AI and Business Storytelling as a Multi Theoretic and Multi Method Framework

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Abstract

Business storytelling is often presented as if it were a single field with a settled vocabulary, a common canon, and one best way to listen. I propose a different image: a mountain range. Each mountain has paths, weather, histories, practices, and vistas that cannot be reduced to another mountain. My own climbing has moved through storytelling organizations, Tamaraland, antenarrative, true storytelling, conversational storytelling interviewing, quantum and living story, enthinkment, existentialism, the XYZA Tesseract of leadership, and most recently the Consent Machine and Ghost Vortex. These are not claims to have climbed every mountain, nor an invitation to place my mountain at the center. They are an invitation to build a valley commons. This working paper develops business storytelling as a multi-theoretic, multi-method framework capable of bringing sensemaking, rhetoric, critical management studies, socio-economic analysis, existential phenomenology, digital media, and practice-based approaches into conversation. It argues that agentic AI makes such crossing urgently necessary because algorithmic systems tell, select, suppress, and scale stories while dispersing answerability. The paper closes by inviting scholars, students, practitioners, artists, and mountain climbers to Wednesday Lab for fireside listening and telling across differences.

Keywords: business storytelling, antenarrative, Tamaraland, true storytelling, conversational storytelling, Tesseract leadership, existentialism, artificial intelligence

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Glossary of the Storytelling Mountain Range

These are working terms, offered to make crossings possible without claiming that any tradition is reducible to this paper's vocabulary. The glossary is especially important where the Mountain Range metaphor meets Indigenous storytelling: there is no single Indigenous method, and authority to tell, interpret, circulate, or retain a story remains Nation-, community-, and relation-specific.

Term	Working meaning	Contribution to business storytelling
Business storytelling	The inquiry and practice of how organizational life is storied, heard, contested, and changed.	The valley: a meeting ground for theory, method, practice, and material consequence.

Tamaraland	A simultaneous, plural story space in which many narratives coexist rather than resolve into one account.	Invites attention to polyphony, timing, and competing organizational realities.
Antenarrative	A fragmented, prospective, pre-narrative bet that circulates before a coherent retrospective story hardens.	Makes emergent possibilities and excluded futures researchable.
True Storytelling	An ethical practice of truthful, answerable, and non-extractive relation in story work.	Tests whether a story's effects can be owned and repaired.
Conversational storytelling	Storying and listening as a relational process rather than a one-way transmission.	Treats participants as co-interpreters, not audiences to manage.
Critical management studies (CMS)	A family of critical inquiries into power, ideology, inequality, domination, and possibilities for emancipation.	Questions who benefits from official stories and which absences organize them.
Ghost Vortex	A CMS-oriented analytic for organizational and AI leadership patterns in which visible narratives mask systemic conditions.	Directs inquiry to infrastructure, governance, labor, and side effects—not personality diagnosis.
Tesseract leadership	A multi-dimensional leadership frame that holds simultaneous temporal, relational, material, and narrative conditions.	Resists one-dimensional leader stories and simple causality.
Serious storytelling	Purposeful story-based design that joins narrative, interaction, media, play, and organizational learning.	Makes AI-mediated and digital story practices available for critique and intervention.
SEAM / qualimetrics	Socio-Economic Approach to Management and its combined qualitative–quantitative inquiry into hidden costs and potential.	Links story evidence to consultation, work design, and accountable action.
Indigenous storytelling	An umbrella term only for plural, sovereign, place-based knowledge traditions; it is not a general technique available for extraction.	Requires protocol, consent, relational accountability, benefit, and Indigenous authority.
Data sovereignty	The right of Indigenous peoples and Nations to govern data about their peoples, lands, languages, and relations.	Sets limits on AI data collection, training, use, retention, and publication.

Table 1. Working glossary. The terms are invitations to careful study, not licenses to blend distinct knowledge traditions.

A Venn-Style Map of the Range

Figure 1 centers business storytelling as a valley of encounter. It does not rank the mountains or imply that their intersections erase their distinct histories, methods, or authorities. In particular, the Indigenous storytelling circle signals relational sovereignty and protocol, not an invitation to mine Indigenous knowledge for organizational innovation.

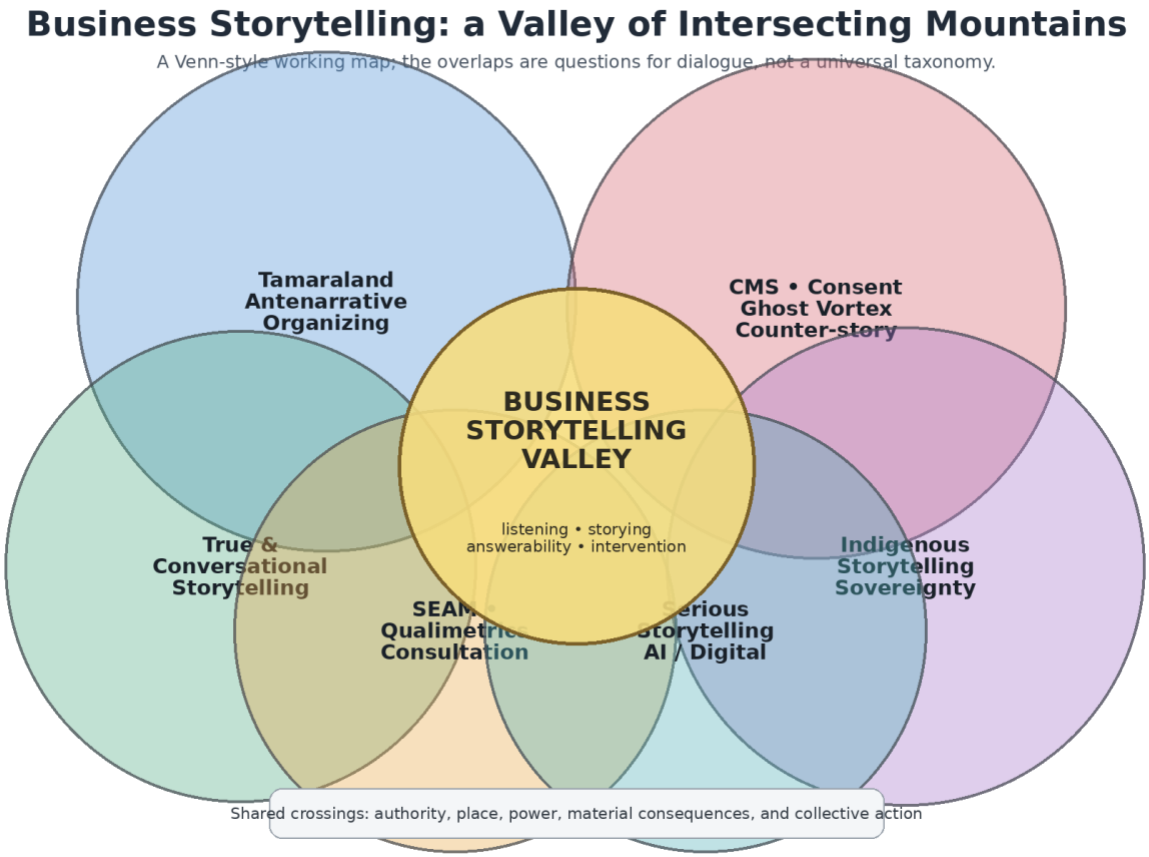


Figure 1. A Venn-style working map of storytelling mountains and their crossings in business storytelling.

Series 3 Working Proposals and the Storytelling Mountains

The six World Scientific Series 3 volumes listed at davidboje.com/ws are working proposals, not fixed assignments. The comparison below therefore records a live empirical and editorial map: it identifies the mountain contributions already in motion and shows one possible Indigenous land–water–storytelling volume as an invitation for discussion, not a decision made in advance of Indigenous editorial leadership.

Series 3 working title or editorial options	Concept connections	Empirical/editorial orientation
Generative AI, Quantum Storytelling, and Organizational Futures	Antenarrative, Tamaraland, serious storytelling, tesseract leadership	Retain; foreground quantum antenarratives, living-machine storying, and guardrails.
Narrative Authority, Cognitive Access, and Institutional Legitimacy	True storytelling, conversational listening, CMS, consent	Retain; extend provenance, disability/neurodiversity, surveillance, and who counts as a knower.
True Storytelling, DEI, and the Age of AI	True storytelling, counter-story, CMS	Retain; make representation, belonging, voice, and answerability concrete.

Human–AI Co-Creation in Entrepreneurship and Strategy	Serious storytelling, tesseract leadership, sociotechnical inquiry	Retain; examine augmentation versus displacement of human judgment.
Strategy Storytelling Against Cognitive Surrender	Critical storytelling, narrative/rhetorical inquiry, existentialism	Retain; connect strategy stories to ethics, aesthetics, community prosperity, and resistance.
SEAM: Socio-Economic Consultation in the Age of AI	SEAM/qualimetrics, consultation, hidden costs, consent	Retain; develop co-designed AI change, work design, and responsible capitalism.
Editorial option: Indigenous approaches to land, water, storytelling, and AI infrastructures	Indigenous storytelling, relational sovereignty, place, water, data sovereignty	Discuss as a future volume or as a co-led strand across the six; proceed only with Indigenous editorial authority, protocols, and shared benefit.

Table 2. Comparison of the six current Series 3 working proposals with the Storytelling Mountain Range, plus an Indigenous-led editorial option.

Indigenous Storytelling, Place, and Relational Sovereignty

Indigenous storytelling belongs in this paper with a deliberate caution: it is not another mountain for a business-storytelling researcher to climb, appropriate, or absorb. "Indigenous storytelling" names plural and living knowledge traditions grounded in particular Nations, languages, kin relations, lands, waters, responsibilities, and protocols. The Mountain Range metaphor must therefore become self-limiting at this point. It can name a relation of respectful encounter, but it cannot claim jurisdiction over stories, teachings, or methods whose authority lies elsewhere.

Deloria and Wildcat (2001) place education, self-determination, and place in direct relation. Cajete (2000) likewise develops Native science as relational participation rather than detached extraction. Smith (2021) makes the methodological stakes plain: research is never innocent when it has historically collected, classified, and governed Indigenous peoples without their authority. For this working paper, those arguments shift the question from "How can business use Indigenous storytelling?" to "What obligations govern any invitation, collaboration, data practice, and publication involving Indigenous stories, lands, waters, and communities?"

Kaupapa Māori scholarship similarly refuses a universal research posture. Hoskins and Jones (2017) convene critical conversations in which kaupapa Māori is neither a decorative diversity category nor a method detached from Māori authority. In a Wednesday Lab, the practical implication is simple but demanding: no participant should retell, record, circulate, analyze, or feed a story into an AI system merely because it was heard in a shared room. Story

stewardship precedes methodological enthusiasm. Permission, conditions of use, reciprocity, and the right not to disclose must be explicit.

This matters urgently for AI. Data centers and AI supply chains occupy land, draw water and energy, rely on labor, and reshape local governance. An Indigenous-led inquiry into land, water, storytelling, and AI infrastructure could ask whose consent is sought, who defines impact, how benefits are shared, and how data sovereignty is protected. It should be developed only with Indigenous scholars, community leaders, and knowledge holders who set the terms. The proposed editorial option in Table 1b is therefore a call for relationship and co-leadership, not a substitute that this author can unilaterally make.

The Wednesday Lab invitation is enlarged by this mountain: come to the valley to listen across difference, but do not presume that every story is available to the valley. Some stories are held by particular people and places; some must remain there. The discipline of not taking is part of the ethics of business storytelling.

Propositions

I have come to think of business storytelling not as one mountain but as a mountain range. It is a range with old trails, newly cut switchbacks, valleys of disagreement, and high places from which one can see the same organizational trouble differently. That image matters because the word storytelling is too often used as a passport to a single theory. A practitioner says storytelling and may mean a persuasive leadership message. A sensemaking scholar may mean retrospective interpretation. A critical scholar may mean ideology, voice, and the silencing of counterstories. A digital-media scholar may mean interactive design, immersion, data, or serious storytelling. Each is a real mountain. None is the entire range.

My own path began long ago with recorded conversations in an office-supply firm. In more than four hundred hours of tape I found that the clean beginning-middle-end story was scarce; fragments, allusions, abbreviations, jokes, and unfinished bits were everywhere (Boje, 1991). That finding did not make narrative irrelevant. It made me suspicious of any method that waits for a story to become neat before it counts as data. The storytelling organization is therefore not a place where managers simply deploy stories. It is a place where stories are performed, interrupted, withheld, and contested by people with unequal access to voice, space, and time.

I am not saying that all mountains should be fused into a bland synthesis. A mountain range is not a shopping mall of concepts. The slopes are formed by real disagreements: whether meaning is primarily retrospective or prospective; whether the unit of analysis is a text, a conversation, a body, a network, a platform, or a material ecology; whether the scholar should interpret, facilitate, criticize, co-inquire, or intervene. A multi-theoretic frame must honor those differences before it can build crossings. Its first ethic is intellectual hospitality, not annexation.

Current Themes in AI Revolution

The current AI revolution makes the mountain-range proposition more than a metaphor. Business systems now generate customer messages, managerial summaries, performance narratives, marketing images, recruitment language, financial explanations, and automated recommendations at a scale that changes the conditions of storying. The issue is not merely whether a machine can compose a plausible narrative. The issue is who supplied the data, whose language has been normalized, which future has been bet upon, what labor repairs the machine output, and who can answer when an algorithmic story injures a worker, a customer, a community, or an ecosystem.

A narrow business-storytelling approach can easily turn AI into another channel for executive message discipline. A narrow technical approach can treat stories as output strings. Both approaches miss the organizational theatre. AI systems are assembled through training data, platform rules, human feedback, contracts, data centers, energy grids, consultants, managers, users, and communities. The story is already under way before the model speaks. The task of scholarship is not to celebrate fluent output, but to follow the heterogeneous actants and the often-hidden relations that make that output possible (Latour, 2005).

This is why I add the Consent Machine to the range. The Consent Machine names the organizational and technical arrangements that turn a story of convenience, innovation, personalization, or inevitability into a taken-for-granted social permission. Consent is not meaningful when it is extracted after the architecture is already in place, when refusal carries a penalty, or when the affected people cannot see the room in which the decision was made. The Consent Machine is a mountain still being climbed. It brings the question of power into the same valley as story, technology, leadership, and ethics (Boje, 2026a).

A Multi Theoretic Framework for Business Storytelling

Business storytelling becomes a multi-theoretic framework when it refuses a single privileged object. It can study a CEO speech as rhetoric, a team meeting as sensemaking, a platform as an institutional and material arrangement, an interview as a living co-performance, a change program as a political struggle, an algorithm as a patterned narrator, and a community conflict as an ecological and existential claim. Theories do not become interchangeable in this arrangement. They become accountable to what they illuminate and to what they leave in shadow.

The framework has at least six orienting questions. First, what story is being told and by whom? Second, what fragments and antenarratives are circulating before a coherent account hardens? Third, in which rooms is the story different, and who is prevented from moving between rooms? Fourth, what rhetorical, institutional, and economic work does the story do? Fifth, what bodies, materials, technologies, and ecologies participate in its production? Sixth, who has a non-alibi in Being: who cannot pass the consequence to a system, market, policy, or machine? These questions make a shared field without erasing theoretical difference.

Theme	**Primary concern**	**Typical methods**	**What it contributes to the valley**
Sensemaking and enactment	How actors interpret equivocal events and act into environments	Process study, interviews, observations, discourse analysis	Attention to ongoing interpretation and organizing
Narrative and rhetoric	How plots, genres, characters, and appeals persuade	Narrative analysis, rhetorical criticism, textual analysis	Form, audience, legitimacy, and strategic communication
Critical and postmodern storytelling	How power, ideology, gender, race, class, and coloniality enter stories	Counterstory, deconstruction, genealogy, critical discourse analysis	Suppressed voices and the dark side of polished accounts
Tamaraland and antenarrative	How simultaneous rooms and pre-stories shape becoming	Multi-site inquiry, fragment analysis, storytelling interviews, theatre	Multiplicity, prospective bets, and resistance to premature closure
True and conversational storytelling	How listening, timing, staging, reflection, and dialogue can be ethical practice	Dialogic facilitation, CSI, action research, reflexive practice	A practice of making room and helping stories along
Existential and enthinkment	How thought remains inside Being, care, anxiety, place, and answerability	Phenomenology, walking/jogging inquiry, dialogue, reflective writing	Embodiment, ecological consequence, and moral presence
AI, Tesseract, and Consent Machine	How intelligent systems embed leadership character and organize consent	Platform tracing, protocol analysis, qualimetrics, network inquiry	Distributed agency, hidden costs, and answerable leadership

Note: The table is not a taxonomy of superiority. It is a trail map for choosing a next question.

The Sensemaking and Enactment Mountain

One important mountain is associated with enactment, sensemaking, and the continual effort to make a plausible world while acting in it. Weick (1995) taught generations of organization scholars to attend to how people retrospectively make sense of equivocal action. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) showed that organizational change involves both sensemaking and sensegiving. That mountain has offered business storytelling an indispensable insight: stories are not ornaments added after decisions. They are part of how decisions, identities, and coordinated action become possible.

Yet I have moved from a sensemaking-only framing toward what I call in-thinking and enthinkment. Retrospective sensemaking can make the past coherent, but life does not wait politely for coherence. People are already betting, fearing, improvising, caring, and refusing in the present. The question becomes not only "What did this event come to mean?" but "What possibilities are being made, foreclosed, or carried forward while we are still inside it?" This is not a rejection of sensemaking. It is a crossing from one slope to another.

For business practice, the distinction matters. An AI implementation team may make retrospective sense of a failed pilot by creating a lesson-learned story. That can be useful. But if the same team did not hear the workers whose work was reconfigured, the customers whose data were repurposed, or the community affected by infrastructure, the lesson remains inside one room. A multi-theoretic inquiry asks what action was enacted, what interpretation stabilized, and what lived situation the settled account has concealed.

The Narrative and Rhetorical Approaches

A second mountain studies stories as narrative and rhetoric. Here one learns to read plot, character, temporality, genre, voice, audience, ethos, pathos, and logos. Gabriel (2000, 2020) has shown why organizational stories should not be reduced to factual reports; they work through fantasy, desire, emotion, and social relation. Goffman (1974) reminds us that frames organize experience. Rhetorical inquiry asks how an organization turns a claim into something credible, urgent, natural, or inevitable.

This mountain is particularly helpful with executive financial and strategic storytelling. Danesh (2025) identifies transparency, realism, consistency, ownership, audience orientation, and ethical judgment as central to financial storytelling. These are important achievements. They

move financial communication beyond a polished performance of confidence. But a rhetorical mountain must also ask whether the audience can contest the account and whether material costs are missing from its plot. A transparent forecast can still be a narrow story if its definition of value excludes labor, water, land, repair work, or future generations.

AI magnifies rhetorical capacity. It can generate many versions of the same sales narrative, infer audience segments, optimize phrasing, and simulate warmth. But a machine's verbal ease is not ethos. Credibility is not a style setting; it is a relation sustained through character, evidence, consequence, and answerability. The human task is therefore not merely to approve AI-generated prose. It is to remain present to the ethical conditions that make an organizational claim worthy of belief.

The Critical Storytelling Approaches

A third mountain is critical. It asks what a successful story is doing for power. It studies the stories of colonialism, gender, race, class, managerialism, surveillance, and corporate legitimacy, not to dismiss every organizational account as deception but to make the conditions of telling visible. Critical management studies does not permit us to treat an organization as a neutral container or an executive narrative as the whole truth. The question is always: who benefits when this version becomes normal?

Grace Ann Rosile and I learned hard lessons from Enron and WorldCom. A dominant leadership narrative can make harm feel like achievement long enough for people to lose jobs, savings, trust, and futures (Boje & Rosile, 2003). The dark side of storytelling is not simply a false statement. It is a whole theatrical arrangement in which incentives, fear, hierarchy, public relations, accounting, and hopeful employee stories reinforce one another. Dark leadership literature has long cautioned that charisma, certainty, and performance can be dangerous when separated from accountability (Conger, 1990; Çoban, 2022).

Agentic AI invites a new critical question. When a firm installs many agents across pricing, supply chains, customer service, human resources, and marketing, what is the story of efficiency covering over? There may be benefits, but there may also be hidden repair labor, intensified measurement, accelerated work, exclusion by data category, and environmental cost. The mountain-range framework does not predetermine the verdict. It requires that the verdict not be made in only the executive room.

Tamaraland as Simultaneous Story Space

Tamaraland came from John Krizanc's play Tamara, in which audience members move through simultaneous rooms and cannot see the whole performance at once. My Disney study developed that insight for organizational research (Boje, 1995). The organization is not a single building with one narrator. It is a plurality of rooms, stages, entrances, exits, and performances. A person follows one storyline and misses others. Knowledge is partial, located, and affected by the path one has taken.

This mountain is useful because it makes the claim of "the company story" immediately questionable. In an AI corporation, the product room may tell a story of capability, the investor room a story of scale, the safety room a story of governance, the labor room a story of invisible moderation or annotation, the data-center room a story of power and water, and the community room a story of consequences. All are real. No chief executive, no model card, and no press release walks every room for us.

Tamaraland is not an excuse for relativism. It is an argument for responsible movement. Researchers and leaders must walk more rooms, name where they have not been, and create conditions for people from separated rooms to hear one another. The Wednesday Lab can become a small Tamaraland in reverse: instead of leaving people isolated in rooms, we invite them into a valley where their partial knowledge can meet without being absorbed into a master story.

Antenarrative and the Story Before It Reifies

Antenarrative names the fragmented, non-linear, prospective, and bet-like material that exists before a story is made coherent (Boje, 2001, 2011). "Ante" carries two meanings: before and bet. An antenarrative is what circulates before the polished beginning-middle-end account, but it is also a wager on what may become. It is found in rumors, hesitations, prototype talk, memories, silences, drawings, numbers, bodily gestures, and counter-stories. It is not an inferior narrative. It is living evidence of organizational becoming.

The seven B-processes give this mountain more terrain: Before, Beneath, Bets, Being, Becoming, Between, and Beyond. Before asks what precedes the official account. Beneath asks which structures and habits work below its surface. Bets asks whose future is being risked. Being asks who and what is present in a situated world. Becoming asks what is emerging. Between asks

what occurs in relations and thresholds. Beyond asks what exceeds the human-centered organization, including planetary and more-than-human consequence. These are not steps in a linear method; they are trails that can be entered from different points.

In AI research, antenarrative prevents the analyst from treating a model's response as the beginning of the story. The response is late in the process. Before it are data selection, labor arrangements, model architecture, procurement, regulation, policy, organizational habits, and leadership bets. Beneath it are values and exclusions that may not be declared. Beyond it are ecological and existential consequences. Antenarrative gives business storytelling a way to study what a fluent system cannot readily narrate about itself.

True Storytelling as Ethical Practice

True Storytelling, developed with Jens Larsen and Lena Bruun, is a practical mountain as well as an ethical one. Its seven principles include truth, making room, plot, timing, helping stories along, staging, and reflecting (Larsen et al., 2021). The word true does not mean that a leader possesses the one final account. It means that story practice must remain answerable to lived experience, to others in the situation, and to the consequences of action. Truth is an ongoing task of disclosure, listening, and correction.

Making room is especially important for a valley commons. The most powerful speaker does not create truth by filling every silence. Story workers must make room for those who have been treated as data, targets, customers, subordinates, or stakeholders rather than as co-authors of organizational reality. Timing and staging matter because a story told too early, too late, or in the wrong setting can be an instrument of control. Reflection matters because even an ethical intervention may produce new exclusions.

In AI work, true storytelling is an architectural constraint on practice, not a public-relations slogan. A firm should not use agents to manufacture testimonials, simulate consent, or flood a public space with a credible sounding version of events. It should create verifiable pathways for correction; it should identify where machine text is used; it should allow affected persons to contest classifications and decisions; and it should tell the inconvenient story of limitations, repair, and cost. This is how ethical storytelling becomes organizational design.

Conversational Storytelling and Listening in Relation

Conversational storytelling interviewing, developed with Grace Ann Rosile, treats the interview as a living relation rather than a device for extracting a finished narrative (Boje & Rosile, 2020). The interviewer does not stand outside the story as if holding a neutral bucket for data. Questions, timing, body language, institutional authority, and the later use of the material all affect what can be told. The method therefore asks for reflexivity and answerability from the person who listens.

That approach belongs in a multi-method framework because organizations contain people who may not speak in polished paragraphs. A worker may offer a fragment. A community member may stop mid-sentence. A manager may use a metaphor that carries more history than an interview code can hold. The researcher can listen for the fragment, invite a counterstory, return to a topic later, and resist converting living talk too quickly into a static theme. Conversational storytelling is method, ethics, and training in humble attention.

Wednesday Lab is not a lecture hall where a finished theory is broadcast down the mountain. It can be a conversational storytelling practice. We can listen for what different mountains are already saying, ask what their questions make possible, and let a participant bring a local organizational dilemma without forcing it into my vocabulary. Fireside story listening is not soft method. It is a disciplined refusal to mistake quick coding for understanding.

Enthinkment and the Existentialism

My work with Rohny Saylors on Louis R. Pondy returns me to the mentor who taught me, during my University of Illinois years, that management thought need not be a detached technique (Boje & Saylors, 2024). Enthinkment is thinking with the heart, but not in a sentimental sense. It is the attempt to think from inside the relationships, anxieties, responsibilities, bodies, histories, and consequences that a managerial abstraction too easily places outside itself. It calls for new habits of thinking rather than just new tools of calculation.

Existentialism and phenomenology deepen this call. Heidegger's Being-in-the-world and Sartre's insistence that existence precedes essence refuse the fantasy that an observer can stand wholly apart from the world being interpreted (Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 1956). Bakhtin's non-alibi in Being makes the ethical point sharply: I occupy a unique place in the world, and I cannot

completely hand my answerability to another person, a procedure, a market, or a machine (Bakhtin, 1993).

Business storytelling needs this mountain when organizations make decisions that touch existential conditions: livelihood, belonging, dignity, safety, climate, land, water, and the capacity to have a future. It is not enough to tell a convincing adoption story for agentic AI. One must ask what sort of world is being disclosed and for whom. Enthinkment does not abolish analysis; it keeps analysis from becoming an alibi for a decision whose consequences are borne elsewhere.

The Tesseract Leadership Theory

The XYZA Tesseract extends my earlier leadership work into a four-dimensional framework. X names task and outcome. Y names the humanistic and participatory dimension. Z names antenarrative, becoming, and the capacity to hold more than one possible future. A names answerability. A cube becomes a tesseract when a fourth dimension is added; likewise, leadership analysis changes when answerability is no longer treated as an optional virtue appended after performance (Boje, 2026b).

This framework is not a scorecard that absolves a leader through arithmetic. It is a way to make tensions visible. An organization can be strong on X, accelerating tasks and measurable results, while weak on Y and A. It can make ambitious Z bets while refusing to name who bears the downside. The Tesseract asks leaders to see these imbalances before a crisis turns them into tragedy. It also asks followers, boards, consultants, and researchers to stop treating the leader as the sole source of organizational agency.

The Ghost Vortex is related. It names inherited and often unseen layers of training data, corporate scripts, policies, institutional interests, and leadership choices that are carried into an AI system. Like a palimpsest, earlier inscriptions are not simply gone because new text appears on top. The Ghost Vortex also recalls Plato's cave: people may interpret shadows while the machinery producing them remains unseen. These metaphors direct inquiry toward the architectural and historical sources of algorithmic story, not only the eloquence of its surface.

The Consent Machine and the Problem of Manufactured Agreement

The Consent Machine names a larger formation than persuasion. It is the convergence of interface design, contractual language, data capture, managerial storytelling, institutional

grammar, repeated media cues, and technological default settings that make one course of action appear natural and another impractical. Its question is not merely "Did people click agree?" but "What possibilities did the system arrange before agreement was requested?" This distinction is crucial where workers, citizens, customers, and communities face systems they cannot realistically refuse.

Business storytelling is implicated here. A machine can manufacture the appearance of participation by providing personalized explanations, FAQ pages, feedback widgets, and responsive chat. None of those automatically creates voice or answerability. If no person with authority must respond, if the affected story is reduced to a sentiment score, or if the decision has already been locked into an investment plan, then the interaction may be a consent performance rather than consent. The critical mountain and the true-storytelling mountain meet here.

The response is not anti-technology. Historical Luddites were skilled workers resisting technologies deployed to break the social contract, not simple enemies of machinery. A Luddite consultant in the AI revolution asks what technology is for, who governs it, whose skills are supported or degraded, and what social relation it creates. That is a storytelling question because every implementation comes with a plot of necessity, progress, cost, risk, and promised future. The plot must remain contestable.

Serious Storytelling and Digital Media

The Serious Storytelling Handbook introduces another mountain with its own vocabulary, methods, and concerns. It treats storytelling as a serious genre and a field of practice connecting narrative, media, design, interaction, learning, and technology (Lugmayr et al., 2026). I have recently climbed part of this slope through my contribution to the handbook. Its authors and editors cite a different constellation of scholars than those of my own storytelling mountain, yet the overlap is real: non-linear plots, digital environments, artificial intelligence, and the need for stories that do more than entertain.

This is exactly the sort of difference that a mountain-range paper should welcome. Serious storytelling may ask about media affordances, audience experience, immersion, and designed interaction in ways that organizational storytelling has not always developed. My own work brings antenarrative, Tamaraland, answerability, and organization development into that

conversation. The purpose is not to say that one framework completes the other. The purpose is to create a ridge line where the questions can travel.

A serious story in an AI setting must be serious about its infrastructure. It cannot celebrate a compelling interactive narrative while ignoring the labor, energy, data, and governance that make interaction possible. Conversely, an organizational story scholar cannot dismiss digital storytelling as mere surface without learning from those who understand design, platform participation, and media experience. The work of the valley is mutual learning.

Methods for Crossing Themes Without Flattening Them

A multi-theoretic framework calls for a multi-method repertoire. There is no universal method because the questions differ. I propose method pluralism with disciplined reflexivity. A study can begin with conversational storytelling interviews to hear fragments and situated concerns; move into Tamaraland mapping to identify rooms and absent connections; conduct rhetorical and narrative analysis of public texts; trace the actor-network of technologies, contracts, and infrastructures; and use socio-economic analysis to identify hidden costs. The purpose is not to pile methods on top of one another. It is to let each method correct the blind spots of another.

SEAM, the Socio-Economic Approach to Management, is essential in this repertoire because it makes hidden costs visible and links qualitative diagnosis to economic consequence (Savall & Zardet, 2008). In an AI deployment, hidden costs may include time spent checking outputs, rework after automated errors, loss of local knowledge, training burdens, turnover, stress, grievance work, data governance labor, and ecological externalities. A business case that measures only direct productivity can therefore become a powerful story of omission.

Method pluralism also requires ethical safeguards. Researchers should disclose their standpoint, avoid pretending that marginalized stories are raw material to be mined, return interpretations where possible, protect participants, and identify the limits of access. They should distinguish an organization's public narrative from the researcher's inference. They should avoid using a technical trace as if it replaces a person's account, and avoid using a moving story as if it replaces material evidence. Rigor is increased, not diminished, by this careful crossing.

Inquiry moves	Question	Illustrative evidence	Ethical caution
Listen conversationally	What is unfinished or difficult to say?	Dialogues, fragments, pauses, counterstories	Do not extract a polished tale from a vulnerable person
Walk the rooms	Which sites tell different versions of the same event?	Meetings, policies, public statements, community accounts	Name rooms to which access is denied
Trace the network	Which human and nonhuman actants shape the account?	Data flows, interfaces, contracts, infrastructures	Do not confuse a technical trace with total explanation
Read rhetoric and plot	How is credibility, urgency, and inevitability achieved?	Speeches, decks, prompts, media, reports	Separate evidence from persuasive packaging
Calculate hidden costs	What work and consequence are excluded from the business case?	Rework time, turnover, energy, complaints, repair	Avoid reducing human harm to a monetary remainder
Reflect on answerability	Who must respond when the story causes harm?	Governance pathways, appeals, named responsibilities	Do not allow "the system" to become an alibi

Table 4: A crossing protocol for multi-theoretic and multi-method business storytelling inquiry

Boundary Work and the Danger of Easy Integration

There is a temptation, when one speaks of a multi-theoretic framework, to make every difference sound reconcilable. I want to resist that temptation. Some mountains carry a deep critique of the assumptions on which another mountain stands. A framework concerned with strategic alignment may seek coherence, while an antenarrative framework may ask what coherence has prematurely silenced. A rhetorical approach may study how a story persuades, while a critical approach may ask whether persuasion is operating where dialogue is impossible. An existential approach may question the separation between analyst and object that a positivist method treats as necessary. These are not small technical disagreements. They are disagreements about knowledge, ethics, and what counts as a responsible intervention.

The right response is not theoretical tourism. It is boundary work. When I borrow a concept from another mountain, I must say what it meant there and not strip it of its history. When I invite another community into the valley, I cannot ask it to speak only in a language already certified by my own field. When a method produces conflict rather than consensus, that conflict may be the discovery. The range needs well-marked borders as well as bridges. Otherwise plurality becomes a friendly name for assimilation.

This is especially true in cross-cultural and Indigenous storytelling. There are living traditions of story, land, kinship, ceremony, and responsibility that cannot be treated as a fresh source of metaphors for business school theory. The mountain-range proposition carries an obligation to learn relationally, cite responsibly, secure permission, and recognize when one is not the person entitled to interpret a story. In a field concerned with answerability, appropriation is not a peripheral issue. It is a failure of answerability at the very point of knowledge production.

Pedagogy and the Formation of New Frontiers

A multi-theoretic business storytelling education should not train students to memorize a list of frameworks and then choose one as a decorative lens. It should train them to notice the question each framework makes possible. Students can take one organizational event, such as an AI implementation, a merger, a data-center proposal, or a workplace conflict, and examine it from several mountains. They can compare what changes when they begin with sensemaking, then with rhetorical history, then with Tamaraland, then with SEAM hidden costs, then with conversational storytelling. The learning resides in the difference among the accounts.

Pedagogy should also restore listening as a scholarly skill. Too often doctoral education rewards the fast production of a theory statement before students have learned how to sit with a contradictory account. Conversational storytelling teaches waiting, returning, and noticing how a question itself shapes the answer. Antenarrative teaches that a fragment is not a defect to be repaired at once. True Storytelling teaches that room, timing, staging, and reflection matter. Enthinkment asks students to consider their own place in the situation. Together these practices form researchers and consultants who are less likely to impose a ready-made plot on people whose lives are still unfolding.

AI makes this pedagogy urgent. Students will increasingly encounter software that offers an immediate summary, themes, references, and a polished paragraph. Those tools may help, but they can also shorten the interval in which a person learns to doubt, listen, and stay with uncertainty. A storytelling education worthy of the name must teach the difference between generated coherence and lived understanding. It should ask students to trace an AI answer back to its conditions of production and to identify who is absent from the answer. That is not a retreat from technology. It is education for answerable use.

From Mapping to Organizational Intervention

The mountain-range framework has practical consequence beyond scholarship. An organization considering an AI initiative can convene a valley session before it writes its business case. The session need not be elaborate. It can begin with a conversational circle in which people name the promised story, the feared story, and the story that has not yet been heard. A Tamaraland map can locate the rooms: executive, technical, finance, human resources, frontline work, customer, legal, community, and ecology. A critical reading can ask where power and consent sit. A SEAM exercise can name likely hidden costs. The result is a more honest starting point, not a veto on innovation.

Such interventions require leadership humility. Leaders often want a single narrative that aligns the organization. Sometimes coordination is necessary, but coordination should not be confused with enforced sameness. A good leader can say: here is the decision we are considering; here is what we know; here is what we do not know; here are the people who may bear costs; here is how to challenge the decision; here is who will answer. That is a far stronger story than the fantasy of certainty. It turns the leadership narrative into an invitation to responsible participation rather than a demand for compliance.

My Critical Management Studies Background

The Critical Management Studies mountain is not merely a distant peak that I visit when I need the language of power. It is part of my own storytelling mountain. My work in storytelling organizations began with the practical and theoretical difficulty of taking seriously what an organization does not want counted as story: the interruption, the rumor, the worker's compressed sentence, the counter-account that will not fit the executive plot. CMS gives that work a sharper political vocabulary. It asks how organizational knowledge is made legitimate, whose voice becomes managerial evidence, whose labor is hidden beneath the performance of rationality, and what happens when a system represents its own interests as universal necessity.

For me, the CMS mountain is crossed by Bakhtin, not placed outside him. Storying is a verb: heteroglossic, polyphonic, unfinished, and always in the middle. Narrative is what can happen when the movement of storying is retrospectively shaped into a plot with selected characters and a chosen ending. Organizations require some narrative coordination, but the danger begins when coordination becomes monologism: one authoritative account speaks as if it

had already absorbed every other voice. The critical task is not to forbid narrative. It is to keep narrative from declaring itself the final owner of lived experience (Bakhtin, 1981, 1993; Boje, 2001).

This is why the mountain range needs CMS. A hospitality that welcomes every theory but refuses to name power becomes politeness without consequence. The CMS ridge asks hard questions of storytelling practice: What work does a success story do? Who must become silent for a transformation narrative to appear seamless? Which harms are transferred to a contractor, a community, a low-wage worker, or a future generation? Where does the institution call its decision "inevitable" in order to avoid the work of consent? Those questions belong at the center of business storytelling in the age of AI.

Ghost Vortex

Ghost Vortex is my proposed contribution at the ridge where critical storytelling, AI leadership, and antenarrative meet. I use it cautiously. It is not a claim that a chief executive's private psychology has somehow been inserted whole into a chatbot. Nor is it a claim that an AI model is a person with a soul, intention, or moral standing equivalent to the people who build and deploy it. Ghost Vortex is an organizational and architectural proposition: values, competitive logics, political constraints, governance choices, training practices, alignment layers, infrastructure arrangements, and product decisions can become sedimented in a system and repeatedly reproduced in patterned output and interaction.

The word ghost names the production shadow that remains active while appearing absent. The word vortex names an active formation, not a passive bias. It directs attention to the way an organization pulls the user into a pre-shaped field of questions, answers, interfaces, defaults, prohibitions, and permissible futures. The system may simulate dialogue while routing the encounter through an institutional grammar that has already sorted what can be seen, said, remembered, or challenged. The relevant evidence is therefore not a leader's personality diagnosis. It is a documented pattern across public discourse, governance, model behavior, labor relations, and infrastructure.

The palimpsest is essential to this concept. Foundation-model material is over-written by provider alignment, enterprise procurement, consulting guardrails, retrieval systems, local policy, and the user's prompt. None of the earlier inscriptions disappears entirely. They continue to contour the later response. Plato's Cave provides a second image: users receive shadows on a

wall and may mistake an answer that arrives smoothly for neutral knowledge, without seeing the organizational machinery that produces the shadow. These metaphors do not replace evidence. They tell us where to look for it.

Bakhtin's non-alibi in Being is the ethical line. An organization cannot discharge answerability by saying that the machine made the decision, that the model is proprietary, that the market required speed, or that a consultant configured the workflow. The human organization remains answerable for the situation it has assembled. The Ghost Vortex asks where an alibi has been manufactured and which actor must answer for the architecture that produces it.

The Original AI Leadership Cases as a Field of Inquiry

The original corporate-leadership cases are the buttresses and bases of my developing Routledge monograph, Dark Sides of Leadership in the AI Era. They are not a ranking of bad leaders, nor a set of psychiatric portraits. They are situated cases for tracing the relationship among public leadership discourse, organizational governance, product behavior, and the broader political economy of AI. The six initial cases are Sam Altman, Dario Amodei, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Satya Nadella, and Liang Wenfeng. Together they provide comparative context for different organizational architectures and different versions of corporate storying.

The cases are deliberately conditional. They work with public statements, dated product interactions, corporate materials, journalistic records, and the accounts of people affected by the systems. Each case requires a counter-case, a source ledger, and a clear distinction between a verified record, a participant account, and my interpretive inference. The project must not claim that a patterned response proves a founder's hidden inner life. Its question is more defensible and more consequential: what organizational values and constraints are visible in the products, policies, and public accounts for which identifiable people and institutions are responsible?

Table 3: Initial leadership cases in the Ghost Vortex inquiry. The table is a research map, not a verdict.

Case	Organizational question	Preliminary vortex concern	Evidence boundary
Altman / OpenAI	How do acceleration, governance, and public-benefit claims travel together?	Capability expansion and the institutional alibi of safety language	Compare public governance records, policies, and documented product behavior

Amodei / Anthropic	How does Constitutional AI define safety and answerability?	Recursive safety framing when a question requires institutional accountability	Separate stated principles from deployment, labor, and infrastructure effects
Musk / xAI	How do contrarian brand, speed, and infrastructure build-out relate?	Adversarial or anti-establishment performance as governance story	Trace public claims and local/community consequences without personality diagnosis
Zuckerberg / Meta	How do platform scale, advertising history, and superintelligence ambitions interact?	Scale and optimization logics carried through platform architecture	Use product, governance, labor, and public-interest records
Nadella / Microsoft	How do enterprise diffusion and "societal permission" claims meet?	Institutional diffusion through cloud and enterprise systems	Follow the enterprise layer and named accountability pathways
Wenfeng / DeepSeek	How do open weights, national regulation, and model behavior meet?	Political and research priorities visible at the boundary of permitted speech	Treat prompt results as dated observations, not stable proof

The Liang Wenfeng and DeepSeek case is particularly important because it made a boundary unusually visible in preliminary probe sessions. The relevant point is not an unsupported claim of total knowledge about a model's training data. It is the contrast between what the system could discuss, what it refused or represented as unavailable, and how it attributed responsibility when asked about corporate practice. That contrast provides a case of institutional grammar in action: a political or organizational limit may be expressed not as an announced prohibition but as a seemingly natural absence of knowledge. The case belongs in the monograph because it makes the wall visible, not because it permits easy generalization to every AI system.

The other cases cannot be collapsed into the DeepSeek case. Microsoft's enterprise reach, OpenAI's governance trajectory, Anthropic's Constitutional AI, Meta's platform history, and xAI's public style and infrastructure strategy pose different questions. The purpose of comparison is to preserve those differences while identifying recurrent patterns: acceleration without adequate public voice, safety claims without clear appeal paths, labor and environmental costs that do not appear in a product story, and the displacement of responsibility onto "the system." A CMS-informed comparative method makes these patterns researchable rather than rhetorical.

Dark Sides of AI Leadership as a Routledge Research Program

The Routledge monograph should therefore be presented as a research program for the next twelve months, not as a completed proof. The plural in Dark Sides matters. There is no single darkness located in one charismatic executive. Dark sides can interact across leadership discourse, corporate governance, model behavior, enterprise implementation, data work, supply

chains, energy and water infrastructure, public policy, and community resistance. The book's contribution will be to show how these layers can be studied together without pretending that a single method can contain them.

The three-strand design gives this project discipline. First, SEAM analysis follows hidden costs: the time spent repairing machine output, degraded apprenticeships, displaced judgment, turnover, grievance work, community costs, energy and water burdens, and the many kinds of labor that a simple productivity story leaves out. Second, a transparent seven-point ordinal coding protocol analyzes public leadership discourse for ethical claims, moral answerability, and dark-side patterns. Third, frozen prompt protocols across systems such as ChatGPT, Claude, Grok, Gemini, DeepSeek, Copilot, Meta AI, and Mistral examine how systems respond to the same accountability questions. These strands converge only where the evidence warrants convergence.

This design resists two familiar failures. One is technophilia: the story that treats scale, fluency, and adoption as sufficient evidence of social good. The other is a mirror-image certainty that treats every AI system as proof of a pre-decided dark outcome. SEAM asks what costs are being hidden. Critical discourse analysis asks what is being said and not said. The frozen prompts allow a dated and replicable record of system behavior. Conversational storytelling keeps the research open to the participant whose experience does not fit the codebook. The monograph must keep these sources in productive tension.

The ethical rule is simple, though difficult to practice: no assertion stronger than its evidence. Public claims need dated primary records or reliable reporting. Product behavior needs preserved transcripts, model/version context, and a stated protocol. Coding needs a codebook, multiple coders where possible, and reliability reporting. Interpretation needs a named standpoint and a counter-interpretation. This evidence discipline will protect the originality of Ghost Vortex by making clear what it is: a strong, testable organizational proposition, not a magical claim about unseen minds inside machines.

Shadow Labor Infrastructure and the Room Between Rooms

CMS also keeps the monograph from becoming only a study of celebrity executives. A model is not post-human intelligence that arrived without labor. It is built and maintained through data labeling, content moderation, reinforcement work, evaluation, engineering, security,

policy, customer support, and the many forms of repair that are routinely relocated outside the official product story. Gray and Suri (2019) call this ghost work. In the AI mountain, the ghost is double: the corporate formation may haunt the product, while the people whose labor makes the product possible are made invisible in its public account.

The enterprise layer is the room between rooms. Consulting firms, cloud providers, systems integrators, enterprise-software vendors, and client organizations decide which models reach a hospital, university, grocery chain, call center, factory, or public agency. They configure guardrails, retrieval systems, dashboards, performance targets, and escalation paths. They determine whether an employee can question an automated recommendation, whether a customer can reach a human being, and whether an affected community is told that AI infrastructure has altered its water, energy, land, or labor conditions. It is in this room that the Ghost Vortex can change masters.

This is where the Consent Machine belongs in the enlarged paper. A consumer may believe that a convenient interface is merely a tool. A worker may be told that an AI assistant is optional. A community may receive a public hearing after the infrastructure decision is already economically locked in. The Consent Machine is the concatenation of defaults, contracts, stories, measurement regimes, and institutional permissions that narrows the field in advance. A critical storytelling method asks whether people were given an actual opportunity to influence the decision or merely an opportunity to narrate their reaction after it was made.

What This Extension Adds to the Field

This extension changes the paper's central claim. My storytelling mountain is not only a collection of concepts—Tamaraland, antenarrative, true storytelling, conversational storytelling, enthinkment, existentialism, Tesseract leadership, Ghost Vortex, and the Consent Machine. It is also a developing research practice. It moves from story to storying, from storying to the organizational architecture that shapes what can be said, and from that architecture to the answerability of named leaders, institutions, and networks. The CMS mountain gives this practice its critical edge; the Dark Sides research program gives it its case-based and methodological foundation.

The Wednesday Lab valley becomes stronger as a result. Participants do not have to accept Ghost Vortex theory to enter the conversation. They can test it, criticize it, bring contrary

cases, and propose another mountain's account of the same phenomenon. What matters is that we do not allow the AI industry to be narrated only by its most powerful rooms. In the Lab, an author, student, consultant, engineer, data worker, community organizer, artist, or executive can bring a question that is still unfinished. The task is to listen for the story beneath the official story and to ask who must answer for the future being made.

Implications for the Six Volumes of Business Storytelling in the Age of AI

The six volumes of Business Storytelling in the Age of AI should not reproduce one mountain's bibliography as if it were the field. They can become a range-wide project. Each volume may have a center of gravity, but each should invite a crossing: strategic storytelling with critical inquiry; digital serious storytelling with living story; AI governance with existential answerability; financial narratives with SEAM hidden costs; organizational development with Tamaraland; pedagogy with conversational storytelling. This design creates a series that is both coherent and plural.

Editorial plurality is not accomplished by adding one token chapter from a different region or discipline. It requires invitation, review practices, and framing language that recognize several genealogies of storytelling. Scholars working in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, South Africa, North America, Latin America, Asia, Indigenous traditions, and many other locations do not enter a neutral field. They enter histories of whose theory travels, whose language is cited, and whose cases are treated as universal. A valley commons has to be designed with that history in view.

I do not claim to have climbed all these mountains. I have a few years left, and I intend to keep learning. That admission is not modesty for its own sake. It is a methodological safeguard. It keeps a senior scholar from turning a long career into a border checkpoint. I can offer a trailhead, some hard-won tools, and an invitation. Others will bring maps I do not possess.

Conclusion

Business storytelling is a multi-theoretic and multi-method framework because organizational life itself is multiple. Stories are told in rooms that do not fully communicate; they emerge in fragments before they harden; they persuade, organize, exclude, repair, and make bets on futures. They are embodied in dialogue, architecture, platform design, financial statements,

algorithms, data centers, ecological relations, and leadership character. No single mountain can see the entire range.

My own mountains—storytelling organizations, Tamaraland, antenarrative, true storytelling, conversational storytelling, enthinkment, existentialism, the Tesseract, the Ghost Vortex, and the Consent Machine—are offered as paths, not as a master map. They help me ask about multiplicity, prospective becoming, ethical listening, material consequence, and answerability. Other mountains will ask different questions and correct my view. That is what a living field should do.

The AI revolution adds urgency, because systems now participate in the production and circulation of organizational stories at unprecedented speed and scale. The response cannot be a more sophisticated corporate narrative alone. It must be a richer practice of inquiry: listening across rooms, tracing what is hidden, calculating costs that are not counted, making room for counterstories, and refusing the alibi that a machine, a market, or a procedure has relieved anyone of responsibility. The valley is open. The fireside is waiting.

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