theory, new phenomena begin to emerge based on my interpretive experience as though the two attract each other in non-equilibrium form. Coding and thematic clustering of data was not a single, terminal event along a linear trajectory which Osberg and Biesta (2004) would suggest as weak emergence. As I organized categories and themes, I would recursively return to and modify them with each iteration in the process. In this way, my individual reflections during iterative cycles led to the creation—rather than reduction—of new personal meaning that was especially different from my previous perceptions of leadership theory; what Osberg and Biesta have described as strong emergence. I would then develop these phenomena into themes that span the breadth of the leadership narratives, providing me with the opportunity to write rich descriptions of shared meaning as a basis for the interpretive framework of the study while still grounding it in the methodological frameworks of the main leadership theorists.

## **Results and discussion of the interpretive investigation**

In “negotiating passages” each part listens actively—sympathetically and critically—to what the other is saying. The intent is not to prove (even to oneself) the correctness of a position but to find ways to connect varying viewpoints. This engagement is a process activity, which transforms both parties. (Doll, 1993, p. 151)

During the process of phenomenological reduction of the research narratives of included leadership theorists, new ideas began to emerge. In Tables 1 to 4, I show the process of horizontalization, wherein I attempted, using NVivo software, to suspend my initial biases and open-coded 91 sources of leadership literature in book and journal article form developed over two years, using an EndNote database. Returning recursively to the documents and the themes, those themes that could not be delimited through the process of horizontalization were clustered into existing themes (see Table 2). Non-overlapping constituents were then reclustered into new themes several times to arrive at the themes listed in Tables 3 and 4.

The confines of this paper do not allow for a comprehensive exploration of all themes and would subsequently contribute to shallow descriptions of all the themes that emerged. I have chosen, rather, to follow Doll’s (1993) suggestion that richer and deeper descriptions of connectivity will help focus this article on the process of interpretive description and lead to two main propositions in current leadership theory. I have tried to incorporate an autoethnographic approach in developing the metanarratives, projecting myself into the conversation with these leadership narratives. I have included proposition-based vignettes from selected leadership theorists to expand the narrative approach of this interpretive framework in an attempt to further my metanarrative development of these themes. In addition, I find that these vignettes represent strong belief systems of the authors in their views of leadership theory. Although these results are more of a précis of metanarrative than I might expand on in monographic form, they provide examples of how this method might contribute to a more complex understanding of the process of leadership.

### **Proposition 1: Leadership is surrounded by socially constructed change and tension**

Concepts such as change, turbulence, and instability were the some of the main themes that emerged in my recursive interpretations of the authors’ research studies. This seems to show the great amount of time leaders must devote to the change process, as well as my construction of reality, which focuses on a changing environment. Equally, leadership theorists, in spite of their disagreements, seem to agree that the more successful a leader is in leading the change process, the more effective he or she truly is. If an evaluation of successful leadership is based on leading change, then it would seem that the very concept of repeated change might also be a very important aspect of successful organizations.

Interactive planning builds on the premise that obstruction to change sits mainly in the minds of participants, rather than separately “out there” in the problem context. Obstructions are often nothing more than assumptions made by participants. They are mental models that are lodged in place. (Flood, 1999, p. 47)

Leaders who attempt to understand the change process must be able to recognize that resistance to change is socially constructed, as there is a strong dynamic toward normative behavior in organizational life. Kohlberg (1984) argued, in his six stages of moral development, that the first two stages focus on a utilitarian view of group norms. This phenomena is what Blake and Mouton (1981) have described as convergence, wherein “people tend to shift their attitudes, opinions, feelings, and actions toward one another” (p. 28) or to the extent of social pressure to conform to these group norms. This concept is equally expanded on in Argyris and Schön’s (1978) theory of first- and second-order organizational learning cultures. Although we would like to believe that wise decisions are made in groups based on experience, the negative aspects of the normative process can lead individuals to converge toward groupthink (Blake & Mouton, 1981).

Resistance to change, indeed, can exist within the individual, but it is the discussion between and among individuals in group settings that gives a name to this resistance and provides the impetus for its growth. Consequently, it is easier for individuals to converge toward “unsound” yet normatively accepted decision making, as it becomes difficult for individuals to reflect analytically toward working solutions that diverge from group norms (Blake & Mouton, 1981). Moreover, the longer individuals have been working together, or the longer an organization has been in existence, the more likely resistance to change and cohesiveness by the group related to this resistance is likely to occur (Yukl, 2002). In effect, resistance is in the process of becoming while individuals in group settings communicate the meanings surrounding change.

Theories of self-organizing change derived from the sciences of complexity support the argument that change is a process that unfolds over time, revealing periods of greater and lesser instability, in which the restlessness of a system is an instinctive response toward survival in a continually changing environment. (Ferdig & Ludima, 2002, p. D2)

<i>Emergent Themes</i>	<i>Characters Coded</i>	<i>Paragraphs Coded</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>	<i>Characters Coded</i>	<i>Paragraphs Coded</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>
Attractors	1,737	11	4	Interpretive	2,372	6	4
Behavior	1,386	24	6	Involvement	992	10	2
Benchmarking	777	3	1	Laissez faire	587	4	2
Bifurcation	137	2	1	Leadership	115	1	1
Biological	667	2	1	Learning	334	6	1
Bureaucracies	302	1	1	Linear	3,386	16	8
Change	4,997	38	12	Meaning making	6,645	23	18
Chaos	7,271	34	23	Measurement	5,170	30	15
Charismatic	290	3	2	Metaphors	3,328	19	8
Cohesion	147	2	1	Moderate	701	5	2
Collective	426	7	1	Morale	590	3	3
Communication	4,705	26	16	Nonlinear	2,455	11	8
Concern for people	5,971	53	23	Normative	6,263	57	24
Confidence	194	2	1	Objectives	210	2	1
Consensus	2,650	25	6	Participative	1,926	24	10
Constructivist	1,403	9	3	Personal transformation	1,150	1	1
Contingency	1,903	9	6	Power	2,586	27	4
Continuous improvement	148	1	1	Process	656	4	2
Control	1,599	8	5	Productivity	2,009	9	8
Creative versus controlled	6,717	27	19	Quality	131	1	1
Creativity	1,185	8	3	Rationality	2,156	6	3
Culture	59	2	1	Readiness	1,761	13	6
Decision making	1,157	12	2	Recursive	1,745	8	5
Definition	1,747	21	10	Refinement	131	1	1
Development	1,133	5	4	Reflection	2,741	27	10
Deviation	505	3	2	Reform	3,479	21	11
Directive	1,581	13	10	Self-organization	3,830	21	11
Dynamics versus structure	200	2	1	Self-referencing	440	1	1
Education	302	10	1	Shared leadership	476	2	2
Effectiveness	1,517	7	4	Supervisors	183	2	1
Equilibrium	590	4	2	System	629	1	1
Fad	864	3	3	Teams	10,890	72	33
Fear	499	3	1	Transformational leadership	4,659	24	19
Feedback mechanisms	4,765	22	15	Turbulence	7,040	50	22
Goals	511	10	5	Values	5,645	44	20
Group dynamics	1,451	12	4	Variety	880	5	1
Guidance	313	1	1	Vision	210	8	1
Influence	394	2	1	Women	381	2	2
Information	2,609	9	7				

*Table 1. First coding through phenomenological reduction and emergent design*

If leaders can learn to identify emerging paradoxes or, if necessary, create paradoxes that embody the tensions between the status quo and a desired future, they can identify important points of leverage that can be used to undermine the force of the status quo in favor of a new future (Morgan, 1997).

<i>Emergent Themes</i>	<i>Characters Coded</i>	<i>Paragraphs Coded</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>	<i>Characters Coded</i>	<i>Paragraphs Coded</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>
Behavior	1,386	24	6	Group dynamics and self-organization	10,214	64	26
Benchmarking	777	3	1	Influence	394	2	1
Bifurcation	137	2	1	Information	2,609	9	7
Biological	667	2	1	Interpretive	2,372	6	4
Bureaucracies	302	1	1	Involvement	992	10	2
Change and turbulence	12,342	83	36	Laissez faire	587	4	2
Chaos theory	9,008	45	27	Learning	334	6	1
Charismatic	290	3	2	Linear versus nonlinear	5,410	25	15
Cohesion	147	2	1	Measurement	5,170	30	15
Collective	426	7	1	Metaphors	3,328	19	8
Communication	4,705	26	16	Moderate	701	5	2
Concern for people	5,971	53	23	Morale	590	3	3
Confidence	194	2	1	Normative and deviant behaviors	6,263	57	24
Constructivism versus rationalism	3,559	15	6	Participative	1,926	24	10
Contingency	1,903	9	6	Power	2,586	27	4
Continuous improvement	148	1	1	Process	656	4	2
Control	10,846	49	34	Productivity	2,009	9	8
Creativity	1,185	8	3	Quality	131	1	1
Decision making	1,157	12	2	Readiness	1,761	13	6
Definition	1,747	21	10	Recursive	1,876	9	6
Dynamics versus structure	200	2	1	Reflection and meaning making	9,826	51	29
Education	302	10	1	Shared leadership	476	2	2
Effectiveness	1,517	7	4	Supervisors	183	2	1
Equilibrium	590	4	2	Teams	10,890	72	33
Fad	864	3	3	Transformational leadership	4,659	24	19
Fear	499	3	1	Values	5,704	46	21
Feedback mechanisms	4,765	22	15	Women	381	2	2
Goals	721	18	6				

Table 2. Second and third codings through phenomenological reduction and emergent design

Change creates uncertainty about the future and increases tension within the work place. Burns (1978) has argued that the most common aspect of normative behavior in organizational settings is the desire for stability, predictability, and certainty. These

desires manifest themselves in the form of wants but, over time, lead to psychological needs if they are given the chance to define group norms. As a result, disequilibrium and uncertainty can become a form of dissent toward the developed group norms and are “perhaps metaphorically best associated with the conscious creation of dissatisfaction” (Carr-Chellman, 2000, p. 30).

<i>Emergent Themes</i>	<i>Characters Coded</i>	<i>Paragraphs Coded</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>
Change and turbulence	12,342	83	36
Chaos theory	9,008	45	27
Control	10,846	49	34
Group dynamics and self-organization	10,214	64	26
Normative and deviant behaviors	6,263	57	24
Teams	10,890	72	33

*Table 3. Fourth coding through phenomenological reduction and emergent design*

Morgan (1997) helped describe the paradox of spiraling tensions when leading organizations through change. It is the leader’s intent to move individuals away from established group norms, and at the same time, normative behavior leads individuals within these groups to want to return to the status quo, even if they are uncertain why they believe this. Moreover, Blake and Mouton (1981) showed that leaders who intend to move an organization through change must accept Morgan’s paradox: A plurality of views about the change process begins to emerge among individuals and groups, usually falling somewhere between total acceptance and absolute rejection of change.

These concepts suggest that leaders should embrace the organizational plurality surrounding change while incorporating feedback mechanisms that help promote effective change leadership. As a leader, I can attempt to control individuals’ actions through negative feedback, or, rather, methods that dampen deference to change, and this approach can be successful in the early stages of transition. However, this strategy has shown to be unsustainable through the entire change process (Carew et al., 1986). Conversely, I can facilitate positive feedback mechanisms, amplifying the resources and energy of people who have adopted a philosophy of openness to change, which can be an instrumental method for effective leadership (Pascale et al., 2000; Stacey, 1992, 2003). Moreover, “if practitioners are to increase their effectiveness in managing paradoxical social systems, they should ‘complicate’ themselves . . . in logico-scientific terms, to match the complexity of the situation they attempt to manage, or in narrative terms, to enact it” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001, p. 987). Consequently, my recognition of the complication of conflicting dualisms in organizational dynamics, incorporating system feedback mechanisms, can help me promote or prevent how effective I am as a leader.

## **Proposition 2: Effective organizations exhibit a culture of systemic, self-organizing leadership**

Ultimately, your leadership in a culture of change will be judged as effective or ineffective not by who you are as a leader but by what leadership you produce in others. (Fullan, 2001, p. 137)

Empowerment of self-managed subordinates offers a number of potential advantages, including stronger task commitment, faster resolution of local problems, better customer service, reduced administrative costs, and more opportunities for leadership development. (Yukl, 2002, p. 136)

These passages emphasize the idea that effective leadership does not have to rely on “the great man” theory (Burns, 1979), whereby great change happens solely as the result of one individual leader’s actions. History has shown that in totalitarian societies, the tyranny of a minority of power holders can, indeed, lead to dramatic changes. However, these changes are not necessarily effective, successful, or productive, and they most likely cannot be sustained (Burns, 1979; Freire, 2000). Fullan (2001) alluded to the idea that leading change should focus less on directive outcomes and more on a systemic process of leadership among individuals within groups. In addition, Yukl (2002) argued that self-managed groups become a critical aspect of effective leadership. Through my course of phenomenological reduction in identifying emergent themes in leadership narratives, the idea of group leadership also becomes a central focus on my horizon of experience of leadership theorists.

As a leader, I am confronted with the challenges of involving individuals in the decision-making process, which leads to another paradox. Ultimately, if I incorporate more people in this process, it might follow that I will feel that I should strive toward consensus in decision making. Conversely, I have discussed the difficulties that can emerge through normative group behavior, and Ackoff (1994) has contended that consensus designs tend to involve stagnation and most frequently prohibit decision making altogether. Blake and Mouton (1981), equally, argued that normative convergence “is likely to occur around a false position when decisions need to be reached quickly and time for discussion is minimal” (p. 110). Ouchi (1981) showed, however, that unlike in Western corporations,

When an important decision needs to be made in a Japanese organization everyone who will feel its impact is involved in the decision making. That will often mean sixty to eighty people are directly involved. What is important is not the decision itself but rather how committed and informed people are. (p. 44)

Albeit I recognize that there are significant sociocultural differences between Eastern and Western philosophies of organizational dynamics, I am once again challenged to embrace the paradoxes of leadership, focusing less on linear causation and perhaps more on the plurality of the decision-making process itself.

<i>Emergent Themes</i>	<i>Characters Coded</i>	<i>Paragraphs Coded</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>
Change and leadership	32,196	177	97
Self-organization and leadership	27,367	193	83

Table 4. Final themes for development of metanarrative

This process of group dynamics in decision making moves me away from normative groupthink and toward an influx of information. As noted earlier, perception becomes critical in the process of meaning making (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004; Moustakas, 1994), and increasing the flow of information into group decision making leads to levels of uncertainty and conflict among individuals within the group (Pascale et al., 2000). However, Pascale and colleagues have found that an organizational philosophy of collegial conflict can actually lead to effective group interactions. “Straight uncensored talk about ‘the way things really work around here’ allows a lot of hidden conflict and frustration to surface in a constructive way” (p. 97).

Some leadership theorists go as far as arguing that continual change and disequilibrium are critical components to effective leadership and organizational successes (Ackoff, 1981, 1994; Checkland, 1999; Pascale et al., 2000; MacIntosh & MacLean, 1999; Stacey, 1992, 2003). These theorists see a process of self-organization as a means for addressing the paradox of normative versus conflict behaviors in group decision-making processes. *Self-organization* is a term borrowed from chaos and complexity theories that is used to describe an unpredictable phenomenon wherein individuals within a turbulent setting are spontaneously drawn toward a basin of attraction and work holistically to achieve systemic solutions to group problems (Pascale et al., 2000; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). This attractor pattern can range from information flows to leadership vision, but the ultimate outcome of this phenomenon is that through creating new solutions, the group bifurcates or else it recursively folds into itself and emerges at a higher level of development. The prerequisites for this phenomenon to take place, however, are uncertainty and turbulence (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984).

As a result, normative patterns of behavior among individuals typically arise during periods of stability to move an organization toward further equilibrium. Conversely, the only way for self-organization to take place is when the organization moves toward instability and uncertainty. Again, I am confronted with Morgan’s (1997) argument that we need to seek out paradoxes. In this case, if I am to help a group move away from a consensus model toward a more holistic self-organizing model, I must equally find ways to help them seek out unstable states.

## Conclusion

This method of interpretive inquiry has led this author to develop metanarrative surrounding two interconnected leadership propositions when using hermeneutical approaches to interpret leadership narratives. The social construction of perceptions of change, and the subsequent tension change brings to organizations, emerged as a prominent theme within this research. Equally, the power of self-organizing and systems-

focused leadership was another emergent theme in the leadership narratives. It becomes apparent that a great deal of time can be spent by leaders dealing with change, and negative control mechanisms introduced into the process can problematize these situations. An attempt to define leadership effectiveness in this framework might imply how effectively an individual or an organization facilitates the process of change. By this definition, therefore, to be effective, leaders must learn to recognize when socially constructed resistance to change occurs in an organization and address the underlying problems and constraints within the system. Moreover, to move toward a transformational, higher level, or learning-centered organization, leadership must encourage opportunities for the organization's members to discuss and reflect on the aspects of the organization they perceive to be dysfunctional or restrictive and why this tension and resistance surrounding change is taking place.

Equally, environments that attempt to control stability appear to produce normative behaviors where individual reflections and contributions become tertiary aspects of organizational effectiveness. Groupthink can result, sometimes jeopardizing the creative dynamics of an organization in an attempt to move the group toward equilibrium. As a result, negative control mechanisms applied by leaders can become so rigid that socially constructed perceptions of change will prevent organizational change from taking place, perpetuating the status quo to the point of organizational obsolescence. However, in organizations where more fluid structures are used, the seeming contradiction of power and philosophical dualism among individuals creates a recursive process of attraction for the group to act in a self-organizing manner. In effect, many of these leadership narratives suggest that amplifying the differences that exist at the micro level in organizations, and subsequently reflecting on these differences, can lead to more dynamic and transforming organizational structures that are able to adapt to change.

The primary focus of this research, therefore, has been to interpret leadership narratives and to develop subsequent metanarrative. It is hoped that further exploration of this methodological framework can help lead not only to more effective leadership practice but also to a better understanding of the theory and processes of how leadership develops in group settings. It would also seem that, given the wide scope of this qualitative methodology, application of this type of research in other areas is plausible. It is believed this methodological framework could be incorporated into any discipline where human interaction is studied through the interpretation and analysis of narratives, journals, or primary sources. This would include qualitative researchers and practitioners primarily in the social and behavioral sciences, such as education, psychology, business, sociology, history, and political science. Because of the systems-oriented nature of the design and the multiple methods involved, interdisciplinary researchers in particular might benefit from incorporating this method. Certainly possibilities for expanding this method to any human-oriented research endeavor exist, and there are equally compelling arguments for its use in the study of human experience through data sources such as oral histories, qualitative interviewing methods, and action research, given their connected relationship to interpretivism.

In qualitative research, we continue to develop and expand methods that give further meaning to the research we perform. With the exception of case studies and biographical sources, many of the research studies on leadership have been limited to positivistic methods. In the course of this paper, I have offered a new methodological approach, using Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological reduction complemented by Doll's (1993) emergent design. I have, equally, attempted to provide examples of how this method can be used to collect and analyze data that contribute to the development of metanarratives. Moreover, I contend that this method captures the connectedness of meaning making during the hermeneutical exploration of leadership theory and practice while integrating findings into an emergent systems view. This method is not intended to provide an analytic tool for generalizing about leadership theory. I have, conversely, integrated my perceptions and reflections on meaning by recursively interpreting leadership narratives and the process of leadership through my development of a metanarrative framework. The results of this study are, therefore, unique to my experiences in both studying and practicing leadership and might or might not relate to the experiences and interpretations of others. However, my evolving connection to the texts and their interpretation has enabled me to study and experience the process of leadership in new ways that perhaps can be shared with colleagues in the field in their further development of qualitative methods.

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