

# **DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF STORY**

**Understanding Human Behavior through the  
Integration of Storytelling and Complexity Thinking**



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## Understanding Human Behavior through the Integration of Storytelling and Complexity Thinking

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*Edited by*

David M. Boje and Ken Baskin



**EMERGENT**<sup>TM</sup>  
P U B L I C A T I O N S

3810 N 188th Ave  
Litchfield Park, AZ 85340

The painting on the cover, "No Dancing," is the work of Jim Brossy, one of the foremost artists in the School of Crackpot Realism.

*Dance to the Music of Story: Understanding Human Behavior through the Integration of Storytelling and Complexity Thinking*

Edited by: David M. Boje and Ken Baskin

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We dedicate this book to Grace Ann Rosile and Martha Aleo, who not only make us dance, but taught us the music of storytelling. We thank all the members of the conference on *Complexity and Storytelling*, and the authors who came forward to contribute their chapters to this book.

*David Boje and Ken Baskin,*  
December, 2010

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

### WHO DANCES TO WHAT MUSIC?

The title of the book you're reading was tossed out as a casual remark during a conference in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in October 2006. Our purpose there was to explore how integrating the studies of storytelling and complexity thinking would illuminate human behavior, especially in organizations. In this book, several of the participants at the conference, and a few others, have begun exploring this approach to understanding the process by which people understand their world as stories and then enact those stories in order to adapt to a continually changing environment. In our introduction, we will describe the conference, then, explain the two reasons that we chose the title *Dance to the Music of Story*: First, our approach is a "dance" between two fields, storytelling and complexity thinking, which may seem strange dance fellows; second, integrating these fields suggests that human behavior can be profitably viewed as the complex dance people do to the "music" of their stories.

### THE STORYTELLING AND COMPLEXITY CONFERENCE IN LAS CRUCES NEW MEXICO

In October 2006, Ken and David hosted a storytelling and complexity conference in Las Cruces, New Mexico, which Kaylynn Twotrees joined them in facilitating. Participants included doctors, nurses, hospital and clinic administrators, community activists, consultants and academics, a corporate librarian, an agency system modeler, government and private sector managers, and some tribal people. These inquirers came from the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Holland and Sweden.

In preparation for the event, we were tossing around ideas and processes in three areas: Socratic Circle, Talking Stick Circle, and Anecdote Circle. (Before the conference Khadija Al Arkoubi put together a Table comparing Socratic Circle, Kaylynn's Talking Stick Circle, and Snowden's Anecdote Circles, an abbreviated form of which is included below.) We focused on Socratic and Talking Stick Circles. Ken sent out a flyer, a call for participants, stating that initially the concept of the Socratic Circle was articulated by Hugo Letiche to describe the 1999 Institute for the Study of Coherence and Emergence (ISCE) workshop on complexity in national healthcare systems. Copeland (2005) has also used Socratic Circles to foster critical and creative thinking in middle and high schools. To give Hugo something to react to, we set Socratic Circle in play using Copeland's format.

We facilitators wanted to create some kind of sacred space for the storytelling. Instead of a Talking Stick, Kaylynn passed a black, shiny rock, she found on her

early morning walk. We wanted to do some things different from what people had done before. We thought this might be some combination of Talking Circles, enacted partly in the Native way, and Socratic Circle. Our idea was simple enough. Do a couple of processes that most people were unfamiliar with, and not with too much structure or discipline. Just enough improvisation of them to let the freewheeling, co-generative processes of play and curiosity kick in.

After doing some smudging, a Native American purification ritual, people voluntarily coming up for smudging, or not, the smudge stick did not get put all the way out. It flared, and smoked, and by the time, people noticed, we had inconvenienced some folks with allergies. David dressed in Indian garb the first day, and that plus the smudging, and sharing in a circle, by passing a black rock, combined to make some Europeans and perhaps some others from U.S. and Canada, mighty uncomfortable.

Like Plato's dialogue, the Socratic Circle begins with individuals stating their positions so that the group can explore those positions and learn as much as possible from them. Unlike Plato's dialogues, *all* members of the group are encouraged to questions each other and share their experience. The intent is to yield a Bakhtinian polyphonic dialogic. And Socratic Circle supposedly eliminates the authority of "experts" so that all participants have the opportunity to interact and learn from each other through questioning (Copeland, 2005). Ideally, according to Copeland, the workshop will allow participants to share their perceptions so that the group can evolve a variety of understandings.

We did not find much of this to be the actuality of what happened at the conference or in its aftermath, as authors doing chapters sorted out their sensemaking. We will return to our living stories of the conference, after telling you more about the dance of storytelling and complexity.

During the third Socratic circle event (Day Two), Terrence Gargiulo remarked that complexity and storytelling, is like a "dance to the music of story." We all had one of those ah-ha moments, but did not have much of a clue what to make of the phrase, although we all recognized that storytelling has ritual implications, a kind of dance.

From the beginning the organizers had hoped that a book of essays would emerge from the workshop experience. You are holding that book—or a Kindle version of it—in your hands.

## THE DANCE OF STORYTELLING AND COMPLEXITY THINKING

The main contribution this book makes is to bring complexity thinking into a relationship to storytelling, in which each illuminates the other in a theoretical construct with which we can better understand human behavior. Here we theorize storytelling as much more than structuralist content or an entertaining performance. Rather we understand the interactional, behavioral, and storied social space of storytelling to contain dynamic acts of agency. Sometimes storytelling can change social interaction, and transform it in ways that intertwine or, if you will, intra-weave with the materiality of the world explored in complexity science. By materiality we do not mean positivistic Newtonian physics with its billiard balls assumptions of cause and effect. Rather, following Karen Barad's (2007) intra-play of materiality and discourse, we look at storytelling as a process by which human agents understand and potentially transform their physical worlds.

Storytelling is, for David, the trilogy of retrospective narrative, living stories in the emergent now, and antenarratives with which people transform those living stories into knowable discourse. This trilogy is agential, in what we are calling the dance of storytelling and complexity at the level of the social. Narrative can be an awareness of representation, even a limited reflexivity, that gazes at history, and in doing so sets out a material change in what gets taken up as next projects, and a kind of linear antenarrative becomes the next step for shaping materiality. Living story, is more agential, as its interactional and relational, as people construct what Ken calls 'storied spaces' meaning the day-to-day work of making sense in conversation, in textual material reworkings, and gestures that are kinesthetic. This co-production of storied spaces is an orality and textuality shot through with materiality, as we use tones, breathing, scribing, and other mediations in the material world that we as humans are embedded in, and not separate from, except in our own illusions. Such living stories interweave and transform the retrospective narrative world, which is more textually anchored, less appreciative of orality, or interactive emergence. Finally, antenarratives can do more than extend lines of the past into strategies that are straight-line extensions into the future. They can also generate cycles, with stage-by-stage predictions of what will happen next, because it is a cycle one has seen before. Cycles like lines privilege retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Beyond straight and bent lines that certainly do shape materiality, there are other spatiotemporal patterns. A spiral is a cycle that does not return to itself. Additionally, rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) are moving assemblages, antenarratives shot through and through with complex materiality. If this is indeed a dance of storytelling and materiality, where the entities are not fixed, but the dynamic results of interactions of many scales of energy systems (subatomic, atomic, molecular, cellular, organic, etc.), then we are looking at phenomena that are not just

lines or cycles that leave predictable behavior behind, but also rhizomes that are assemblages of antenarration that can move any which way, and even settle into stability, now-and-again, only to leave it and move into spirals. This architectonics is radically different from what Kant imagined.

Our contribution then in this conference, and in this book, is to describe several experiments that were done, that we are calling Socratic Inquiries into the interweave of complex materiality and storytelling triad (narrative, living story & antenarratives of many sorts). Let us look briefly at the storytelling and give account of why we think complexity science, like quantum physics, moves us toward a more dynamic understanding of our world.

Until the last 20-some years, storytelling studies have focused on the apparently stable structure and content of the stories that are so important to being human. Complexity thinking, on the other hand, examines the patterns of behavior that emerge as dynamic systems evolve. They may thus seem an odd couple to pair off in a dance. To make the link of storytelling and complexity, we believe it's important to focus on the dynamics of human behavior. This behavioral nexus opens the door to a dance with complexity thinking, which arose from complexity science's study of physical systems. It means that storytelling has to focus on action, and agency. In recent years, some thinkers, such as Ralph Stacey (2001), have questioned whether it is reasonable to apply many of the principles of complexity science—multi-leveled, complex networks for example—to human organizations. Barad (2007), on the other hand, looks at quantum level complexity as very much related to social organization and discourse.

On the other hand, no one would dream of suggesting that storytelling shouldn't be applied, as testified in the rich literature examining every corner and turn of human life. The question is, what strands or steams of storytelling theory and research might be associable with complexity? A growing body of research in neurobiology and evolutionary anthropology suggests that the structure of the human brain evolved to transform our experience of the world as a more or less comprehensive, symbolic field, especially as stories (see, for example, Deacon, 1997; Donald, 1991 and 2001; Wexler, 2006; Wilson, 1998). This conclusion has been reinforced in the critical role played by storytelling in philosophers such as Bruner (1990, 2002), de Certeau (1988), Derrida (1991), and MacIntyre (1984); psychologists such as White and Epston (1990); legal analysts such as Cao (2004); and economists such as McCloskey (1990) or Akerlof and Shiller (2009). Moreover, a small library has developed of books devoted entirely to storytelling in organizations, including those by Boje (2001, 2008), Czarniawska (1997, 2004), Denning (2001), Gabriel (2000), or Weick (1995).

The ability to create and tell stories, this literature suggests, offered *homo sapiens* the evolutionary advantage that enabled our species to survive as the *only* hominid species to survive the transition from the forests to the savannas of Africa, about 2 million years ago (Turner, 2000). In fact, within 20 thousand years of the emergence of modern humans, our early contemporary, the Neanderthals, which had emerged more than 100 thousand years before *homo sapiens*, were extinct. The evolution of language, the hand as we know it, and distinctly human emotions were all essential to our survival; yet, in many ways, the ability to create stories was key. Stories enabled *homo sapiens* to overcome the overwhelming anxiety of the transition from forest to savanna, Blumenberg's (1985) "Absolutism of Reality," with an all-encompassing symbolic world (Deacon, 1997); to communicate the complex processes required to take full advantage of the human hand (Wilson, 1998); and to shape the symbolic culture that forged their number into tightly knit organizations, even though our history as hominids is of weak social structure—that is, organisms that tend to be "mobile, individualistic, autonomous" (Turner, 2000: 12).

Given the critical importance of story creation to our evolution, it's hardly surprising that thinkers in a variety of fields are exploring its function. McCloskey notes, for example, that "any economist tells stories," but that economists "do not know they are telling stories and therefore cannot distinguish good stories from bad" (1990: 1, 3). Similarly, Noble (1997) makes a case for the emergence of four critical technologies—atomic weapons, space exploration, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering—as a transformation of the Millenarian stories in the *Book of Revelations*, formally adopted by the medieval Church around 1200 CE. The list of fields in which thinkers insist on the vital nature of stories goes on and on: Kleinman's (1987) pioneering prescription for listening to patients' stories as the antidote to biomedicine's overly technological approach; Cao's (2004) analysis of Chinese law as embedded in the "story" of Chinese culture; Bruner's (2002: 103) observation that our perceptions conform to a shape "that fits the stories we tell about it"; or White and Epston's (1990) description of psychological therapy as the individual's discovery of his/her life story and the option to change it.

The difficulty with these attempts to apply storytelling is that they have, thus far, avoided two questions. First, how do all the stories on which human beings depend interact? No one will argue that stories dominate the way we experience events and our lives, our families and organizations, our professions, religions and nations. On the other hand, no serious work thus far examines the way any of these stories shapes others. Second, and related to the first question, what are the dynamics of the relationship between events in the world and stories we form to explain them? Thinkers from Bruner (1990; 2002) to de Certeau (1988) have begun exploring the question, and David (Boje, 2001; 2008) has added to this discussion with the concept of antenarrative. Yet all this discussion remains embryonic, largely because the study of storytelling

has not yet developed a comprehensive model to trace the development of stories in any of these areas of human life or principles that would explain how their dynamics enable stories at different levels of scale to shape each other.

Providing those dynamics is the function that complexity thinking plays in its dance with storytelling. Complexity thinking extends the insight of complexity science—also called “complexity theory,” although it presents no theory—which arose as scientists in a variety of fields, including meteorology, fluid dynamics and ecology, discovered remarkable common behaviors when they modeled their systems with non-linear mathematics. (For an excellent overview of its origins, see Pagels, 1985.) In this way, complexity thinking became the descriptive study of the patterns that emerge as dynamic systems evolve. Complexity thinking extends the principles of complexity science beyond the physical world to human social systems, suggesting an alternative to the Newtonian worldview that has become increasingly discredited over the last 30 years (Berman, 1981: 117-130).

The parallels between complexity science’s model of the physical world and human social systems are striking. Where physical reality is a multi-scaled, interconnected network that includes atoms in molecules, molecules in cells, cells in organs, organs in organisms, and organisms in ecosystems, social reality is a similar network that includes individuals in small groups, small groups in organizations, and organizations in an environment of professions, markets and nations. Similarly, in the world of complexity science, systems at all levels go through an identifiable life cycle: In “phase transition,” their components explore the environment and find the limited range of possible behaviors that work in their current environment, build relationships that enable them to maintain the system in a “stable state” until changes in the environment force those components to break up and re-enter phase transition so that they can reform the system in another, more appropriate stable state. Put a chunk of ice in a pan and heat it. At first it will remain in the stable state of ice; at some point, it will enter a turbulent phase transition and turn to water and remain in that stable state; finally, it will enter another phase transition and turn to vapor. In human systems, one sees the same pattern in personality development—as the child’s personality develops in transition during its first few year, builds and adapts in a more-or-less stable state until adolescence, when it reenters phase transition to form the person’s adult personality. Families (Hoffman, 2001) and large organizations (Adizes, 1988) go through a similar pattern, as do professions such as medicine (Foucault, 1994) and economies in their boom/bust cycle. Other complexity science principles, such as self-reinforcing cycles and “self-organization,” provide an excellent way of understanding human systems, the behavior of which, like physical systems, is determined by the interaction of their parts, while the behavior of the components is shaped by the whole system. (For a fuller examination, see Chapter 4 in this book.)

Because these parallels seem to reflect the way human systems actually work, a number of thinkers have proposed tools build specifically to take advantage of complexity's principles. In the late 1990s, much of this work was in organizational studies, as in books by Eoyang (1997), Battram (1999) or Lissack & Roos (1999). More recent work (see, for example, Midgely & Richardson, 2007 or Tait & Richardson, 2008) draws on already existing tools developed in other disciplines that reflect complexity principles. These principles are also being applied to a growing number of other fields, including sociology (Sawyer, 2005), economics (Arthur, 1994 or Ormerod, 2000), and nursing (Lindberg et al, 2008). While much of this work has proven helpful to people in these fields, a problem remains. As participants in a conference on complexity and healthcare observed a decade ago (Complexity and Healthcare, 1999), there are significant differences between physical and human systems; in spite of their similarities, a mountain-stream ecosystem is very different from a small city. Most notably, what holds the ecosystem together is the dependence of its various *physical* elements on each other; what holds the city together is its intersubjectivity, the set of shared ideas its members hold. This difference is articulated most forcefully in the works of Stacey and his school, for whom organizations can best be understood as the interactions among their members (Stacey, 2001) and organizational culture, a key concept for us, is a "point of control" which reduces "the individual actor [to] a unit in the social system" (Griffin, 2002: 94). For them, the "loose metaphors taken from the complexity sciences," applied to management action produces "old prescriptions in new jargon" (Stacey, 2000: 2).

Barad (2007) on the other hand does not abide 'interaction' finding this too Newtonian (where only separate entities interact), and instead, focuses on intra-activity, and intra-play of discourse and materiality (see Chapter 1). Her approach, which we share, is not merely to put old wine in new bottles, as Stacey suggests, but to build new wine presses and grow new types of grapes.

While many in complexity thinking find Stacey's point of view extreme, the issue is significant: How far can one accurately apply complexity principles to organizations, which are linked intra-socially rather than by physical interaction? If those principles answer the question of *how* human dynamics work, *what* is the substance that holds human systems together?

That *what*, we propose, is the storytelling that provide the intersubjectivity in families and organizations, professions and nations. The dance of storytelling and complexity, "storytelling complexity," if you will, is a partnering of the *what* and the *how*, respectively, that drive the dynamics of human behavior in its intra-activity between materiality and storytelling, which intra-twine in what we are looking at as complexity.

Which brings us to the second meaning of our book's title. Essentially, we agree with Blumenberg (1985: 5) that the great formative event shaping the evolution of *homo sapiens* was "the emergence from the primeval forest's concealment into the savanna," when *homo erectus* evolved about 2 million years ago. These ancestors faced overwhelming anxiety. For one thing, they moved from a forest environment, where the visual field was full and hiding places everywhere, to the savanna, where open horizons stretched in all directions; for another, the instincts their ancestors had developed over 20 million years in the rain forests no longer applied. They needed a different guide to their behavior. We are suggesting that the subsequent evolution toward *homo sapiens* (see Donald, 1991), which was the *only* species descendent from *homo erectus* to survive, provides strong evidence that this behavioral guide would become the stories that our brains are programmed to create so that we can interpret events around us. In this sense, human behavior is a dance, described by the principles of complexity, to the music of our stories.

In this way, one can see the dynamics of complexity principles played out, not merely as Stacey's "loose metaphors," but in the processes by which people enact their stories on many scales. Consider, as an example, Gell-Mann's (1994: 23-25) theory of how complex adaptive systems process information. For him, complex adaptive systems "perceive regularities in the data stream" surrounding them, condense that data "into a schema," combine incoming data with that schema to prescribe appropriate behavior, observe how other entities respond to that behavior, and adapt their schemas according to those responses. Similarly, human beings, both individually and in groups at many levels of scale, find the patterns in the antenarratives they create to interpret events, which evolve over time into the dominant narratives that function much like Gell-Mann's schemas, testing and adapting those narratives as needed. As a result, one can analyze the various storied spaces that emerge—personality, group dynamics, organizational or national cultures, market or professional *discourses*, and the *epistemes* generated by religions, philosophies and science—as the human equivalent of complexity science's complex adaptive systems (Baskin, 2008).

Other principles of interest include the ubiquity of self-reinforcing feedback loops, which result from the way dominant narratives become so powerful that they shape the way people perceive the world, or the difficulty of addressing organizational "problems" as if they were distinct and subject to isolated "solutions." In addition, storied space evolves in the non-linear manner described in complexity thinking. Any new antenarrative, interpreting emerging events, that becomes integrated into the dominant narrative of a family, organization or profession, for instance, has the potential to create changes at many scales. In this way, Einstein's relativity antenarrative, summarized by  $E=mc^2$ , did not merely alter the dominant narrative of physics;



because of its non-linear effects, it has altered world history and the lives of billions of people.

A manager working day-to-day with “real” organizational problems might ask, “So what?” That’s an excellent question. As the last 30-some years of organizational exploration have demonstrated, such theory can lead to significant waste of employee time and good will, not to mention waste of corporate resources. One essay in this book provides an especially powerful, if unintended, answer to this question, Hugo Letiche’s treatment of complexity-oriented experiments in dialogue.

## **WE ALL DO NOT EXPERIENCE THE SAME STORYTELLING, EVEN WHEN WE ARE OBSERVERS TO IT IN THE SAME ROOM**

**T**oward the end of his essay Letiche recounts some of the events from the 2006 conference on “Storytelling and Complexity in Human Systems,” which served as the launching point for this book. He made the commitment to write this section of his essay from memory, even though a recorded transcript of the conference was available to participants who wanted to write about it. We, on the other hand, privilege the tape-recordings. As the coauthors of this introduction, co-facilitators of the conference, read through Letiche’s essay, we were repeatedly confused by several elements of his remembered-description that we remembered very differently. Perhaps most notable is his analysis of what he perceived as the anti-authoritarian, almost Oedipal tone of one exercise in dialogue. Thus Letiche characterizes that dialogue with the question, “does destroying the male authority figure make authenticity possible?” A little later, Letiche stated that, in response to David Boje’s anti-authoritarian comments on the first day of the conference, “Ken Baskin responded by telling that the only good thing his father had ever done for him was to die, making it necessary for him to grow up.”

None of us recognized this statement, even though its strong emotional affect should presumably have triggered at least one of us remembering. So we asked Theodore Taptiklis, who had recorded the conference, to check for the comment to which Letiche referred. Taptiklis reported that the recorded Baskin’s comment was about how the death of his father had driven him to address his own self-destructive drinking:

*What was really shocking was the way his death kicked a hole in my life that I had never imagined...I came to realize later that my father was the source of stability in my life - the one person that I could really count on, and suddenly he was gone...as a result it became harder and harder to control my drinking...*  
(Storytelling and Complexity in Human Systems, 2006: Day one).

It is the circumstances at the conference that make our differing memories so revealing an answer to the working manager's "So what?" Unlike an organization, there was, as Letiche notes, very little at stake. We had no power for people to fight for, no bonuses to joust over, no hierarchic jealousies, no cliquishness, outside of what's inevitable when some people in a group have worked together before and others haven't. We even structured the conference to be as open as possible, a place where, as complexity principles suggest, some new insights might emerge. Finally, no one had to enact their personal story of the conference, as, for example, the participants of a corporate meeting might have to, in ways that could easily lead to conflict. Yet Letiche's internalized story of the conference was very different from what the three of us remember.

If people can walk away from shared experiences where the stakes are so low with such a different understanding, think about what actually happens in organizations. People competing for promotions, pay raises, top bonuses, and the esteem of their colleagues will internalize the stories they create from their interactions differently. Sometimes they will do so innocently, as Letiche did, as a result of having different interests and perspectives. Other times, they will do so for political purposes, to win a promotion, for instance, or get a bigger bonus. To the extent that each party believes his/her story is the whole story—especially where there are power differentials, many people experience no need to doubt their stories—there will be little negotiation over what the optimal story to enact is. And when people enact different stories about their shared experiences, conflict becomes inevitable; opportunities go unaddressed; people feel unappreciated; and overall performance suffers.

On the other hand, helping people across an organization understand that their experiences reflect the stories they have constructed, as much as what "really happened," opens a wide range of possible benefits. For one thing, it enables people working in different departments to recognize that the disagreements they have with each other may result from different stories they tell about their shared experiences. This recognition gives them the opportunity to negotiate their differences, rather than attribute them to the sort of long-running resentment that, for instance, marketing and engineering departments experienced at the Baby Bell telephone companies. Where people in marketing were paid, praised and promoted for selling services, no matter how difficult it might be to implement them, those in engineering were rewarded for realizing the promises of the marketing department, no matter how difficult. The ongoing conflict, documented repeatedly in Scott Adam's *Dilbert*, was inevitable as long as each group was convinced that its story was "true." Negotiations become possible, however, if both groups recognize that their stories are partial, reflecting the self-interest of members in both.

This realization may be even more important for managers and senior executives. Managers who have already turned the circumstances of any situation into a narrative and, therefore, “know” the story are less likely to listen to the antenarratives of either their subordinates or peers who may have included significant details that such managers have omitted from their stories. As noted above, conflicts often occur largely because people with different functions have different interests and have constructed stories different enough to cause that conflict when they enact their stories. A manager who isn’t open to the antenarratives of subordinates who are trying to interpret the behavior of customers or suppliers may miss important opportunities to improve organizational performance. However, a manager who does listen has the option to include details in his stories, which he or she had initially omitted, that may prove helpful. He or she can even enact stories that don’t include reported details, and, if the action isn’t successful, include such details later.

The stakes here are highest for executives. Ironically, their success in achieving the rewards of power, money and esteem can convince them that they already have the whole stories. Yet, in markets changing as quickly as today’s, assuming that one’s antenarratives are correct is often dangerous. One of the best examples may be the story Halberstam (1986: 518-19) tells about Lee Iacocca when he was a vice-president at Ford. Asked, in 1971, by a race driver friend whether he should buy a Honda dealership in Houston, Iacocca replied that he shouldn’t because American auto makers would kick the Japanese auto makers back into the Pacific. Iacocca was a brilliant executive. Yet, the combination of the success he’d achieved with the American narrative for the auto industry and the lack of understanding that his narrative was a story that might not include the most important details drove him to give advice that his friend would later call the worst business decision of his life.

The alternative to “knowing” that one’s story is the whole story—and thus being blinded to what may become important emerging events—is a special kind of humility. With this sort of humility, managers can admit that even the knowledge they applied successfully yesterday just might not be appropriate today. It requires an openness and flexibility to new possibilities that is not often valued today in major corporations. As a result, it requires a good deal of courage for executives to practice this sort of humility. However, the benefits of such an attitude go far beyond the ability to recognize the changes in markets from which Iacocca could have benefited; it extends to every area of corporate life.

In fact, we believe that the ability to act upon the understanding that people are likely to have very different stories explaining the experiences they share may be key to the successful 21<sup>st</sup> century style of management toward which so many organizational thinkers have been moving. This understanding

suggests that any organization will be a network of groups with different stories that depend upon their functional and professional *discourses*, their place on the corporate hierarchy and level of autonomy. As a result, conflict is inevitable, to be expected rather than fought. From this viewpoint, the stories underlying much conflict are a mine of information about what is happening in the organization, among its customers and suppliers, and how performance can be improved. Consider how, over the last 20 years, many executives have deplored the “resistance” with which employees met attempts at organizational change (Watson, 2009). Understanding organizations as spaces with multiple stories being told suggests that the behavior those managers interpreted as resistance may result from people enacting stories they are convinced are valid. To encourage buy-in to such changes, it would be necessary to address the issues that generate the stories and enable people in their work groups to renegotiate new stories. When people change the stories they tell to explain events, their behavior will change. As long as they are only told to change, their old stories will drive them to “resist.”

## STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

**F**or all these reasons, we believe that it is well worth the effort of people engaged in organizational life to examine the essays on storytelling complexity in this book. We have organized those essays into three sections—one on theory, one on putting theory into practice, and one on applying it to different contexts.

The essays in Part I treat a variety of elements of our theory that the environment of stories that people accept guides their behavior in ways that reflect the principles of complexity thinking. Chapter I is unique in this collection, an attempt not to explore what happens when one integrates storytelling and complexity, but, rather, to put storytelling complexity in a wider context. In this essay, “When Storytelling Dances with Complexity,” David Boje and Ken Baskin suggest that the ensuing explorations are part of an ongoing attempt to articulate a post-Newtonian worldview, which has resulted from the scientific revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—relativity and quantum mechanics, neurobiology and complexity science. In particular, they discuss how that emerging worldview has been reflected in the economics of Deirdre McCloskey (1990), the sociology of Dorothy Smith (1990) and the philosophy of Karen Barad (2007).

In Chapter 2, “Complexity Theory and the Dance of Storytelling in Organizations,” David Boje discusses the traditional theory of stories as fixed BME narrative, examines its limitations, and points to a more complex way of thinking about them and how they guide human behavior. In particular, he focuses on the concept of antenarrative, the fragmentary, unfinished form of story by which people try to begin understanding emerging events. The

process of articulating those emerging events is further examined in Chapter 3, Jo Tyler's "Story Aliveness." In her essay, Tyler explores the ways in which such events, the "living world of stories," choose to be told through the sometimes-reluctant storyteller. A theory of the dynamics in which the living world of stories gives rise to the world of action is the subject of Chapter 4, "Storied Space as the Complex World of Experience." In it, Ken Baskin outlines the process through which events, as living story, are articulated as antenarrative and, over time, evolve into dominant narratives in the context of a multi-scaled network of storied spaces.

How one experiences the time in which stories evolve is the subject of Theodore Taptiklis's "Surrendering to the Flux of Time," Chapter 5. In it, he examines the distinction between the traditional Western attitude toward time as a linear progression of moments and time as a single flow, a constant flux. By giving up the idea that one can dominate linear time, it's possible to better experience the dynamic emergence of events and the significance of the stories interpreting them. In Chapter 6, "Simple Storytelling Is Storyselling," Cheryl Lapp examines the tendency of people in our culture to reduce storytelling to storyselling, the effort to use stories instrumentally to manipulate the desires and actions of others. In so doing, storysellors reduce the dynamic, non-linearity of life, making it difficult for either the storysellors or their audience to perceive what is actually going on. Such perceptual lapses should not be surprising in the world of storied space, explains Brandon Love in Chapter 7, "The Illusion." In it, he discusses his experience as a magician, exploring the neurobiological and psychological elements of choice of detail in all stories, and how it drives the desire for certainty that makes the job of all illusionists so much easier. One can, after all, only perceive the details one includes in his or her stories, a dynamic of which most people remain unaware.

In Part II, the essayists explore two ways in which managers and consultants can put this conception of storied space into practice. Hugo Letiche's "Complexity Experiment(s) in Dialogue," Chapter 8, begins with an examination of major theories of dialogue, as an appropriate manner for negotiating stories in a polyphonic world. After that, he discusses two experiments in implementing dialogue—an experiment in Buberian Dialogue and the one in the Socratic Circle that occurred at the conference in Las Cruces. In Chapter 9, "The Dynamic Narrative Approach," Laura Hyatt explores a complexity-oriented approach to research into storytelling in organizations. Drawing on ancient Asian narrative traditions, she explains, this style of research enables practitioners to reduce the influence of their facilitation while encouraging global participation.

Part III examines several applications of the theory presented in Part I. Chapter 10, Jonathan Elliott's "Being-Becoming *Self-ful*," examines the importance of listening in a world of storied space. It is through listening, he explains, that the "little guy" can "muddle though" in an environment of continual change

and can even make a difference, as he listens in order to survive in a dangerous world. A prime example of the survival value of listening appears in Chapter 11, Patricia Reilly's "So there We Were . . .", an analysis of storytelling among U.S. Navy officers. Life on an aircraft carrier exaggerates the dangers that Elliott talks about, and, as Reilly shows, it is through storytelling that officers provide the guidance that inexperienced seamen need to survive. Doug Samuelson applies storytelling for very different purposes in Chapter 12, "Some Uses of Storytelling in Quantitative Social Sciences." For him, storytelling provides the qualitative information that has been absent in quantitative attempts to model complex social systems, thereby suggesting a more comprehensive approach to studying the social sciences. Finally, Ken Baskin analyzes the dynamics that are played out in the multi-scaled network of storied space around us in Chapter 13, "When You're a Gangsta." Using the rise of gangsta rap in hip hop culture as an example, he demonstrates how people with different dominant narratives in different fields of practice, in spite of sharing significant assumptions, can end up driving behaviors that none of them had desired and to which many had strongly objected.

The study of storytelling complexity is still only beginning. However, the essays in this book suggest the potential of further work in this field. What, we wonder, for instance, would a full examination of an organization as storied spaces—individuals in small groups, in departments, in the organization, in its markets—suggest about how it might perform more effectively? What unnecessary conflicts might it enable managers to eliminate? What opportunities for new product developments? What organizational change might it facilitate?

As a result, we want to invite the reader to consider these ideas and, perhaps, contribute to their development. After all, for the last 30 years, the search for a better way to understand and manage organizations has been a focal point of enormous activity. How might a significant effort to understand the nature and dynamics of the stories that emerge in it further this understanding?

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Intervention	Pioneers	Goals	Process	Participants	Characteristics/ comments
<b>Socratic Circle</b>	Socrates & Plato	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching/learning;</li> <li>2. Critical thinking;</li> <li>3. Problem solving;</li> <li>4. Consulting;</li> <li>5. Reflective inquiry;</li> <li>6. Open dialogues.</li> </ol>	<p>Consists of an inner and outer circles.</p> <p>Open ended /authentic questions are asked.</p> <p>The goal for discussion is not opposition or arguments.</p> <p>The circle fosters inquiry and reflection.</p>	Learners, students, people willing to share experiences, employees, etc.	It's about accepting multiple perspectives on a certain topic and re-examining our experience in light of those perspectives.
<b>Talking Stick Circle</b>	American Indian Tribes Was used in their council meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just and impartial hearing;</li> <li>• Strengthening the community;</li> <li>• Collaborative learning;</li> <li>• Realization of the power of shared minds;</li> <li>• Understanding life's mysteries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The leading elder would hold the talking stick and begin the discussion. When he finished what he had to say he would hold out the talking stick, and whoever wished to speak after him would take it.;</li> <li>• Whoever holds the talking stick has within his hands the sacred power of words.</li> </ul>	People deliberating over choices and decisions or sharing history and paths to the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates space for possibilities;</li> <li>• Promotes access and respect for different perspectives;</li> <li>• Fosters relationality, multiplicity, and diversity which include but are not limited to species, gender, race, culture, geography, class, religion, economics, physical and intellectual orientation, sexuality, partisanship and learning styles.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Anecdote Circle</b></p>	<p>David Snowden</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research method;</li> <li>2. Conflict resolution;</li> <li>3. Team building;</li> <li>4. Evaluating projects;</li> <li>5. Change management.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim to develop 2 or 3 stories for each theme;</li> <li>• Do not disagree with participants' stories.</li> <li>• Record using a digital device;</li> <li>• The facilitator acts as a guide not a leader to help the group members tell stories to each other.</li> </ul>	<p>Members of the circle are selected according to the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common professional identity;</li> <li>• Diversity of the group (age, race, seniority, gender, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be retrospective and imprisoned in the past;</li> <li>• Telling them at the end what was extracted (first option mentioned) won't enable consultants to win participants' commitment for the implementation stage. It is about leaving the last word to senior managers;</li> <li>• There is no description of how the feedback is given to participants or how the brainstorming is run;</li> <li>• A lot of weight is given to the past at the expense of crafting a new vision;</li> <li>• Consensus is not fostered but respect to each one's perspective is emphasized. Conflicts are to be avoided.</li> </ul>
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**Appendix 1: Collective Storytelling Interventions by Khadija Al Arkoubi**