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# David M. Boje: A Storyteller for the Post-Newtonian Era

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Tonya L. Henderson

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## Abstract

Boje, David M. holds a Wells Fargo Professorship and is a distinguished professor and Bill Daniels Ethics Fellow in the management department at New Mexico State University. He also holds an honorary doctorate from Aalborg University. His specialty is organizational storytelling using qualitative methods ranging from traditional narrative to living story emergence, to new work utilizing Shifts-Patterns-Uniqueness-Discrepancies-Self-Assumptions in doing the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association field note methods. He is best known for his groundbreaking work in storytelling, including antenarrative and quantum storytelling theory, as well as his key role in the creation of multiple organizations fostering postmodern, critical, and spiritually informed approaches to scholarly dialogue. Each phase of Boje's four-decade career (so far) has served to more firmly situate him, and the field of organization development as a whole, on the path toward more inclusive and ontologically sound ways of knowing, Being, and influencing the world.

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## Keywords

Ontology • Boje • Materiality • Complexity • Storytelling • Postmodernism • Quantum storytelling • Veterans • EAGALA • Fractal • SEAM

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T.L. Henderson (✉)

Tonya Lynn Henderson, Limited, Colorado Springs, CO, USA

e-mail: [tonyalynnhenderson@gmail.com](mailto:tonyalynnhenderson@gmail.com)

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## Introduction

To know Boje, whether personally or through the lens of his numerous writings and lectures, is to become a part of the living story web that links all who think deeply about organization development (OD), ethics, and, of course, storytelling. Boje has published 22 books, 140 articles, and 83 book chapters as of this writing, not counting his works in progress (Boje 2016). He is a super-collaborator who helps others discover their voices, and he finds inspiration in even the unlikeliest of places. To be a student of Boje's is to be a student of life; to play a part in the unfolding of a living story web shared by intellectuals across the globe, not to mention veterans, artists, blacksmiths, consultants, and even horses. This is uninhibited, cocreative exploration at its finest: a learning that seeks understanding regardless of accepted norms, daring to swim against the current of institutionally approved methods and perspectives. Boje is the consummate lifelong learner whose kindness and humble spirit inspire and empower those who are open to embracing change – something he himself has never avoided. For Boje, embracing change means questioning the status quo, seeing old problems in new and creative ways, and unleashing the potential in others.

Unafraid of critique, Boje has consistently given a voice to stories that might otherwise be suppressed, whether because of unpleasantness, political correctness, or a preference for empiricism in the field – always with the aim of expanding the collective understanding of organizational storytelling and change. Where ethics and human rights are concerned, he has used his scholarship to shine a light on the practices of big corporations, including Monsanto, Nike, Enron, Disney, and McDonald's (see, e.g., Boje 2000, 2008, 2010a; Boje et al. 2005a, b; Boje and Baskin 2010a). He has frequently added his voice to public and scholarly debates when controversial topics were at stake, always supporting constructive discourse (e.g., Boje 2000, 2010b; Fitzgerald et al. 2010). While some may find fault with this tendency to engage in controversy, it has led to many rich and fruitful lines of inquiry that benefit the field and encourage growth.

Throughout his career, Boje has forced us to look at things we would rather not see and to create an irresistible, if uncomfortable, call to action. As a critical postmodernist, he constantly refines his ideas about storytelling in organizations, nudging himself (and us) toward the kind of ethical answerability best garnered through lived experience and authentic storytelling (Bakhtin 1993). He does this through the use of a variety of tools, including theater (Boje et al. 2005a) and deep theoretical explanations (Boje 2008), as well as by giving a voice to those whose stories the general public might not really want to hear ([www.veteranstheater.com](http://www.veteranstheater.com), 2015). A tireless inventor, he sees human value and potential that others might miss or discard – a gift that has brought him many productive mentees and coauthors. This experience of pushing past superficial judgments to encourage fruitful dialogue characterizes his lifelong quest to move away from the dominant narratives we often accept as “truth,” to illuminate the more inclusive, authentic stories that live within organizations of all kinds.

Whether one is a student, colleague, friend, or all of these, we all know Boje as a bold thinker and an unfailingly generous soul. In this chapter, we examine a few of the experiences and influences that have shaped his quest for a deeper, ontological understanding of organizational life. Next, we offer a few highlights from his extensive writings – spanning multiple theoretical streams – and consider how they shape modern OD. We then enjoy a brief taste of the work that is currently in progress as of this writing and suggest a few key references to engage the curious scholar.

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## **Influences and Motivations: A Cocreative Blend of Scholarship and Practice**

Boje is an avid reader whose writings are influenced by many sources. What makes his scholarship unique and, in many ways timeless, is his consistent knack for blending concepts drawn from centuries-old, seminal works with the most innovative ideas of the modern age. A conversation with Boje invariably involves a full range of references from Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) to Zizek (2012) and beyond, touching on many salient points in the time and space between. An intellectual *flâneur* of sorts, he can be seen strolling among the intellectual wares and living stores of the world, fully open to suggestion as he selects the very finest (often piquant) ingredients, in order to concoct surprising new interpretations and generative thought patterns (Boje 2011a). Here we explore some early influences in Boje’s work as a segue into discussing his major contributions to the field.

Boje’s creative spirit may have found early inspiration in his father’s inventions. These included a trash compactor, a widescreen television concept, and even a coffeemaker (Boje 2011a, 2014a). Boje laughingly told the story of a day in his youth when he gathered the neighborhood trash so his father could demonstrate the trash compactor for investors. He chuckled as he described the absurdly frantic preparation and how it all came together just as the investors’ limousine rolled up for

the big demonstration. This spirit of innovation, complete with the method of gathering whatever materials are on hand in preparation for something spectacular, has found its voice throughout Boje's writing and his life.

One of the most influential thinkers in Boje's path was physicist and organizational studies pioneer Lou Pondy (Pondy and Boje 2005). It was in Pondy's systems theory class that Boje's storytelling work was first encouraged. Affectionately known as "Leapin' Lou" due to his animated teaching style, Pondy eventually left his organizational systems post and moved to the anthropology department, a change that influenced Boje's work toward a more qualitative approach, despite the widespread empiricism dominating the field at the time. Thus began Boje's own nexus of systems theory and storytelling.

His early exposure to OD was a thorough and rigorous one. He was influenced by Ken Rowland, who taught change management consulting at a time when the topic had yet to gain popularity. Boje was also impressed by the ideas coming out of the Tavistock Institute and National Training Labs (NTL) and from pioneers like Chris Argyris and Richard Walton. Mark Sandberg taught him OD methods such as small groups, survey feedback, and facilitation, including many approaches that remain in common use today.

This training in OD fueled Boje's resolve to maintain his qualitative focus even after he left for the University of Illinois, where the PhD program was empirically driven and consulting clients were less plentiful. Boje's dissertation modeled social networks at a time when these concepts were foreign to most. Working with David Whetten, Boje completed an extensive study of 16 cities and 316 organizations. Whetten had high expectations of his students, perhaps owing to his own distinguished colleagues; the volume of readings that he assigned was extensive, but it resulted in a very high level of expertise among his mentees.

Boje's dissertation modeled social networks at a time when those concepts were foreign to most. Boje found himself "left with creating a story to account for all the significant variables." This begged a more qualitative exploration. David reminisced:

I was out there getting the pre-data for the dissertation, you know. Doing some informal interviews, I would say, with some people in the field and I was flying around the state in a Cessna – in the rain and storm, by the way. Uh, it's kind of a bumpy ride. But, you know, we had the money and I would fly to different cities. I remember walking down the hall with somebody in St. Louis. The guy was telling me that he ran into the owner of the building where they had their offices for social services. And he noticed that the owner of the building was also a guy he recognized that was on welfare, picking up welfare checks, you know. Then I decided that that story was probably more important than the whole dissertation that I had put together. Quantitative only goes so far. That turned me.

Although David is well trained in quantitative methods, qualitative research is his true passion; it is something he has promoted over the years by developing and teaching methods that get at the deeper, ontological aspects of organizational life (e.g., Boje 2001a; Boje and Rosile 2011; Henderson and Boje 2015).

Boje spent his early years as a scholar at UCLA, where it proved difficult to focus on the qualitative work that has since become typical of him. Yet these years proved to be formative for him because the time spent steeped in empirical methods deepened his appreciation of qualitative research and its significance in the context of his own work. This was a powerful mode of inquiry that was destined to be a staple of his future work.

When Boje left UCLA, he started a personnel agency with colleagues, bringing a practitioner flavor to his works when he later returned to academia. Afterward he wrote about his business' early struggles. At first, he and his partners had little success as they attempted to sell printing chemicals. Then, the effort to market the product led them to stumble upon a more profitable business model: skilled personnel placement for the printing industry. They were successful until one partner's financial mismanagement brought about the company's demise. This shift facilitated a return to academia. Boje had always felt pulled in this direction, even when the business was doing well. He published some 30 practitioner magazine articles during that time and was, as he put it, "trying to intellectualize the selling activity." Trade-focused writing gave him access to a broader audience, with more freedom and license in his writing. This experience served him well when he and his business partners dissolved the partnership, permitting him to follow his heart back to the classroom and his research (Boje 2011a).

His passion led him to Loyola Marymount, a teaching university where he found his voice as a qualitative scholar. He first taught three sections of basic management principles for a teacher on sabbatical and soon found his home. During this time, Boje also met his wife, Dr Grace Ann Rosile, who soon became an indispensable part of the work. An accomplished storytelling scholar in her own right, Rosile is Boje's equal, his colleague, and his muse, all wrapped into one. Their shared love of postmodernism, ethics, horses, and storytelling has led to extensive work with native American thought, materiality, and horse sense (Rosile 2002; Boje and Rosile 2011; Boje and Henderson 2014).

Boje listed several European philosophers among his favorite and most influential authors. Exposure to Edmond Husserl's work as a Ph.D. student set him on the path toward phenomenology. William Fredrick Hegel's work inspired an emergent dialectical model of consulting. Early exposure to these thinkers in particular laid the foundation for an insightful approach to postmodernism, always tied back to ethics; contemporary students of Boje's are all familiar with the likes of Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Mikhail Bakhtin, John Dewey, and more recent thinkers like Bruno Latour and Henri Savall – diverse scholars whose perspectives are honored pieces of a much larger puzzle. This rich well of influences, combined with Boje's ability to collaborate simultaneously on multiple projects, allowed him to pragmatically blend the most useful elements of a variety of works to construct approaches that are at once innovative and inspired. This is not the stuff of invention for its own sake, but rather a graceful dance of old and new concepts to suit the music of modern story as the manifestation of human organizing.

Building on these ideas, today Boje is working out the synergy between the Hegelian dialectic and the socioeconomic approach to management (SEAM) that is commonly used in Europe (Savall et al. 2008). For Boje, Hegel's work is "not about thesis, antithesis synthesis, but actually a dialogic process toward an improved state."

It fits the word "change," because it's a process. . . the main narrative of a company and then negating that with the anti-thesis so you have a counter narrative or a counter story . . . this is dialectical process. It doesn't resolve in some sort of, "Oh, they're wrong and you're right." It results in endless spiral of negations of negations of negations. [Hegel] equates spirit with reason. . . (as) the coming together of a system and science so that your consciousness is not just responding to intuition, but you start to explore the scientific aspects of it and you bring about. . . a system of observation and experiment and experience. I want to treat spirit as something enlightened in the world, not just science for science's sake.

For Boje, it is the consideration of spirituality where scientifically minded scholars ranging from Karl Marx to Karen Barad (2007, 2011) fall short. As an accomplished critical scholar, he has always asked the hard questions and started conversations that questioned conventional wisdom to elicit deep thought from those open to change.

In this quest for engagement and constructive dialogue, Boje has found numerous sparring partners among his students and colleagues. While he has mentored many PhD students in traditional programs, he has a soft spot for nontraditional students in applied programs, addressing large groups and mentoring several at a time. He has a knack for attracting (and keeping) a variety of students from all walks of life and openly praises their willingness to consider their professional experiences in new ways. He enjoys the nontraditional students' abilities to embrace qualitative methods without a strong prior attachment to traditional empiricism. Boje has drawn his inspiration and collaboration from many different sources, gathering the most useful perspectives from each and adding them to the unfolding body of knowledge.

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## **Key Contributions: Breaking New Ground**

It is tempting to rattle off a list of theoretical streams in addressing Boje's major contributions, but to do so sells him short. Is he a feminist? A critical scholar? A storyteller? A postmodernist? Complexity theorist? Quantum storyteller? New materialist? Something else? The answer is invariably, "To some extent." He has spent nearly 40 years examining human organizations through a variety of lenses, and his work has evolved over time, changing course often and spilling over its banks as each new tributary adds to the deluge. Boje is not dogmatic in his approach. He does not ascribe to a single way of seeing and investigating the world, but pragmatically tests out each new perspective encountered, as a craftsman might consider new tools. He has thoroughly tested those deemed worthy of use in concert with his favorites, drawing together concepts, authors, students, and colleagues to cocreate new perspectives and methods. While his personal contributions to the field are many, in terms

of lasting impact, Boje's key contributions may very well be his innovative spirit and the tenacity with which he helps others to make their collective voices heard.

Boje is best known for creating new avenues for nontraditional approaches to OD, changing the way we see organizational storytelling, inventing the concept of antenarrative, and ultimately developing the sociomaterial approaches collectively referred to as quantum storytelling. The latter is a culmination of decades of work influenced by feminism, postmodernism, complexity, quantum physics, and more. It has ushered in a new way of considering OD that is dynamic, inclusive, and inspired – a model for what many have called the post-Newtonian world (Prigogine and Stengers 1984; Prigogine 1996). While Boje's writings alone could fill many volumes of analysis with rich material, we first turn our attention to his role as a leader of scholars, for he is a piper of sorts, playing a tune of his own invention that bids deep-thinking people to follow along and “dance to the music of story” (Boje and Baskin 2010a). Having noted some of the doors he has opened for others, we will then consider a few key concepts for which he is well known.

## Creating Forums for New and Controversial Thought

A true postmodernist, Boje has brought many voices to the chorus of understanding, inviting the inevitable discord in the name of constructive tension, which Bakhtin termed heteroglossia (Pondy and Boje 2005). This inspiration is apparent in the establishment of three distinct avenues for open, scholarly debate: the Standing Conference for Management and Organization Inquiry (SC'MOI), the *Tamara Journal*, and the Quantum Storytelling Conference. All three have been catalysts for dialogue and the unfettered exploration of ideas.

SC'MOI lasted 25 years. In 1999, Boje and Robert Dennehy collaborated to create an organizational theory track at the International Academy of Business Disciplines (IABD). They first emphasized postmodernism and storytelling, later adding critical theory, postcolonial theory, and critical pedagogy. In 2004, the group separated from IABD, precipitated by Boje's colorful critique of the Iraq War just as he was stepping into the IABD president's role. Dressed as a clown, he performed the critical play *McDonald's Goes to Iraq* at a formal banquet. Some members took offense and Boje's resignation followed soon after. SC'MOI continued through 2016 and consistently offered an open, inviting place for scholars to bring critical work and explore topics that more conservative organizations would be hesitant to discuss (Boje n.d., 2001a).

SC'MOI was not the only instance in which Boje acted to create a home for critical and controversial scholarship. In 2001, inspired by John Krizanc's play *Tamara*, he founded an academic journal by the same name. In Krizanc's play, audience members followed the cast from room to room, capturing multiple perspectives of an unfolding drama, but never actually seeing the entire stage. They then regrouped during intermission to engage in collective sensemaking. As such, each audience member's experience was unique, and those who saw the play more than once had a new experience every time. The metaphor was an apt one for organizational storytelling from the postmodern perspective, wherein scholars and workers

alike strive to realize the “truth” by listening to the snippets of stories from management, marketing literature, and the rank and file workers, but never really getting the whole story. The *Tamara Journal* “draws on critical management studies, post-modern organization theory, and social systems theory” ([Tamarajournal.com](http://Tamarajournal.com) n.d.) to support collective sensemaking in organizational contexts.

In 2011, Boje and his colleagues created the Quantum Storytelling Conference. It started as an opportunity for doctoral students from Colorado Technical University to meet face to face with their dissertation mentor. The decision was made for them to come to New Mexico and meet on Boje’s birthday, an event that organically grew into a conference. This small group of scholars continues to meet annually to cocreatively explore concepts tying together various aspects of storytelling, native American scholarship, European philosophy, complexity, and quantum physics in new ways (Boje 2011c; Boje and Henderson 2014). The conference temporarily moved to Los Angeles in 2015, but returned to its scholarly roots in the New Mexico desert the following year, where it remains an intimate gathering of open-minded scholars and students.

These conferences and the *Tamara Journal* demonstrated Boje’s ability to truly embrace the postmodern. He understands and cultivates the very nature of the work as a polyvocal living story web, something that lives and breathes in ways that we can’t control (Boje 2014b). His willingness to create a respectful venue for multiple stories – not just for those who agree with him or present their work in a particular way – is a demonstration of postmodern sensemaking in situ. Boje strategically set the stage for organizational theory development as an emergent phenomenon. He has invited in a collective of actors (in the post-humanist sense), making way for a rich, multifaceted experience to emerge, inspire, and then dissipate when the time is right (Latour 1999).

## **Key Theoretical Contributions: Bojean Storytelling and Antenarrative, Paving the Way for Quantum Storytelling Theory**

Apart from his role as a leader of scholars and deep thinkers of all kinds, Boje may be best known for his overall approach to storytelling, the concept of antenarrative and the nascent body of work known as quantum storytelling theory (QST). In each case, we see Boje’s ability to, as Isaac Newton first suggested, “stand on the shoulders of giants” to see further than his contemporaries, always honoring the dynamic, unbounded nature of organizational life without imposing a singular interpretation on the scene.

### **Bojean Storytelling**

For Boje, storytelling is where the complexity of human organizations emerges. This is where the unfolding process of aggregate sensemaking comes out in all of its



messy, unedited truth. Boje and his colleagues explore OD in ways that emphasize sociomateriality and organic change, boldly questioning how we bound the systems we study and whose voices are heard and honored (Boje and Baskin 2010a). Beginning where general systems theory and living systems theory left off, Boje and his colleagues tend to employ storytelling as a medium for illuminating complex adaptive systems (CAS) behaviors in human organizations and social networks (Pondy and Boje 2005; von Bertalanffy 1969; Boje and Baskin 2010a; Wakefield 2012). For Boje, organizations are best understood through the stories told by their members – all of their members, not just those residing in the C-suite. Such an approach denotes a decidedly postmodern view. Yet the most interesting aspect of Bojean storytelling is not its polyvocalism, but rather its multifaceted fluidity. Here we not only take multiple perspectives into account but begin to explore the ways that those perspectives shift over time as the product of cocreative sociomaterial enactments.

Here is the notion of the living story web, where stories emerge and dissipate at will in the context of a greater organizational perspective that is decidedly fluid (Boje 2001b, 2008, 2011c, 2014c; Boje and Baskin 2010a, 2011; Boje and Wakefield 2011; Letiche and Boje 2001). Boje entreats modern scholars to see an organization's collective story as constantly changing, driven by myriad influences in ways that are reminiscent of Lewin's (1951) famous force field diagrams. Working with this kind of understanding can be difficult for many leaders, as the informal power structure gains importance and we are forced to accept that one can never completely control or contain what goes on in any organization. Organizational storytelling is a multifaceted, living, breathing thing that accepts the artful influence of responsible, aware leaders but aggressively rebels against those who would insist upon ownership and control.

Boje has called this way of seeing organizations "systemicity," wherein not only the stories, but the very fabric of the organizations themselves, are viewed as constantly changing, expanding, and contracting to redefine institutional boundaries (which are contrived, anyway). This continual dance of emergence and dissipation occurs in a sometimes unpredictable, multifaceted response to (and influence of) environmental factors and the development of internal living story webs (Ashby 1958; Boje 2008; Boje and Wakefield 2011; Wakefield 2012). He highlighted the difference between a dominant narrative (often a top-down idea of the organizational story) and organic, grassroots manifestations of organizational life (Boje and Baskin 2011), suggesting an analytical approach that does not presume absolute knowledge of the system itself or even the ability to map it with any accuracy. Storytelling inquiries such as this entreat one to "start where you are," perhaps at the middle or even off to one side, and work outward from the starting point in order to increase understanding. This type of approach is decidedly at odds with reductionist thinking, making it a hard pill for many to swallow. Such an approach requires one to accept that the analysis is never complete; the system changes faster than one can make sense of it, creating an experience akin to cleaning a house with small children

following behind the broom to drop new crumbs. Despite the unsettling sense of never being complete, which vexes many scholars and terrifies most practitioners, such approaches are ideally suited for the development of an ethics of care in the context of today's uber-connected organizations – Boje's ultimate aim.

## Antenarrative

A thorough understanding of systemicity and its analytical approaches is heavily reliant on the concept of "antenarrative," a term Boje coined in 2001. Antenarrative is "storytelling 'before' the narrative takes the form of BME (beginning-middle-end) storytelling, to include 'bets on the future'" that occur in real time as sensemaking unfolds (Boje 2014b, p. xxi). The term itself begs the question, "What is happening outside of the accepted version of 'truth' that is explicitly or implicitly approved by designated leaders?" Just as one often passes through an anteroom before entering a meeting space, the antenarrative is the entrée to a lived experience of what Ken Baskin (2008) refers to as "storied spaces."

Antenarrative as a concept legitimizes the speculative nature of storytelling beyond the privileged voices of those considered "in the know," to capture a more egalitarian perspective – one that remains fluid and defies any attempt to solidify it. For when we record antenarrative, we transform it into narrative, confining it to the printed page and preventing its further unfolding. The act of writing, even writing that is done with great respect for polyvocalism and the interplay of multifaceted sensemaking, privileges and legitimizes one perspective. Once this is done, the written account is no longer a reflection of antenarrative. It ceases to grow and becomes a limited narrative itself, albeit a generative one. Each frozen account that attempts to corner the market on "truth" is ultimately subsumed and ends up becoming a part of the greater antenarrative of the organization. Antenarrative likes to be acknowledged but it will not be tamed.

Boje's development of antenarrative as a concept extends beyond its discovery to include an extensive body of related work. Of particular use to those who would employ the concept in practice is the development of a taxonomy of antenarratives (Boje 2011d, e). Boje (2011e) describes four types of antenarratives: *linear*, *cyclic*, *spiral*, and *rhizomatic*. Linear narrative is described as having an arc, a beginning middle and end, often following a set, predictable path. Cyclic antenarrative is the stuff of seasonal repetition, akin to the rise and fall of dynasties in the Chinese view of history. Building on cyclical antenarrative, spiral antenarrative is more fractal, with self-similar patterns repeating as part of a larger arrangement of directional growth that might be considered progression toward a Hegelian absolute were it not for the way the spirals emerge and dissipate at will to create updrafts and downdrafts in organizational life. Finally, rhizomatic antenarrative spreads like strawberry plants or sumac, with widespread influence owing to unseen root structures that support what might appear to the casual observer as unrelated occurrences of a particular

type of story. This bold conceptualization of story as something more than an accepted tale of organizational Being (capitalized after Heidegger's use of the term) has had profound effects on the consulting industry, forcing a deeper reckoning of the subtle undercurrents in organizational life.

The idea of a living, breathing organizational story that legitimately exists at all levels flies in the face of control mechanisms and corporate storytelling that consistently emphasize an idealized "brand," instead demanding a more open, ethical accounting (see, e.g., Jørgensen and Boje 2009, 2010). To analyze antenarrative is to get at the unspoken truths of organizational experience as it unfolds, creating a snapshot of the tide as it comes in, but never adequately capturing the salt taste and unruly nature of the deluge as it knocks you down and floats you back up to the surface.

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## **New Insights: Quantum Storytelling Theory**

Boje is decidedly critical of the notion that living systems theory and complexity are mere metaphors for the unfolding of human organizations, which he perceives as sociomaterial fractals in and of themselves (Boje 2011d; Henderson and Boje 2015). To that end, he has spent decades cultivating an awareness of organizational life as an unfolding process of time, space, materiality, and a deeper spiritual drive.

Boje's nascent work on quantum storytelling theory (QST) represented his boldest and most comprehensive move yet. Building on decades of work to capture antenarrative from a postmodern, human perspective, it takes the work in a decidedly posthumanist direction. Quantum storytelling theory offers a more comprehensive answer to the limitations of prior theories, including living systems theory (LST) and general systems theory (GST), as well as complexity (Boje 2011c). It is consistent with sociotechnical systems theory (STS), the French socioeconomic approach to management (SEAM), and agential realism, all of which constitute important steps toward blending social and material factors (Trist 1981; Savall et al. 2008; Barad 2007). Building on these perspectives, Boje shares Bennet's (2010) understanding of what she calls "thing power" and contextualizes it in a cocreative space of emergent and dissipative story that is at once tangible and unseen, spoken and tersely told, and always as dynamic as antenarrative itself. Here assemblages of people and things, akin to what Latour (1999) calls collectives, interact dynamically to constitute a sociomaterially constituted ontology of the dynamic becoming, Being, and dissipation of the modern organization.

Boje's early works gave us a springboard for understanding organizational storytelling, turning from the mechanical models of the past and embracing LST and complexity-inspired notions. They taught us to view storytelling as "the currency of the realm," the medium of exchange that makes the complexity of human organizing visible to the casual observer (Boje 2008). Building on these concepts,

Boje has continued to add to the body of knowledge in ways that help scholars and practitioners embrace change by accepting the fluid nature of organizing processes. This new understanding is best examined by further exploring QST. A succinct description of quantum storytelling theory is perhaps premature, as at the time of this writing, many scholars are working to flesh out its meaning, drawing from various streams. Yet its promise merits a partial explanation herein.

QST is a line of inquiry that addresses the ways storytelling in organizations has changed since the widespread acceptance of quantum physics and the philosophical shift that entails. The post-Newtonian world suggested by Prigogine and Stengers (1984) was only the beginning, as the world of human activity has become increasingly dynamic and interconnected. As the millennials come into their own, the prevailing thought patterns will be those of digital natives for whom quantum computing is a given and space travel is a “bucket list item,” no more unrealistic than their parents’ dreams of visiting Tahiti. This world necessitates new ways of understanding organizations, ones that address virtual and hybrid teams and are attuned to ways of Being that are at once material, social, and spiritual. (Note: Being is capitalized after Heidegger (1962) to indicate something closer to the German term *Dasein*, in lieu of mere presence or existence.)

For Boje, the major global paradigm shift that is underway has necessitated an ontologically grounded, ethical approach that is at once rich in its depth and pragmatic in its applications (Boje 2014b).

We need methodology – empirical methodology that tracks non-linear processes – so when we’re forgetting that we have a linear understanding of reality and we apply all these linear methodologies, we’re really doing a disservice to the nature of Being.

Boje and his colleagues suggested that quantum-inspired views of time, space, and matter, and even the metaphysical implications of modern science have a place in our understanding of modern organizational theory and practice (Boje and Henderson 2014). Taking a cue from Barad (2007), Strand (2012), and others, Boje stressed “intra-penetration of storytelling, a particular domain of discourse, and materiality (Boje 2011b, p. 1).” The flexibility offered by sociomaterial perspectives that address dynamic *timespacemattering* and go so far as to legitimize the role of spirituality in organizational life made for fertile ground in Boje and his colleagues’ efforts to understand the realities of modern organizational storytelling (Boje and Henderson 2014).

This emphasis of the interplay between time, space, materiality, and spiritual elements shifts our understanding from one born of positivistic scientific inquiry – which can be limiting in terms of an ethics of care – toward an understanding grounded in lived experience and meaning-making as an unfolding, nonlinear process.

We just try to escape into the millennial generation of cellphones and iPhones and iPads and iBooks and whatever “i” you want to do; then we can get detached and, in a Hegelian sense, alienated from Being, and alienated in two directions: one in our own inner consciousness,

and secondly in our encounters with spirit of the earth...that agential cut as Barad (2007) calls it. There [are] other ways of cutting those relationships or non-dualizing them.

This polyvocal perspective moves beyond dualistic thinking (us vs. them), towards something Boje has said he feels is better suited to the modern world. Given that even our most contrived human behaviors are fractal in many cases, quantum storytelling opens the way to understanding a multidimensional, multi-fractal way of seeing organizing processes (Henderson and Boje 2015; Henderson 2015). This is terra incognita, fertile ground for the creative and inspired thinking that has characterized Boje and his ilk.

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## Legacies and Unfinished Business

When asked about the future of OD, Boje's suggestions pointed toward a more truthful, inclusive representation of organizational narratives. He continues to expand QST and to examine organizing processes as sociomaterial fractals (Boje 2015; Henderson and Boje 2015), expanding these ideas with insights from the European SEAM approach (Savall et al. 2008) and a host of other sources. Ever the prolific scholar, he is typically working on at least five writing projects with a variety of collaborators at any given time. Contributors in this area include Coppedge, DePorres, Gladstone, Henderson, Hockenberry, Littlebear, McCaleb, McCulloh, Rosile, Saylor, Strand, Tisby-Cousar, Turunen, and many others. His call is to embrace deeper understanding through ontological ways of knowing, something that has fundamentally influenced scholars and practitioners at multiple universities. These activities highlight Boje's long-term effort to address socially accepted dominant narratives that may be less than truthful if further investigated. (For example, Boje et al. (2005b) offers a detailed analysis of Enron's use of theatrics to deceive shareholders.)

A powerful advocate inside and outside of academia, Boje has shown no sign of resting on his laurels. In addition to his full-time position at New Mexico State University (NMSU), he is actively engaged in the material storytelling lab at Denmark's Aalborg University and its New Mexico affiliate, the Embodied Restorying Processes (ERP) Laboratory. He is actively involved in (and, at the same time, critical of) the movement toward greening business and universities, concerned that the "triple bottom line" (people, planet, and profit) may lend itself toward what is commonly known as *greenwashing*. When *greenwashing*, organizations seek out positive press but don't always commit to "walking the talk" behind closed doors, something Boje finds disturbing. At NMSU, he chairs the sustainability committee and is heavily involved in greening the curriculum to include work on creating a school of sustainability with living laboratories in the city of Las Cruces, NM. He also advocates for increased institutional support for qualitative research to include more thorough training and emphasis on the more difficult seminal texts that are often neglected in the process of educating scholars. Boje remains actively

engaged in the community, and a host of topics speak to his sense of justice and openness.

This sense of justice is further seen in his work with disenfranchised war veterans. Boje is a certified provider of Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) methods, works extensively with post-traumatic stress disorder sufferers, and has formed a self-sustaining veterans' theater project. Having served in the Vietnam Conflict himself, Boje is able to connect with those who return from combat and find themselves homeless, unable to get needed medical care and struggling against addiction.

Half the veterans in this state – we don't even know who and what they are – they just disappear after military service. Then the other half try to register and most of them have their claims rejected; then they give up. Eventually, they join veterans' organizations and they start working for social justice. But it's a long route.

The work includes not only therapeutic measures but helping those who have served in the military and find themselves disenfranchised to earn their own money and deal with the material realities of their situation.

In support of these projects, Boje has further expanded his audience beyond academia through blogging, film, and extensive workshops. Issues highlighted on his website, [www.veteranstheater.com](http://www.veteranstheater.com), include widespread addiction to "spice," synthetic marijuana, in the homeless camps, using sand play to assist veterans' efforts to overcome past traumas for more positive outcomes, and ongoing efforts to create a tiny house community. EAGALA methods and more are being expanded through the Legacy Ranch project, as well (Boje 2015). These efforts offer a small taste of Boje's dedication to making theory practical in a very real, concrete sense.

Ultimately, Boje's legacy will likely be a blend of the organizations and opportunities he has created for others, mixed with his theoretical works (completed publications and those yet to come). These contributions will continue to be expanded for years to come by the very long list of scholars, practitioners, and friends whose lives he has touched. The application of storytelling to bigger social contexts for greater impact gives Boje a sense of satisfaction going forward.

He has accomplished much in the four decades of work to date, but by all indications, Boje is really just getting started. To spend time with Boje is to become a true student of the world, a postmodern listener whose ears are ready to receive ancient and scholarly wisdom blended with the raw, lived experience of those who exist both inside and outside of the system. He forces us to consider perspectives that push us beyond our comfort zones but ultimately make for a more just world.

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## Conclusion

To give full consideration to the works of David Boje is to explore vast oceans of content ranging from the ancient Greeks to modern thinkers. While he has contributed many works in the categories of storytelling, complexity, feminism, post

modernism, and post humanism, what makes Boje impactful as a scholar is his uncanny ability to pragmatically draw from a plethora of sources to engage in collaborative sense-making that is consistently groundbreaking if not controversial. Always ahead of his time, ever open to new ways of seeing the age-old problems that characterize our field, Boje is and will always be an inspiration and a friend of those who would seek to expand their minds and understand Being from a deep, authentic place. David Boje is truly a Storyteller for the Post-Newtonian era and a catalyst for change on many fronts.

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## Further Reading

- To suggest that a student “read Boje,” is to offer up a lifetime of possibilities, for his books, articles, chapters, films and speeches are extensive, and he tends to create new material faster than the most avid reader can digest it. To that end, here we recommend an article considered to be a major turning point in his career, the author’s all-time favorite, and two of Boje’s personal favorite “Boje books” as an entrée to understanding some key elements of the work.
- Boje’s 1991 Administrative Science Quarterly article about storytelling at an office supply company was groundbreaking. It ushered in a line of inquiry that replaced dominant organizational narrative as put forth by management, with a clearer picture of what is going on—one tied to the voices heard around the water cooler and elsewhere (Boje, 1991).
- His 2008 book *Storytelling Organizations* is a noteworthy addition, as it expands the learning to explore archetypal organizational narratives complete with examples from the likes of McDonald’s and Nike (Boje, 2008). Here, Boje’s explorations of organizational attempts to harness and shape public perceptions are highly critical of the manipulation of story for marketing purposes (Also see: Boje et al., 2005a).
- Boje has named *Being Quantum: Ontological Storytelling in the Age of Antenarrative* and *Storytelling Organizational Practices: Managing in the Quantum Age* as some of his personal favorites (Boje and Henderson, 2015; Boje 2015). The first is an edited collection of essays contributed to by participants in the annual Quantum Storytelling Conference. It explored OD through a lens of *timespacemattering*, a term which denotes the inseparability of time, space, and matter in the dynamic unfolding of organizational reality, and spirituality, building on the works of Barad (2007) and others. The second of these books, which appeals to Boje most as an author, addressed the practical aspects of storytelling in organizations. This is where he found his most complete expression, shining a light on sustainability through storytelling, spirit and simplicity. Boje’s current understanding is deeply spiritual; here, he openly shared the experience of bringing his authentic self to the writing to help make sense of the day-to-day storytelling of our organizations. These two works captured the essence of an emergent stream of theory and reflected the generosity with which Boje shared the spotlight with his students and colleagues to contribute to the unfolding body of knowledge as a living story web in its own right.
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