

Antenarrative in Management Research

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Antenarrative is not anti-narrative, it complements narrative. Antenarrative is defined as “the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted, and pre-narrative speculation, a bet, a proper narrative can be constituted” (Boje, 2001: 1). Antenarratives are “in the middle” and “in-between” (Boje, 2001: 293) refusing to attach linear beginning, middle and ending. Narratives must achieve coherence, developmental plots required by narrative theorists (Gabriel, 2001:20, 22; Czarniawska, 1997: 79, 98; 1998: vii, 2). Narratives in narratology complement modernist conceptualizations of linear discourse, overlooking the fragmented and unformed antenarrative process that accomplish intriguingly different communicative purposes. Antenarrative is rhizomatic flight continuing as long as there is context left to reterritorialize (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Critical Antenarratology is defined as *in situ* interrogation or inquiry into relationships between narrative coherence and antenarrative nonlinearity, between storyteller and expositor, and between researchers and researched. Storytelling is not just about linearity or non-linearity; it is both, and an interrelationship narrative and antenarrative. In ‘antenarrative’ (Boje, 2001), storytelling is no more than a bet, a scrawny pre-story that Latour (1996: 119) calls a “whirlwind.” Latour (1996: 118) argues there is a difference between the linear narrative *diffusion* model (narratives that erupt fully formed in the mind of Zeus) and the non-linear *whirlwind* model, what we call antenarrative. Looking at both models in the same story space of complex organization is a collaborative way to proceed. The result is a dance between linear narrative diffusion and antenarrative whirlwind; and in that dance are patterns we can interpret using complexity theory. Strands of narrative *and* antenarrative are interwoven, raveling *and* deraveling, weaving *and* unweaving in storytelling organizations. Critical antenarratology is a method to trace and deconstruct an ongoing interweaving antenarrating this is always composing and self-deconstructing.

The contribution of critical antenarratology to narratology is what living storytelling that is fragmented, dialogically polyphonic, and collectively co-produced. Antenarrative derives its organizing force in emergent storytelling where plots are emergent, contested, and speculative. Antenarratives have five dimensions (Boje, 2001: 3-5).

1. Antenarrative is about the *Tamara* of storytelling. *Tamara* is a play where ten characters unfold their stories before a walking, sometimes running, audience that fragments into small groups to chase characters and storylines from room to room.
2. Antenarrative is a collective memory before it becomes reified into the organization story, or consensual (official) narrative.
3. Antenarrative directs our analytic attention to the flow of storytelling, as lived experience before the narrative requirements of beginnings, middles or endings.
4. Antenarrative gives attention to the speculative, the ambiguity of sensemaking and guessing as to what is happening in the flow of experience.
5. Antenarrating is both before whatever narratology as a method and theory supplements, frames or imposes order onto story.

The crisis of narrative theory in modernity is what to do with the non-linear antenarrating, with polyphonic emergence in the *Tamara* of collective story production and simultaneous action. Telling stories that lacks coherence and plot is contrary to modernity. Yet, people are always working and living in the middle of collectively mediate antenarrative processes, where few accounts attain narrative closure and fixity.

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There has been increasing interest in antenarrative theory and research (Barge 2002; Boje, 2001, 2002, 2003; Boje et al, 2004; Collins & Rainwater, 2005; Vickers, 2002). Vickers (2002: 2-3), for example, looks at how “postmodern antenarratives encourage the possibility that there may be no story to tell, only fragments that may never come together coherently. She combines Heideggerian phenomenology with an antenarrative exploration of multi-voiced ways of telling stories, of putting fragments together. Using in-depth interviews of people whose lives were shattered by chronic illness and suffering, Vickers presents what does not fit into coherence narratives.

Barge (2002), takes an antenarrative approach to organizational communication and managerial practice by focusing attention on ways people manage the multi-voiced nonlinear character of organizational life. Antenarrative, for example, says Barge (2002: 7) “requires managers to recognize the multiplicity of stories living and being told in organizations.” He gives examples of the managerial practice in the Kensington Consultation Centre in London.

Dalcher and Drevin (2003) are studying software failures in information systems using narrative and antenarrative methods. On the one hand, “failure storytelling can be understood as a narrative recounting with the unlocking of patterns or a plot” (Dalcher & Drevin, 2003: 140). A more antenarrative process focuses on how “the reality in failure stories is of multi-stranded stories of experiences and reactions that lack collective consensus” (p. 141). During lack of collective consensus, there are more disparate accounts and perspectives, where webs of narrative and antenarrative work things out.

Gardner (2002) did a dissertation contrasting heroic, bureaucratic, chaos and postmodern narratives of expatriates. The relevant finding is that the quest and bureaucratic forms are cohesive and tidy narratives, while the chaos and postmodern forms are more akin to antenarratives. Gardner looks at the hybrids, how in the same conversation, the narrator switches between, say bureaucratic and more chaos forms.

Boje, Rosile, Durant, and Luhman (2004) looked at a set of eight antenarrative clusters, and their trajectory, that appeared to explain some of the dynamics of various types of Enron spectacles: “Antenarratives are bets that a pre-story can be told and theatrically performed that will enroll stakeholders in ‘intertextual’ ways transforming the world of action into theatrics” (p. 756). “The antenarrative roots of Enron’s collapse go back to its beginning in ways that are rhizomatic and intertextual” (p. 769). Boje and Rosile (2003) studied the antenarrative bets made about Enron, sorting out their causal texture. Was it Fastow, Skilling or Lay, or do we put the blame on general greed and hubris, or say it was those Evil Corporations, something about Enrongate, or what we teach in the Business College. These are competing antenarratives still being sorted out.. Boje and Rosile (2004) looked at the clash of Aristotle’s epic and more tragic narrative poetics.

Collins and Rainwater (2005: 17) study is a “sideways look” at storytelling, the local and fragmented understandings of Sears’ transformation. Storytelling is not viewed as reflection of organizational reality, but as organic and vital constituents of organizing (p. 20). Their significant finding is at Sears there was an overlap of “proper stories: and emergent “antenarratives.”

Implications of Antenarrative Theory

Much of what passes for organizational story is sequential single-voiced, linear narrative. There are several important implications of antenarrative theory for future projects. First, narrative methods can no longer ignore antenarrative dynamics. Second, analyses that refer to a unitary universal narrative miss the morphing of antenarratives and their changing intertextual relationships through complex rhizomatic practices. Third, it is important for future students to look at the emergence of networking of antenarratives in the unplotted soup of organizing. Antenarratives are self-organizing fragments that seem to cling to other fragments, and form interesting relationships.

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