Chapter 2 Leadership is Storytelling Theatre

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Based on Boje’s Antenarrative Handbook proposal – Dec 7 2008; Revised Dec 27 2008

Leadership is needed because so much storytelling patterns are full of cacophony.

Images of Cacophony & Noise of Storytelling Patterns

Leadership can be defined as creating antenarratives of co-generative future out of the living story now-relations, and writing a narrative that shapes history.

Collective Storytelling Dynamics is defined as the interplay of linear narrative, living story networking in the now, and antenarrative bets on the future. Leadership storytelling is a combination of three genres: narrative, living story, and antenarrative (Boje, 2001, 2008).

Narratives are backward-looking (retrospective) sensemaking. Their success and value is giving coherence and order. Western narrative thinking tends to be linear retrospection (Abbott, 1988; Cajete, 2000; Fixico, 2003), putting something complex into a tidy line. There are founding narratives of heroic leaderly exploits, often erasing all the heroism of the little people, as if the leader did it all alone. Leaders with the sword have the power to write these historical narratives, to make history look a lot neater, planned out, and coherent than it was in the day. Aristotle dictated that narratives must have a plot that has a beginning, middle, and end (BME). The problem with Aristotle’s plot, is most of storytelling does not conform to this rule.

Narrative is fixated on backward-looking coherence and petrification. Czarniawska (2004) defines a petrified narrative as the basis of a strong corporate culture, where the retrospected past has sedimented. Similarly, Weick’s (1995) approach to narrative is whole, BME plot, and retrospective. A narrative that is (retrospectively) stabilized as recurring pattern recognition involves the potential problems of reductive and confirmatory bias. In order to make the plotline linear, people compulsively insert or exclude events and characters to abstract (misplaced) coherence. A second problem in

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retrospective sensemaking narrative that Currie (1998) identifies is they petrify (or stabilize) so quickly there is a lack of noticing of the dynamics of living story networking. While Czarniawska (2004) acknowledges Boje (1991) fragmentation and terse narrative processes of change, where storytelling is preferred sensemaking currency of organizations, Gabriel (2000) objects to saying a story is terse, or implied, instead of being worked out in its emotive appeal. A key constraint of narrative is monologism: Bakhtin (1973: 12), for example says, “Narrative genres are always enclosed in a solid and unshakable monological framework.” Derrida (1979: 94) also sees narrative as hegemonic. Narratives put storytelling into orders, structures, coherence, and BME linearity. Narratives interact with living story and antenarratives to form dynamic patterns, and its these patterns that leaders are shaping to change collective sensemaking.

Images of Collective Patterns as Narrative Interplays with Living Story & Antenarrative

Living stories are now-looking (Here & Now) sensemaking that defy BME rule. Living stories form in webs, referring to other stories that must be told to trace out networks of relationship in the moment of Being, that are still unfolding, and not all sorted out. Living stories start and finish in the middle, never-ending, never sorting out origins. Living story seeks to escapes these leaderly narrative models (typologies). Living story is a networking in the unfolding present, where each story is dialogically relational to another one, and must be told to tell of another social relationship, another context. Living stories are often without beginning, and are never-ending (unlike narrative). Derrida (1979: 99-100), for example, treats story more in terms of their reflexivity web of story to other stories. Leadership means intervening in living story networking (Boje, 2001a, 2007a, 2008).

In the Green image at left, a person’s living story denotes or implies (between-the-lines) relationships to other stories (“I cannot tell you this story, without unfolding another story, and another relationship to other stories.”). In the image of the Gold storytelling circle (holding hands is optional), people share the living stories that are unfolding now and here, in their lives. The image at right shows how each living storytelling is a social act of relationship to other’s living story networks. Living stories unfold in the present (now-spective), without traceable beginnings or knowable end. One’s living stories constitute a web of relationships in what Bakhtin (1993) looks at as a dialogical process in the present, in-the-moment-of-Being.

Living story networks are by definition, non-linear (Boje, 2001a, 2007a, 2008: chap 11). People and scenes are networked (webbed) together in three or more Holographic dimensions. “There is no [narrative or linear antenarrative] timeline, the story does not progress, there is no central character who goes out to experience adventures, there is no future and no past, there is only the now.”

Antenarrative are future-looking (prospective) sensemaking that do not follow BME rule. Very few antenarratives are linear (goal-plan-action chains). Most antenarratives are cyclic (life cycles), or complex rhizomes (no stable lines or centers, just moving, shape-shifting assemblages) that keep ripping up linear assemblages (those BME plots).

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7 People Storytelling Network image address: http://blog.imedexchange.com/images/LuckyOliver-1696379-blog-networking.jpg
8 Source of quote on non-linear storytelling (bracketed additions, mine) - http://www.widen.org.uk/responsiveenvironments/projectmanagement/sboard.htm
Ante’ your 'bet on the future!' Chaos does not mean disorder (that's just noise or cacophony). Chaos is not just entanglement to the neglect of order. Chaos is movement whose order is hidden, subterranean, pre-conscious. Its antenarrative chaos of subterranean (rhizome) order, and complexity dynamics of storytelling (defined as interplay of antenarrative, living story and linear narrative). Intervene in the collective dynamics of storytelling with some theatre of leadership is the central thesis of this book.

Currently, there are three types of antenarrative: linear, cycles and rhizomes. These are in dynamic interplay.

Linear antenarrative is beginning middle end (BME) plot structure. It reduces life to the 3-act play (1st threshold, crisis, & climax) of the linear hero’s journey. This BME narrative line is retrospective flatland storytelling (storytelling life reduced to a line). The prospective antenarrative, by contrast, is forward looking, an attempt at futuristic scenario making.

9 Organic Rhizome address” http://io.uwinnipeg.ca/~simmons/images/rhizome.gif
10 Multi-colored rhizome social network:
http://www.jeffvail.net/uploaded_images/rhizomecentral2-768939.gif
11 Rhizome image – sticks: http://rhizome.files.wordpress.com/2006/06/rhizome.jpg
12 Linear narrative image address:
http://www.widen.org.uk/responsiveenvironments/projectmanagement/sb1.gif
1. **Linear Antenarrative:** A simple example is goal setting in planning the future. A (in figure below is the starting point; linear paths branch out to B, D, & H and E, F & G; I is the End or Finish-point of the goal network; each line has a duration number. If we project past onto the future (working backwards from imagined Goal-Finish to the Starting Point A) we have future perfect antenarrative in short and long-term memory: imagining future as completed and reverse engineering steps (backwards from I-Finish) to get there (to A our Starting Point) brings us back to prospective narrative.

This kind of linear thinking in antenarrative (& retro-narrative) is highly

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13 Linear Narrative Climax model image location: http://www.widen.org.uk/responsiveenvironments/projectmanagement/narrative.jpg
14 Linear Goal Path Model image address: http://cisnet.baruch.cuny.edu/holowczak/classes/programming/example_graph.gif
instrumental. It is a utilitarian ethics. It assumes, in linear antenarrative terms, we can know the end (goal, outcome, result) and layout linear steps to get there. It assumes the predictability of ends, cause-effect chains, and root cause location of beginnings. Western managerialist thinking is linear and hierarchical.

In cognitive science, prospective memory a linear scenario (antenarrative) for the future by remembering to take an intended action (delayed retrieval) on cue. Work by Melissa Guynn (2003) uses laboratory studies of simulations to research prospective memory processes: “Individuals remember to execute event-based intended actions by deploying … attentional resources to monitor … target events.”

The problem, goals (futuristics) are disrupted (short-circuited) by storytelling cycles and rhizomes. Next we look at two more kinds of prospective sensemaking, but these are non-linear: cycles and rhizomes.

2. **Cycles Antenarrative**: Thinking in terms of cycles (such as seasons, life or event cycles) instead of lines of events, has been part of indigenous thinking (Cajete, 2000; Fixico, 2003) before colonization by structural-functionalist-linear modeling (Sandoval, 2000; Smith, 1999) that reduces complexity to a flat-land (1 or 2 dimensions on a time-line chronology).

Socioeconomics behaves in cycles, not lines. In above image, late contraction alternates

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15 Economic Cycle behavior image:
http://bigpicture.typepad.com/comments/images/econ_cycle.jpg
with early contraction, bonds and stocks move up and down, market cycles shift. If you try to bet on the future, using linear modeling, you will lose your investment. Cycles have been part of indigenous premodern thinking. Cycle thinking was picked up in modernity (in Enlightenment project), again by reclaiming some classical Greek ideas.

Plato’s Cycles includes Fire, Air, Earth, & Water (see also Native & Indigenous views); Ether, Gas, Liquid, solid; Dry, Warm, Moist, Cold, Passive to Active and back.

One cycle is phase space transitions such as thermodynamics of heating ice, to get water, and then steam. Another example is phase cycles discussed since Plato’s Republic: a pattern of governance would cycle between Timocracy (aristocracy), formation of Oligarchy, the emergence of Democracy, and the eventual collapse into Tyranny and beginning the cycle anew. There are other types of cycles. Nietzsche (1956) theorized that constellation of forces happens from time to time to create an “Eternal Return” pattern. Nietzsche was critical of Plato for making his cycle of governance only flow one way. More complex and dynamic phase transition is non-chaotic strange attractors’ in torus bifurcation (Zhang, Kong, Yu, & Chu, 2008). When an attractor introduces instability (disorder), then predictions of transitions between phase states become uncertain as multi-attractors, noise, and chaotic itinerancy occurs (Sauer, 2003).

16 Plato’s Cycles image location: http://www.artofdivination.com/images/platoneng.gif
2. **Rhizome Antenarrative**: Rhizome antenarratives are nonlinear itinerant processes that do not behave as stable lines or cycles (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 8). Rhizomes occur in nature and in the social environment; e.g. a rhizome in your yard would be crab grass, irises, or in the desert trumpet vines. A rhizome sends out shoots above ground; e.g. strawberries send out runners and form another strawberry plant (tuber) and those form other rhizomes, etc. Potatoes send roots underground forming more potatoes.

Social rhizomes look at covert underground and aboveground dynamic movements, the formation of covert cells. Boje (2007c) developed an analysis of globalization as an interplay of rhizome antenarratives, and two linear antenarratives (road to the top, & road to the bottom). Bougen and Young (2000) looked at the rhizomatic processes of bank fraud and auditors’ attempts to detect bank fraud. Auditors using linear analyses could not detect an already escaping present. Policy prescriptions could not corral the continuous movement of fraud into the future. There was a bank fraud panic in the 1890s and a stock market rhizome in the 1920s, the Enron Rhizome of 1990s, and our most recent as we speak crisis – mortgage-banking crisis? Boje and colleagues’ work traces patterns of rhizomatic antenarrative clustering in the Enron crisis (Boje & Rosile, 2002, 2003; Boje, Rosile, Durant, & Luhman, 2004).

In each of these examples a rhizome formed with a set of covert transactions whose detection even by experts came too late to prevent crisis and tragedy. A proper study of rhizomatic collective dynamics would assess how people keep investing in patterns and ignoring the signals that a tuber, not only can they not see the roots below ground but they are ignoring the aboveground symptoms. Rhizomes are bonded by information you don’t have. The Socio-Economic Approach to Management (SEAM) small business consulting training in rhizomatic patterns of the Arts Scene serves to identify what we call balance points in early detection to disrupt or destroy on-going rhizomatic crisis.

Rhizomes in the arts scene are non-linear. Why? Because as a linear antenarrative prospectively tries to make the future a line path to a goal, there is a tuber breaking forth from the ground. An organization comes into the scene to organize it into lines.

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17 Rhizome black and white image address:
http://www.mciap.org/herbarium/images/rhizome.gif
The Arts Scene resists by forming a counter-organization (tuber), as a non-line, a non-linear flight. Rhizome is not a cycle. The cycles are recurring. The rhizome just keeps extending in all directions, until an obstacle, and then goes up, down, around, or cracks through.

The tubers that form can shoot up from the (cover) subterranean or descend from the visible vines crawling along the ground. The key facet of rhizomes is movement. They don’t stand still, they are not lines.

Therefore, developing antenarrative skills allows for a greater possibility of intervention to disrupt a rhizomatic spread. To disrupt a rhizome or break out of recurring cycle of doom, it is necessary to understand something I call ‘Collective Storytelling Dynamics.’ Antenarrative is a term I invented in the book, *Narrative Methods for Organization and Communication Research* (Boje, 2001). Antenarrative is defined as a ‘bet on the future,’ as ‘before narrative linearity and stability sets in,’ and as a ‘prospective sensemaking.’ Antenarrative is a bet on the future and it’s before narrative cohesion petrifies the past. In storytelling theory (Boje, 2008a), there are three discursive constructions: narrative retrospection, living story networks unfolding in the present (now-spection), and antenarrative prospection.

Antenarratives are self-organizing fragments that seem to cling to other fragments, and form interesting complexity patterns of relationships (Boje, 2001a,b,c 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007a,b,c; 2008, forthcoming). The work has been extended in collaboration (Boje & Rosile, 2002, 2003; Boje, Rosile, Durant, & Luhman, 2004; Boje, Rosile & Gardner, 2007) and inspired additional independent work in the field of antenarrative (Barge 2004; Collins & Rainwater, 2005; Vickers, 2005; Yolles, 2007).

Storytelling brings the divided times of narratives, living stories, and antenarrative into dynamic interplay and interanimation. Antenarratives play with living stories, and revise narratives. Narratives tame and domesticate living stories and antenarratives. A living story can morph into an antenarrative, and end up morphed once again into some dead narrative structure, with a tidy BME.

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18 Subterranean rhizome network image:
http://www.abdn.ac.uk/rhynie/images/plants/nothia/nothia6.jpg
By developing theatre of leadership skills, instead of abstractions about trait, behavior, power, participation, and situation --- we jump Out-of-the-Box into our own living story leadership and antenarratives future co-generativity that is beyond simplistic narrative structures of the past. We get at the skills of theatre and the storytelling you can master to turn stuck in the past-narrative-abstraction back into something personally useful, your own living story in the now, and find a way back to antenarrative future potentiality. Instead of being the embodiment of other’s dead narratives of leader taxonomy, you find your own living leader storylines, and antenarrative strategies to shape collective future.

CONCLUSION
Leadership is theatre, rich in narrative scripts, and here and there, in the living story potential of leadership. Through theatre and storytelling we learn to notice the dance of narrative and story that allows us to inquire into our own ways of leading and following. Narrative and story morph in an unending process. With each telling, narrative fights to keep its way of telling in tact. Story with each telling changes, moves along. Narratives become petrified, too stable, only changing on rare occasions. Stories modify more quickly. As narrative stability sets in, living story is apt to wither and die. Story noticing begins anew. Narratives grow out of fashion, and have to recontemporalize, by reaching out to story creativity. Living stories become forgotten. We can loose our way, as leaders. There is a course of a story’s development, from what is not yet storyable, to retelling it the same old way, to disuse, to revitalization with a new audience or a new context. When a story is retold or a theatre reenacted, people add scenes, characters, and themes. A leader is more effective when there is narrative and story noticing, when there is leader theatre awareness.