

THE EMERALD HANDBOOK OF  
MANAGEMENT AND  
ORGANIZATION INQUIRY

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# THE EMERALD HANDBOOK OF MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION INQUIRY

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
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Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2019

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78714-552-8 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78714-551-1 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78714-972-4 (Epub)



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

We, the editors, dedicate this book to the wonderful people who attended the Standing Conference for Management and Organization Inquiry, which we affectionately called “sc’MOI” which in French means, “it is me.” We were a community of scholars in search of critical inquiry, at a time when the regular mainstream academy did not do that sort of thing. We pushed the limits of critical inquiry to its limits. We were rebellious, often roasting the conference invited speakers. We danced, laughed, and had fun doing inquiry. Each year there were books or special issues of journals about the topics we explored. We appreciate all the wonderful board members and participants in all the sc’MOI sessions. We would like to make a special dedication to Professor Abbass Alkhafargi, who in the early years gave us a home for sc’MOI inside the International Academy of Business Disciplines conference. We were welcomed there, and emerged as our own independent conference.

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# PREFACE

This *Handbook* is based on 25 years of the critical and important presentations of participants in the *Standing Conference for Management and Organizational Inquiry* (sc'MOI). Our collection of chapter authors have amassed a history of our many critiques of the “business-as-usual” narrative known far and wide as “managerialism.” A short list of the top 10 themes of managerialism:

- (1) Efficiency of Taylorism;
- (2) Total Quality Management (TQM);
- (3) Globalization as one more round of (neo)colonialism;
- (4) Technological Progress Narrative;
- (5) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as ridiculous;
- (6) Corporate Ethics (another *nonsequitor*);
- (7) Sustainable Future as illusion;
- (8) Social Constructivism ignores both sociology and construction;
- (9) Grounded Theory (which has no ground and no theory); and
- (10) Action Research (recently versions have no action and no theory).

We wanted some space for more radical critique of managerialism. Managerialism is all the ways of doing managing and organizing that defend, reword, and legitimate “business-as-usual.” For a while we put our faith in critical postmodern approaches, but that turned out to be short lived. We, as editors, realize that the *Sixth Extinction* is now inevitable (Boje, *in press*), and realize that managerialism of our academy, and management praxis (defined as *theory plus method in practice*) has a death-grip on business-as-usual.

The Anthropocene has been declared an official subdivision of geological time, an epoch, by the Union of Geological Sciences. The Anthropocene Epoch is a way of dating anthropogenic climate change, but there is not much agreement. For sc'MOI we focused on the impact of the Industrial Revolution, the steam engine burning coal, and then other kinds of fossil fuel – as kicking off unprecedented anthropogenic changes in the climate that impact species life on the planet. For 25 years we hoped sc'MOI inquiries into managing and organizing would bring about more sustainable praxis. We decided to stop meeting when it turned out that the financial situation of our international colleagues no longer afforded them travel budgets to attend. In our final meetings, we had some inkling that sustainable management and organization is a fantastic myth, a way of pretending to do something while the Titanic takes on water, a kind of rearranging of the deck chairs. All the reduce-reuse-recycle (3R) ignore the

obvious: we continue to use fossil fuel energy even though we have passed peak oil and gas, passed peak water, and are about to pass peak food therefore all these peaks mean that on the other side of the hump, it will cost more and waste more to get at these resources. Any sensible civilization would read the apologetic grand narratives of progress in “Carboniferous Capitalism” (Mumford, 1934), such as, *there is no alternative to fossil fuel, there will be a technological fix to the coming energy crisis, we can all transition to solar energy and drive electric cars, or we can all build Earthships and live off-grid growing aquaponics*. Unfortunately, wind energy is only 1.1% and photovoltaic only 0.06% of what the fossil fuel economy is supplying (Malm, 2016, p. 368). The electric cars will be affordable by the rich, and last we looked the Earthships are as expensive as McMansions in Taos, New Mexico.

We know from antenarrative (forecaring for the future) that we have to actually make space and time to care for the future, in order, to get off the path of “*business-as-usual*.” What we at sc’MOI in its closing session observed was the death-grip of managerialism on the organizations. We know how to make them more efficient, but cannot steer them away from a short-term, quarterly return mindset. It takes a long temporal horizon, to understand how we are depleting resources that the future generations, our children’s grandchildren, and soon just our grandchildren, will be experiencing the consequences of our decisions about living in Carboniferous Capitalism.

We continue to meet in Las Cruces, as the “Quantum Storytelling Conference” ([davidboje.com/quantum](http://davidboje.com/quantum) for info). We are hoping, once more, that storytelling can be a way to address the dominant narratives of managerialism with any number of counternarratives. However, we also look to the antenarratives that are forecaring for a continuation of “business-as-usual” and ways many counternarratives are more illusions, and hope for some antenarratives that take civilization along a path that is lifestyles living within the planetary limits, in living stories, finding balance with the rights of other species, plants, and animals, rivers and mountains too, to coexist.

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# INTRODUCTION

David M. Boje

The seven-S framework is not the usual managerialist one. Rather, we constituted a standing conference of critical management and organization scholars with something to say about doing methods of management and organization inquiry to constitute an eighth S called “sensemaking.” We existed as a standing conference for 25 years, and you will find many historical examples of what we produced in this book. Ours is a critical sensemaking of managerialist organizations. I wanted to have a very simple framework, something easily understandable by a managerialist audience and a bit too shallow for a critical management studies audience. This introduction is written in a way that can appeal to both audiences. Here are the S’s of a simple framework that entangles sensemaking:

*storytelling;*  
*systems;*  
*sustainability;*  
*science;*  
*spirit;*  
*spirals;*  
*sociomateriality; and*  
*all these entangle sensemaking.*

Most of the standing conference participants (perhaps all the regular ones) view storytelling as not just combinations of retrospective and prospective sensemaking but the realization of sociomateriality. By sociomateriality we mean all the ways of the “spacetimemattering” of sensemaking in management and organization. Managerialism separates and splits mind and matter, whereas we look at their inherent inseparability. The seven Ss are entangled with sensemaking.

We have produced a “handbook” because we want to take the simple framework and do something radical with it to use it in a critical management way to say something about the state of affairs of most organizations on the planet. I will introduce the Ss one by one and try to show how they are entangled together and constitutive of “sensemaking.” I will use “plastic” as my case example in this introduction, because were I to call for the Standing Conference of Management and Organization Inquiry to reconvene, I would be calling for a plastics inquisition, an accountability for the health-hidden costs of our plastic addiction, and for solutions to a growing plastic crisis.

*Storytelling:* of the first seven ways of sensemaking, storytelling has been my long-term focus. Storytelling refracts and detracts through the other six to constitute retrospective and prospective sensemaking in our management and organization inquiry. My analytic tools are “dominant narratives” of power, the “living stories” people and things at the margins, and the “antenarrative” processes that constitute and transform both narrative and story. “Things tell a story,” according to William James (1907, p. 96). That means stories do “space-timemattering” or, as Jane Bennett (2010, pp. 3–4) calls it, “onto-story”:

The strangely vital things that will rise up to meet us in this chapter — a dead rat, a plastic cap, a spool of thread — are characters in a speculative onto-story. The tale hazards an account of materiality, even though it is both too alien and too close to see clearly and even though linguistic means prove inadequate to the task. The story will highlight the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the use and the slip-slide into each other. One more of the story is that we are also nonhuman and the things, too, are vital players in the world. (Bennett, 2010, pp. 3–4)

*Onto-storytelling* means material things are entangled with the “agency” and “property of an assemblage” (Bennett, 2004, p. 354). I do not mean some naive realism, but rather as sensemaking of how things tell a story of what Bennett (2004, p. 364) calls “thing-power materialism” in all its “ontological imaginary [...] matter” of the “onto-tale,” which is part of our critical management and organization inquiry. Our “onto-tale,” in this book, is about how “thing-power” is agential and tells an important story about management and organization of “vibrant matter” (Bennett, 2010) of actor–“thing-power” networks. Thing-power is an actant in Latourian actor-network theory (ANT).

*Systems:* At my first assistant professor job at UCLA, I began teaching a systems class and another class about storytelling. Students taking both classes were asked to do projects on storytelling systems. And within a few years I was writing about “storytelling systems” and “storytelling organizations.” Being a follower of Bakhtin (1981, 1991, 1993) I began to look at his notion of “systemicalness” (an impossible and strange word), meaning the “unmergedness” and “unfinalizedness” of systems (Bakhtin, 1991, pp. 270–277). I shortened the Bakhtin word to “systemicity” — neither word caught on. Nevertheless, instead of whole systems, I find a lot of unmerged fragments, and implementations of fragments, that are never finalized, and never moved, just layer upon layer of being undone. As each new executive, chancellor, provost, president, and so on comes on board, an organization has its systemicities, but not much mergedness or finalizedness.

So is it any wonder that the storytelling—sustainability—science—spirit—spiral—sociomateriality systems are in such a state of chaos and disorder?

*Sustainability*: it is all about onto-storytelling and thing-power ANT. After all, organizations are social and material assemblages and thing-power is agential, and something not just managed but mismanaged. In our onto-tale of sociomateriality, the thinghood is a vital player in sustainability and unsustainability. Antenarratively, the being-becoming of sustainability is all about routines of unsustainability. Yesterday, I dug a doggie poo compost hole and inserted a barrel with the bottom cut out, and a lid made in the top. I drilled holes in the sides of the barrel and after getting through layers of caliche placed the compost thing in the ground. I picked up all the “poo” and layered it between brown matter and some decomposed horse manure. It was a sunny Tuesday, and I wore work gloves and used a posthole digger. I did all this to change an unsustainable practice (poo going into the waste stream or into the waste dump) into a sustainable routine of composting. Over the weekend, I built another compost thing, of great thing-power. It is my own version of a Kambha (several bins, with bottom cut out and breathing holes drilled in the sides). The ideal composting is to put layers of green (nitrogen things), the waste (used copy paper, organics, torn up cardboard, Kleenex, paper towels), and layers of brown (carbon things). By doing this according to the trash audit I performed, it is possible to eliminate 75% of the trash things from the waste stream headed to the landfill. The other 25% is all kinds of “plastic” and the dog poo (which now goes to the doggie septic composting thing). If I can convert the doggie poo composter thing into a worm farm composter, the compost is useable in the gardening. For now, dog poo stays separate. Why am I doing all this? Because, after 21 years promoting recycle—reuse—reduce, I realize that I had it backwards. I need to reduce the plastic I am buying and reduce by composting, then reuse as much as I can, and only then recycle recyclables. The recycle—reuse—reduce is backwards, but it is also out of date. The new idealism is refuse—rethink—redesign before the reduce—reuse—recycle begins. Why am I telling you this? After 22 years of working to enact sustainability across various institutions, I realized it was all coming undone. Students and faculty were not as enthusiastic about recycle—reuse—reduce. In one Southwest college, new faculty were reportedly asking the building monitor to just remove the recycling bins from plain sight and have fewer of them, which meant having a single bin unsegregated (unsorted) recyclable stream.

The recycling bins were once in the main lobbies, visible there for over 15 years, and apparent to the mind of consumers in that space-time, but the bins then became out of sight, out of mind, or there were just no more bins to be found. Students were putting aluminum cans and plastic single-use water bottles (and plastic soda bottles) into the trash bins, when there was a recyclable bin in the same room. There just were not recycle bins in plain sight. I asked the students about it, and they did not know what the new recycling rules were. I asked the recycling workers in the recycling center what was happening. The team had been downsized, once six in number, then only two, who worked with a similarly reduced number of student workers, but a few brave and caring came to work

for free in the wee hours of the night. Storytelling has everything to do with its entanglement in science.

*Science:* to continue this onto-storytelling, the science of recycling is thoroughly entangled with the market forces of commodity pricing. For example, my city used to recycle glass, but then over a decade ago, glass recyclable commodity prices fell, and we had to pay haulers to transport it from our city to out-of-state recycling facilities. So there are no glass recycling bins anywhere. It is not because we lack the science, but because the market forces determine what is and what is not sustainable. You can drive your glass to the city waste disposal facility, and there you can separate your bottles into clear and colored glass, and drop it off for free. But there is a disconnect between what science is doing to make the glass and what market forces tell the producers and consumers to recycle. Plastic science produces plastic single-use bottles and reusable plastic bottles that cost a lot more. This again is thing-power – the agentive role of plastic things and their commodity value in market forces. Plastic has various recycling codes (1, 2, 3, etc.), and since 2017, China, which had been recycling half of the developed nations’ plastic, was no longer taking anything but 1 and 2, and only if it had less than 1/2 of 1% contamination by other grades of plastic (or toxins), the market dropped out. That means more plastic types head straight to trash bins, are emptied to dumpsters, are picked up, and transported to already full landfills. Thus, I conclude recycling plastic is unsustainable, because 91% of plastic is not recycled (or not recyclable), and of the 9% that is only recyclable one time (based on US practices). This means new solutions must be found. Don’t get me started about electronic-waste (called e-waste for short), because that is all about plastic mixed with heavy metals in our cell phones, laptops, desktops, and electronics in our cars and almost everything. I am telling you all this to explain why I am making compost contraptions on our small ranch. And it is an onto-storytelling of sustainable choices and unsustainable choices. Yet, the science is there to assign e-waste and plastic waste all its different numbers (#1, #2, and numbers China is no longer accepting). Science is entangled with the spirits, either denying their existence or claiming everything has spirit (a Hegelian notion, and an Indigenous Way of Knowing, called “IWOK” for short).

*Spirit:* Does recycling plastic and e-waste have spirit? In an enchanted world of “vibrant matter” not only rivers and mountains have the kind of spirit that New Zealand’s government chose to declare legal personhood in them, but the smaller particle matter also has spirit. When I traveled to New Zealand and learned of the river and a mountain that by IWOK were spirit, and that the Western Ways of Knowing (WWOK) in New Zealand, in government, had also declared “spirit,” I went into a reflexive sensemaking mode. Why not the Rio Grande? Is this river in New Mexico also a “spirit”? If it is, then declaring it a legal person would change our storytelling—sustainability—science relationship to that spirit-river. I took some samples of the water to see how many plastic microbeads I could see. I could not see any with the naked eye. I gazed at the plastic microfibers I thought I could see and wondered if I could find anyone in the city or the university to do tests for the “nanoplastic” particles. Nanoplastic

is a particle so small that it can enter the molecules, the cells, even the blood and bone of the human body, or the animal body. Microbeads, plastic microfibers, and their nanoplastic constituents pass through the waste treatment filters, from the plastic water bottles, from the lint from polyester washing machines, and they enter the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the soil we grow our food in. In oceans, these quanta of microplastics enter the smallest marine life and are eaten by bigger and bigger marine species until they are caught and eaten by human species, who insist the material thing-power of plastic, after it has soaked up every kind of toxin along the entire food chain. You would have heard that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the oceans than the weight of all the marine life. But is there a “plastic spirit”? Surely only the natural elements, the organic thing-power, have spirit. In IWOK every living thing and lots of inanimate things have spirit. But, not plastic, as far as I know. Manmade materials, however, are constructed in production systems from various physical and chemical (often petrochemical) natural things. And those plastic things have thing-power and do also tell a story, an onto-story of their vibrant matter. Break down matter to its quanta, its nano particles, and its wave formations — well, that means plastic is made of elements, in a process, that does not kill the spirit. Most authors of this handbook, I suspect, do not believe in spirits, in either good or bad spirit. I have come to realize plastic is a bad spirit and is spiraling out of control. The increase in plastic production, plastic packaging distribution, and plastic consumption is exponential, doubling at rates that are fractal. Spiraling spirits are making natural world into a plastic world.

*Spirals:* I have always marveled about spirals: how they are movements of things upward and downward, at the same time, in different pathways, and how they move left or right, in and out, and emerge and fall silent. And I also marvel at the out-of-control spirals, where a plastic out-of-control spiral results in a parallel fatal of unhealthy lifestyle and hidden costs of health care. Storytelling spirals in its sustainable and unsustainable ways, and there is a science to spirals. Is it wrong to say spirals have spirits? A dust devil is something I see almost daily in New Mexico. If there is a spirit of capitalism, and capitalism has so many upward and downward spirals, at the same place, and same time, mattering thing-power, then perhaps spirals have their sports. There seems to me to be a spirit of greed that has infused spirals of managing and organizing, and there is a spirit of care that is accountable to the problems of plastic waste and e-waste.

*Sociomateriality:* I have been storytelling sociomateriality all the way through this introduction. My point is that “critical” management and organization inquiry can look more deeply at the inseparability and entangled nature of sociomateriality in everyday practices of managing and organizing our institutions. To continue my illustrations, there is spacetime-mattering of plastic, at an accelerating way that is plastic-wrapping the entire planet, that is, producing enough plastic bottles to circle the world five times each day. Here are a few facts from the 2019 Earthday Fact Sheet.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1950s, 8.3 billion metric tons (9.1 billion in US tons) of plastic have been produced around the world. The onto-storytelling and sociomateriality is that all that plastic humans produce and consume, unless incinerated, still exists. Of plastic waste 91% is never

recycled, and what is recycled, only one time, is plastic waste forever. Around the world 500 million single-use plastic bats are produced every minute. Just in the United States it is 100 billion plastic bats every year, which would, when tied together, stretch around the Earth's equator 773 times. Now there are more microplastic particles in the ocean than stars in our Milky Way (which by the way has spiral arms).

Plastic "particles," as Deleuze (1990, p. 56) calls them, act in dis-placement, displacing one thing-power for another thing-power. In the plastic revolution, since the 1950s (and a bit before with polyesters), plastic thing-power was displacing wood and metal thing-power. And now plastic thing-power has invaded every product niche, either as part of the thing or its packaging or both, and then placed in a plastic bag, so the consumer does not actually touch the thing they bought, until they are home. Plastic is reterritorializing all other modes of production and consumption. Try to go a day without buying or consuming plastic. The plastic lifestyle is being resisted by a few revolutionaries, called "zero plastic" warriors.<sup>2</sup>

I read dozens of such articles and viewed scores of YouTube videos. I want to be plastic free, but I live in a sociomateriality plastic addiction world – working and living in plastic systems.

*Sensemaking*: all the seven Ss are constitutive of, and entangled with, sense-making. It is an onto-storytelling of sensemaking – how not only humans but things tell a story. So, if you will, please pick up that white, blue, or green plastic bottle cap, take a look at its plastic number, sort them, and find some productive ways to recycle—reduce—reuse, or better yet just say "no" and refuse them. Go back to the thing-power of metal and glass. If we can do some plastic sociomateriality sensemaking, perhaps we can stop transforming the Natural World (that no longer exists) into the Plastic World (which exists more and more everywhere). It seems senseless to live a single-use or briefly used plastic lifestyle, to have a plastic razor holder instead of a stainless steel one, which will last forever. It seems a senseless sensemaking to use single-use plastic bags when a cloth one will do the job better and last such a very long time. To become zero-waste is impossible, and how would we be plastic-waste free when every kind of product we use at home and work is made of plastic, which by its nanoplastic particles and the waves of plastic sociomaterial proliferation are taking over the world, invading the body, making it more plastic than fish in the oceans, lakes, and rivers? This is the reason I would want to call together the Standing Conference for Management and Organization Inquiry for a plastics inquisition.

## NOTES

1. Earthday 2018 Fact Sheet. Accessed on September 26, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.earthday.org/2018/03/07/fact-sheet-end-plastic-pollution/>

2. Way beyond recycling: How some Bay Area families are trying to get zero waste by Karen D'Souza, July 22. The Mercury News, 2018, online. Accessed on September 26, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/07/20/way-beyond-recycling-how-some-bay-area-families-are-trying-to-get-to-zero-waste/>

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