

## Echoes of Wisdom: Inspirations from Management and Organizational Theorist David M. Boje

Yue Cai Hillon<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

David Boje's influence on management and organization has been innovative and inspirational. His critical postmodern storytelling breathes life into the field, transforming complex theories into vibrant, dynamic explorations. However, this article is primarily a story of mentorship, from the personal to the field level. David's kind and gently assertive mentorship has inspired students and colleagues to push boundaries, think critically, and develop a scientific field while advocating for social justice and practical solutions to real-world problems.

### Keywords

Storytelling, critical inquiry, postmodern, science, mentorship.

**G**andhi once said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." This quote beautifully captures the essence of mentorship, a transformative process for both mentees and mentors. More importantly, it encapsulates the intentional, stimulating, and empowered impact David Boje has had on countless individuals, including myself, within academia and beyond.

I appreciate this special issue for providing a platform to honor the work of our mentors, predecessors, and inspiring researchers/authors. It also allows us to reflect on the current state of the field and its future resilience. I value the opportunity to write this piece because it motivated me to engage in deep and much-overdue introspection. I remembered my first introduction to David, my initial impression of him as a professor, his ways of challenging my rigid thinking and confronting my fears, and his gentle yet assertive guidance in helping me grow into a more critical thinker. He inspires us to find our passion, follow our hearts, and cast aside conventional norms. I am confident that anyone who knows David, in any capacity, has been touched by his kindness, challenged by his thinking, and inspired by his passion and dedication to his journey of critical inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> Western Carolina University, United States, e-mail: [ycai@wcu.edu](mailto:ycai@wcu.edu)

Everyone who has worked with David has their own unique stories to tell. While some of our experiences may intersect, much of them remain deeply personal to each individual. Hopefully, my story will share a glimpse of David Boje and his work from the eyes of one of his students. This story is meant to honor his significant influence in the field of management and organization theory and practice. Moreover, by reflecting on David's lifelong academic contributions and wisdom, we gain valuable insights into the evolution of management theory from its origins to the present day.

## Mentorship and Inspiration

I first encountered David's work during an undergraduate research project at New Mexico State University. Our group chose to explore Disney Channel's major rebranding in 1997 and its transformative competitive impact on the industry as a case study. During this research, I discovered David's paper, "Stories of the Storytelling Organization: A Postmodern Analysis of Disney as 'Tamara-Land'" (Boje, 1995). At the time, it introduced me to many unfamiliar and unconventional ideas, for example, the Tamara metaphor, the deliberate focus on marginalized and excluded perspectives in business analysis, and the fusion of storytelling and organization into one concept to uncover identity, cultural narratives, and power dispositions.

During my master's studies, I had the honor of studying directly under David. His unconventional approach to teaching management in that first class left a lasting impression on me that continues to influence how I design and facilitate my classes to this day. He integrated diverse experiential learning techniques such as role-playing, theater, and real-world projects to engage students in active learning and making sense of theories in practical situations (Boje & Arkoubi, 2009). He challenged students to question dominant narratives, consider alternative viewpoints, and develop an understanding that reflects organizational realities (Boje, 1991a, 1995, 2008a). This helps grasp the fragmented and emergent stories before they become mainstream ideas (Boje, 2011). I still vividly remember my first improvisation in David's class. It pushed me far outside my comfort zone and evoked a whirlwind of emotions and fears. Later, I came to understand the theoretical foundations and inspirations of David's innovative teaching approach, which draws from Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1985), Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1993), and other critical theorists. Today, I find the emotions and fears useful in my teaching to stay on the outer edge of comfort. Learning requires that sort of uneasiness, but my students just see a knowledgeable and composed professor. I often share personal anecdotes from my life to illustrate that they too can manage their fears and cultivate valuable unconventional skills on their way to personal and professional growth.

The mentorship continued into my doctoral studies. David's scholarly works demonstrate that he is a prolific and inspiring writer who embodies the importance of continuous learning and exploration. I still remember when I was learning to write academically and found myself stuck, unable to translate thoughts onto paper. David would patiently walk me through the process and help piece together my fragmented ideas into coherent expressions. Clarity of ideas inspires us to never stop exploring, never stop learning, and never be content with what we already know. Helping make sense of a broad range of ideas extends beyond his work, as he cultivates a culture of perpetual learning and critical thinking among his students and colleagues. A great example of this is sc'MOI, a conference that David and friends created for

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critical management and organization scholars. Each time I attended over the 25-year life of sc'MOI, the ideas and challenging questions posed by management theorists, philosophers, sociologists, and other critical researchers impacted me profoundly. That impact continued with the Quantum Storytelling Conference that emerged as sc'MOI was winding down. These experiences consistently highlighted the limitations of my current knowledge – in a very healthy way – and underscored the need for a deeper exploration of the unknown. Listening and reflecting, attendees found inspiration to question the status quo, see old problems from new perspectives, and unleash our hidden potential for learning.

David shared the key point on mentorship with his students, a lesson he received from his mentor Lou Pondy, which in turn went back in a continuous academic lineage to Kurt Lewin. No one is meant to be a copy of their mentor because everyone has unique talents and a purpose that guides their development as human beings. Students must be nurtured to develop their human potential to help them find and pursue research interests as scientists, always questioning conformity and convention with the courage to learn something meaningful to their own lives (Hillon, 2020). Pondy's nurturance was kindness, not to be confused with gentleness. He told his students and colleagues what they needed to hear to give them an intellectual push toward true scholarship. For both mentor and student, this push toward purposeful learning requires a reflexive humility to keep us balanced in our attempts to succeed at the larger challenge of becoming human (Pate & Boje, 1989).

Humility in our own learning leads to concern for others. David remains committed to advocating for ethical practices and social justice both within and outside academia. He has taught barefoot to protest multinational corporation sweatshops in developing countries and he still protests to stand up for peace. This advocacy also shines through in his critical analysis of the corporate behaviors of multinationals such as Disney, McDonald's, Enron, Walmart, Nike, and Monsanto. His forthright writing reveals ethical and corporate responsibility concerns, the danger of corporate action driven by profit maximization, and how companies use narratives to shape their public image and control perception. Including marginalized and excluded voices is extremely important in critical research to formulate a balanced understanding (Boje, 1995; 2004a; 2004b; 2008b; 2015) and provide a better sense of the conflicts between labor and management (Marx, 1867). All of this helps to explore complex organizational phenomena and uncover deeper insights into corporate practices and their broader implications.

David not only presents his own thoughts and theoretical developments but also integrates a network of scholars into his work. He goes beyond merely interpreting others' interpretations. Instead, he brings original works to the forefront to reveal their intended meanings. For example, David's research on the McDonald's Corporation was the first project I participated in as a doctoral student. I learned about Bakhtin's grotesque method (Bakhtin, 1981) and explored the grotesque corporate body, McDonaldland characters, and the McDonaldization of the global body. The research drew on Bakhtin's concepts of grotesque realism and the carnivalesque (Boje & Cai, 2004a). In addition to literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, David frequently included scholars in philosophy, social sciences, and organizational studies. For instance, Foucault's idea of power, knowledge, and discourse helped explain organizational dynamics (Foucault, 1977; 1980); Habermas's theories on communicative action and the public sphere illuminated organizational ethics (Habermas, 1984); and Pondy's theories on conflict and systems theory challenged the traditional paradigms of management studies (Pondy, 1967; Boje, 2023).

David employs innovative theoretical frameworks, such as deconstruction and quantum storytelling, to analyze complex organizational phenomena. These approaches uncover deeper meanings in corporate practices and their broader implications. Deconstruction allows for a critical examination of how organizational realities are constructed, maintained, and reconstructed. The process uncovers underlying structures and practices that shape corporate behavior. It dissects organizational narratives to reveal hidden power dynamics, contradictions, and marginalized voices within corporate stories (Boje, 2001). More than just a method, deconstruction serves as a way of thinking that I practice and use to help my students think more critically about the information gathered during strategic inquiry. I was also fascinated with David's integration of quantum physics with narrative theory to study organizational stories. Instead of a linear narrative with a clear beginning and end, quantum storytelling emphasizes the multiplicity of narratives that coexist and interact. It enables a polyphonic and a more holistic perspective on the complexity and richness of organizational life to understand the influences on corporate practices (Boje, 2012, 2014b).

Academia can be distinguished from other professions by its pursuit of knowledge, theoretical research, and educational focus, in contrast to practical problem-solving aimed at immediate, tangible outcomes (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2008; Johnson, 2016). While teaching and service hold undeniable significance, an individual's success in academia, like in business schools, is often gauged by the number of publications, grants, and academic contributions (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Garrido-Lopez, Hillon, & Hillon, 2024). Individual measures can hide the fact that achievements frequently result from long-term collaborations within academic circles, which may be interdisciplinary in nature (Schlosser *et al.*, 2011). Academic metrics can also hide or even discourage bridging gaps between academia and industry. Here, it seems important to highlight that David's pioneering academic work on the storytelling organization actually emerged from his practical consulting experiences (Boje, 1991a; 1991b). Theory came from practice. If we go even further back to his dissertation research, we see the roots of the storytelling organization in the questions and doubts about what exactly can be measured from an academic theory perspective of a living functioning business. While David was conducting surveys and mapping communication networks, people kept telling him stories of that hidden life of the enterprise. Management and organization were much more alive than anyone had imagined and the story was life. I have followed David's example of active intertwined engagement of teaching, service, and research through projects with community partners. Research that addresses practical issues in organizational change and development ensures that our work has pragmatic significance in both academic and practical contexts. Thus, the dominant narrative of academia as theory without practical problem-solving relevance falls apart under deconstruction. We might even say there is nothing as theoretical as good practice.

David's humble, critical, pragmatic, interdisciplinary, and innovative approach to teaching and research has significantly influenced me. His sense of responsibility to his communities has proved central to my personal and academic development. Achieving a meaningful and harmonious balance between the three pillars of academia – teaching, scholarship, and service – is often difficult, but when accomplished, it leads to a more fulfilling life and enables greater contributions to the world around you. I feel fortunate to have found a wonderful academic home at Western Carolina University (WCU), where I collaborate with colleagues who quietly and deliberately embody these educational values. Project-based learning allows us to step beyond the boundaries of a classroom, cultivate a collaborative learning environment that challenges

our students' thinking, and work together to engage as active contributors within our immediate and greater communities. The WCU Boyer model of scholarship invites us to do just that, to step into various roles that do not fall neatly into the traditional separate compartments of teaching, research, and service. Good things happen when we holistically approach our teaching, scholarship, and university and community commitments as one big endeavor.

David's critical perspective on management and organization studies questioned traditional paradigms and opened new avenues for inquiry and reflection. Building on David's storytelling organization frameworks, I incorporated Wilma Dykeman's (1955) watershed model to help students in project-based strategy courses gain a more balanced knowledge of regional dynamics. This spanned from distant history to modern eras, from economic to community developments, from industrial movements to environmental conservation and preservation, and the unwavering values of the region in which the project client or the students' own ventures thrive. This approach enabled students to draw lessons from the past and analyze their implications for fostering a more sustainable future for both the region and their organizations. Dykeman's (1955) use of the term *watershed* captures all of the interconnected human and natural activities that continuously flow from the past to the future on the land drained by a river system. This practical concept aligns seamlessly with David's emphasis on inclusive and socially responsible organizational practices. By integrating Dykeman's perspective with David's framework, we can foster a comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics that emphasizes sustainability and social responsibility.

Thoughts on mentorship that began with inspiring an individual student to learn expanded to caring for a regional community ecosystem. A scholar has a dual professional responsibility to perform daily academic service roles of the job and to engage with ideas in scientific inquiry over multiple years. Mentoring a student to succeed in that world requires direct engagement with all the work of the profession (Hillon, 2020). "Scholarship is a very personal undertaking. Were it not, it would not be worth doing" (Pondy, 1989b, p. 17). Our field is not an abstract collection of facts and theories. It is something built by people, by successive groups of scholars who mentor the next generation. There always exists a sort of double spiral helix set of antenarrative generative mechanisms working at different levels. They can move together to benefit the micro to the macro or against each other to create dysfunctions in the sense of destruction of value or value creation potential (Savall & Zardet, 2008). Life under socially irresponsible capitalism is intentionally and necessarily dysfunctional. Diagnosing and treating dysfunctions in individuals, enterprises, and communities call for a triple spiral helix to antenarratively correct the deficiencies of current management and organization theory (Hillon & Boje, 2019). Thus, there will continue to be support for socially irresponsible capitalism until the people who make up our field learn to evolve via successful mentorship, nurturing learners from the personal to the global.

## Evolution of Management and Organization Theory

Theory arises because we observe phenomena that we cannot readily explain with our current knowledge. With that understanding of the construction process, it is not a radical idea to say that our field had no theory until someone began to question our philosophy of science and, later, the ideological grand narratives that structured social and economic life in the modern industrial era. Our field is relatively young and it did not begin with such questions. The first

issue of *Administrative Science Quarterly* appeared in 1956. The authors spoke of the new field with optimism. They thought that we would soon discover universally generalizable laws of management and organization (Litchfield, 1956; Parsons, 1956; Thompson, 1956). There was a belief in natural order and certainty. This expectation for order never materialized, as scholars splintered into disparate micro-specializations of belief (Mintzberg, 1978) without ever learning how enterprises work in practice (Daft, 1980). Boulding (1958) knew that scholars in the early years had not built a foundation for an applied scientific discipline capable of serving humanity.

Most of these splinter theories can be classified under the schools of management typology and simply constitute variations of how to study the classical organization and its management. The classical perspective combines thoughts from Taylor, Fayol, and Weber. Taylor's (1911) professional management for profit maximization serves twenty-first-century financial capitalists equally as well as the nineteenth-century robber barons of Taylor's era. Fayol's (1916/1949) functions of management for planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling continue to provide a structure for the standardized management textbook. Furthermore, Weber's (1922/1947) concept of bureaucracy emphasizes the importance of a structured, rule-based approach to organization. Altogether, the three classicists offer an economic belief system, the training materials for students, and a simple idealized framework for academic inquiry that never looks too deep. It makes no difference how a theorist identifies themselves within the schools of management typology if they all share the same basic assumptions about the nature of their subject.

Scholars that significantly shaped the landscape of organization theory in its early stages tacitly began their research with the following question: "Given the classical organization and manager, how does one improve factors that affect profitability?" The Hawthorne Studies by Mayo (1933) highlighted the importance of social factors, such as employee satisfaction and morale, and their impact on productivity. McGregor (1960) borrowed Maslow's (1943) positive theory of motivation into management to suggest that management practices should consider individuals to be motivated by a series of needs, from physiological survival to self-actualization. However, McGregor accepted Taylor's worldview in practice, thereby eliminating any real chance of change. He said that productivity would improve if Taylor's manager could just be nicer as he threatened worker survival needs in a workplace intentionally designed to deny human dignity (El Haddad, Hillon, & Hillon, 2024). Virtually all varieties of humanistic psychology, quality management, and organization development and change share this "make the best of a bad situation" philosophy.

Our field was not unique in following this approach to confirm a priori beliefs. The social sciences adopted a philosophy of science loosely attributed to Francis Bacon. The looseness comes from the fact that the social scientific method combines Bacon's basic logic of authoritative induction with generalizations stemming "from imaginary hypotheses and abstract conceptions" (Bacon, 1620/1902, p. 13). Bacon was not actually a scientist, but that did not stop him from imagining how scientists *must* reason their way toward finding the inherent order in nature. Social scientists expected human behavior to follow the order they imagined as well. In contrast, real scientists begin with communal ignorance, "where the existing data don't make sense, don't add up to a coherent explanation, cannot be used to make a prediction or statement about some thing or event" (Firestein, 2012, p. 7). In short, you cannot form a scientific theory before you push through the ignorance to describe, explain, and predict the observed phenomenon.

Such an approach describes the questioners in our field who have always been drawn together by the challenge of communal ignorance. They questioned our philosophy of science, they were innately curious, and they took pains to conduct research to answer questions, not confirm biases or ideological beliefs. Lou Pondy serves as a great example of how disciplines crossed and combined in this communal quest for science. He was a physicist who became a social scientist of organizations by applying a phenomenological approach developed from the convergence of Kurt Lewin's experimental social psychology and the bounded rationality, systems theory, and pathological approach of the Carnegie School's March, Cyert, and Simon. Pondy's mentor, Harold Leavitt, had been mentored by Alex Bavelas, a student of Kurt Lewin (Hillon, 2020). An instance of tacit assumption-breaking from this interdisciplinary convergence concerned conflict. Pondy realized that cooperation was too rare and fragile to be the natural state of an organization. Instead, cooperation only appears from time to time as "a side effect of the strategic pursuit of conflict" within an organization viewed as a theatre of ongoing conflict (Pondy, 1989a, p. 96). Advancements like this indicated the importance of language use and mythmaking in management because narratives constituted symbolic boundaries on rationality that had become theatrical representations of organization reality (Hillon, 2020).

This is just one example of Kurt Lewin's scientific descendants. We have wonderful tools now for learning about academic lineages, who mentored who, and the origins and convergences of different lines of thought (e.g., [academictree.org](http://academictree.org)). The lines from Lewin's mentor Carl Stumpf produced phenomenology, gestalt psychology, experimental social psychology, and ecological psychology. The collaborations and influences beyond direct mentorship connect these areas to Tavistock, the National Training Laboratory, the New School, the Chicago School of Sociology (and its reincarnation at Berkeley under Blumer), and French socio-technical management.

Lewin was arguably the first group behavior scientist that we might claim as our own, even though he was never actually a management and organization scholar. However, he trained a line of students who pushed into supporting areas and he set the model for a scientific approach in his determination to elevate social science into the Newtonian age. We might not think of Newton as an advancement, but our tacit classical assumptions follow the logic of authority backed up by the threat of violence (Graeber, 2015). Lewin's gestalt-based psychological topology constituted a convergence of Newton's laws of motion with the social psychology of group behavior. For instance, Lewin's equation  $B = f(p, e)$  states that behavior is a function of a person(ality) and their perception of their environment is a qualitative and intersubjective image of change described with Newtonian physics. His action-research aimed to determine the force to apply (i.e., vector psychology) and the location of application within the life space or gestalt topology (Hillon *et al.*, 2018). Metaphorically, the concept works on both real and symbolic levels (Pondy, 1983). The fact that it proved extremely difficult to realize in practice did not deter Lewin from trying. Lewin failed to inspire a widespread Copernican revolution in our field, as research typically begins with a theory in search of support and endeavor to reach a minimal threshold for statistical significance while explaining minimal variance. Some individual scholars heard Lewin's message and imagined how they might instead leave "an insignificant amount of variance unexplained" (Pondy, 1977, pp. 27–28).

Critical and postmodern scholars formed the next wave of questioners after the scientists. The antenarrative counter-current to the American business school's classical model originated in the same period. In the twentieth century, critical sociologists, phenomenological psychologists, socio-technical pragmatists, existentialists, and post-modernists joined social reformers

of the nineteenth century. In a challenge to Weber's simple rules of the ideal organization, Simon's (1947) bounded rationality emphasized the importance of understanding decision-making processes, the limits of information, and the cognitive capacity of decision-makers in organizations.

Mintzberg (1975) challenged Fayol's functions with a detailed analysis of management's dynamic and multifaceted nature, emphasizing the importance of informal structures and the diverse roles that managers play in organizations. Savall and Gephart (2019) also pointed to the negative impacts of Taylorism, Fayolism, and Weberism. They argued that these principles can lead to organizational dysfunctions due to hyperspecialization, the separation of work design and execution, and the depersonalization of job descriptions. Hyperspecialization involves breaking down tasks into small and specialized components, often without regard for the technical wholeness of the product. While this may boost immediate economic efficiency or profits, it has several long-term drawbacks. The isolation, monotony, and repetitiveness of tasks leave workers feeling unfulfilled, thereby lessening social, psychological, and technical efficiency. These hidden forms of reduced efficiency produce real, though unaccounted, financial results.

Postmodern philosophers and theorists have questioned classical and modern views to significantly reshape our understanding of how organizations operate in a complex and evolving world. These pioneers of postmodern thought include Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Robert Chia. Once again, these were not management and organization scholars, but their ideas proved adaptable to the context. Foucault's (1977) exploration of power, knowledge, and discourse has led to a deeper analysis of how organizations exert control and influence through established norms and regulations. Derrida's (1976) idea of deconstruction, a critical thinking method challenging the fixed meanings and rigid structures within organizations, advocates for a more adaptable and dynamic approach to organizational processes. Lyotard's (1984) skepticism toward overarching narratives highlights the importance of localized, fragmented knowledge, promoting diverse perspectives and decentralized authority within organizations. Chia's (1996) critical reflection on the field delves deep into the implications of postmodern thought and the philosophical foundations of organization theory. He calls for a more nuanced and reflective approach to analyzing organizational life. Collectively, these theorists have propelled the field into a new era of discourse, emphasizing the critical importance of context, power dynamics, and the ever-changing nature of organizational structures. By questioning established norms and embracing diversity in perspectives, they provide valuable inquiries for navigating the complexities of contemporary organizational life.

## David Boje's Transformative Influence on Management and Organization Theory

David Boje had a solid grounding in research methods before he ventured into storytelling and narrative methods (Boje, 2001). Thus, he thoroughly understood the first wave of scientific research as he was riding the second wave of questions on deconstruction and re-situation of grand narratives. Management and organization seem pathological in that they were designed to harm healthy, functioning human beings. However, it is not easy to disentangle causes and influences. Gephart (1996) notes the confusion about what the modern and the postmodern mean and how their meanings are mixed up with capitalism. History shows us discontinuity in multiple enlightenments, scientific revolutions, industrial revolutions, forms of bureaucracy, and capitalisms

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that came at different times and in different forms to different places. Early capitalism was likely just one of the contributing factors to the emergence of the modern era. Capitalism and modernity are not one and the same. Postmodernity offers a chance to unravel the confusion of meaning and let go of whatever preconceptions are holding us back from transcending our past (Lyman, 1997).

On the way to the postmodern, “we fragmented, we tried to be romantic, to rebirth enlightenment, then became dismayed, and went off to our caves. We found it safer to engage in dialogue than to be thoroughly dialogic. It is safe to discourse with other radicals, much tougher to strike up a meaningful conversation with your enemy, or worse, to realize, there are no enemies” (Boje, 2006, p. 493). We never got to the postmodern. Very few scholars found their way to “the inner truth of that newly emerged social order of late capitalism ... [and] the specificity of the postmodernist experience of space and time” (Jameson, 1998, p. 3). The need to explore the relativistic experience of time and space led David Boje to Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotope. Earlier, we noted how an ancestor in David’s academic lineage sought to apply Newtonian physics to group behavior. Bakhtin likewise found inspiration in Einstein’s relativity to explore the dialogical imagination, how the heroes and ordinary people within a narrative, as well as the external readers or listeners, experience the time-space of a story. Consistent with a relativistic perspective, David’s search for new and viable postmodern roots for storytelling of management and organization in the 1990s led him to the literary criticism movement of the early twentieth century. That is the beauty and power of letting go of classical assumptions – imagination can take you anywhere. The spectacle of Guy Debord, George Ritzer’s McDonaldization, and the Grotesque of François Rabelais all speak of the same thing from different perspectives. David saw how Bakhtin offered a genuine scientific paradigm shift for storytelling.

Under Aristotle’s logic, only one conclusion can prove true. A contradiction means that a premise or assumption in your argument is false. A postmodern contradiction is a glimpse of truth. It means that two things can be true and, therefore, your system of logic is faulty or too limiting of possibility (Jameson, 1984). A postmodern story borders on the quantum, as all possible paths are open without negating any of the past logics, however limiting they may be (Strauss, 2018). The story is emancipatory. David Boje transformed our field by providing a forum for scholars to work through their communal ignorance together. He has done this through *Tamara Journal*, sc’MOI, Quantum Storytelling Conference, and collaborative publications too numerous to list.

The first part of the critical project focuses on freedom or emancipation from oppression. It needs momentum to push us into action toward the second part. “The great secret to freedom is to look as unflinchingly as we can bear to at the myriad ways in which we are wrong, to relinquish the foolish thoughts and beliefs that force our actions into repetitive cycles of suffering” (Ellison, 2023, p. 268). Work has become a way of tending to the suffering without release from oppression. “Most of life is work. We live on a planet where everything needs tending: businesses, relationships, homes, gardens, machines, interests, bodies, psyches. Everything here falls apart unless someone makes an effort to keep it going or improve it. And things *still* fall apart sooner or later” (Ellison, 2023, p. 271). Thus, how can we ever hope to bring about social justice and equality of opportunity, the second part of the critical project? Is the narrative too strong of management as a servant to the alienation of speculative financial capitalism to break the cycle of oppression?

The emphasis on inclusion, balance, and social justice constitutes a central thread in David’s refinement of narrative methodology to explore the role of storytelling in sustainability and

social responsibility (Larsen, Boje, & Bruun, 2021), as well as social justice in organizations (Boje & Larsen, 2007). While David's output has gained significant respect in both academia and practice, like any prominent scholar's work, it has faced some criticisms. One of the main critiques of David's theories, including his own reflections, focuses on their complexity and abstract nature, which can present challenges when applying these concepts in real-world organizational settings (Rowlinson, 2008; Boje, 2008). According to Pondy, objective organizational realities are always open to multiple interpretations (Hillon, 2020). Instead of seeing these as deficits, David has treated them as opportunities to refine his theories, engage in deeper research, and foster constructive dialogue within the academic communities and industries.

What we have gotten wrong has defined us as management and organization scholars. In classical management, suppression and destruction of human potential are intentional because the production function linking capital and labor does not recognize this as the source of value creation. The role of management is to break the technical bonds of cohesion between whole tasks, the psychological bonds between a worker and their capabilities, and the social bonds between workers. Before David Boje met Henri Savall, David's small business consulting course used a classical SWOT framework for sorting interview data. The tool proved insufficient for the task and the framework was breaking under the load of rich qualitative data quotes extracted from theme analysis of interviews with business owners, employees, and other stakeholders. Henri Savall's socio-economic model of management drew on the opposite premise from the classical school. Human potential serves as the source of value creation and management is defined as the creation of cohesion (Savall & Zardet, 2008). The meeting of minds offered a path to action for critical postmodern storytelling to reduce oppression and achieve equality of opportunity through business consulting. Imagine healing the dysfunctions written into the stories of classical management and organization by developing and releasing human potential. David and Henri saw the possibilities.

A deeper understanding of the power dynamics within an organization accentuates the need to amplify all voices within the narratives, especially bringing the marginalized, hidden, or forgotten voices to the forefront and empowering them to facilitate change and organizational learning. "It is easy to become a character in someone else's master narrative. It is more helpful to find your own living story path. It's a matter of finding your voice" (Boje, 2008a, p. 3). David Boje turned me into a curious scholar and helped me to find my own path.

An emphasis on context, meaning, and ethical implications of storytelling constitute important considerations for building on David's legacy in critical management inquiry. Whatever comes next, it is abundantly clear that David has embraced his mentor's advice to find his own path to grace and beauty (Hillon, 2020). Scholarship has become a way of life, the questions have never stopped, and he has found purpose on his path to humanity (Pate & Boje, 1989). David Boje tells us what we need to hear and gives voice to others who would also share their wisdom if only we could listen.

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