Yes, and . . . and . . .

Beyond the improvisation metaphor (just in time)

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The improvisation metaphor has been useful in helping us view organizations as collaborative, co-creative entities that often need to respond within relatively short time horizons to unexpected and unplanned events and information (Miner, Moorman et al. 1996). Each day, organizational actors must also improvise in response to "immediate stimuli of the environment" (Frost and Yarrow 1989). The consequences of these actions range in significance for overall organizational performance and the social construction of the organization itself.

Researchers and theorists have looked to the arts not only to help understand and describe improvisation in the organizational setting, but to help shed light on how to create the conditions in which it will thrive.

The jazz metaphor has been quite useful in developing the theory of organizational improvisation. The parallels are intriguing— jazz music begins with some degree of structure (the song) from which musicians improvise. Organizations have various comparable structural elements such as mission, values, knowledge, norms, procedures, and even physical structure and artifacts (Crossan, 1998). Jazz musicians must strike a balance between their memory and past experience and their pursuit of new discoveries, as do most organizations. Jazz ensembles are social groups as are organizations and they must work well together and respond quickly to change, as do most organizations today. These are a few of the ways the jazz metaphor has been used to point the way toward organizational improvisation, and improve our understanding of what it may look like when it occurs.

The jazz metaphor does not offer much in the way of providing executives, managers, workers and organizations a way to actually increase their competence in improvisation, partially

because the skill and talent for jazz is inaccessible to most (Crossan, 1998) and even with a high degree of jazz competence, it remains a metaphor in need of translation for practical application in organizational settings. Part of the bias toward this metaphor may be explained by a pre-existing competence or exposure to jazz improvisation (Kao 1996; Barrett 1998; Hatch 2002). The relatively sparse exploration of alternatives in improvisation may also be explained by a lack of understanding. Unfortunately many know theatrical improvisation largely as an entertainment (e.g. Drew Carey's Whose line is it anyway, or the many comedy sports clubs that use improvisational games). The almost exclusive associations improvisation form, its underlying principles, and learning from improvisers (many of whom have expanded the form far beyond the comedy/cabaret genre) how to develop improvisational skill.

In a handful of separate, articles Crossan (1996; 1997; 1998) explores the value of theatrical improvisation in both illuminating our understanding of organizational improvisation (metaphorically) and pointing the way for actual improvisation skill development for individuals and organizations.

> . . . improvisation is more than a metaphor. It is an orientation and a technique to enhance the strategic renewal of an organization. The bridge between theory and practice is made through exercises used to develop the capacity to improvise . . .
> (1998:593)

Where jazz provides a useful metaphor for theoretical understanding, theatrical improvisation provides both metaphor and the opportunity to develop directly transferable skills for the practice of organizational improvisation.

As we explore beyond the metaphor of improvisation in organizational settings we can begin to identify dimensions of improvisation over which organizational practitioners have

varying degrees of agency, such as competence and skill-building for improvised action and their relationship to the less tangible, though significant, impact of translating our understanding of organizational improvisation into an appreciation of the improvisational mindset for organizing.

Drawing on my experiences with adult learners, client organizations, and my own and others' research I will explore beyond the metaphorical use of improvisation in organizational settings by relating examples of individual experience of improvisation and reflect on organizational implications for these experiences. My intention is that in expanding the discussion of improvisation in organizational settings I will also invite further discussion about the relationship between the lived experience of improvisation and current and emerging themes in time in management.

The Improvising Learner

Over the past decade, I have learned much about the practical applications and real life implications of improvisation from my adult students in my organizational improvisation class at the School for New Learning at DePaul University. These students represent a cross-section of urban professionals, and career changers with diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. It is not untypical to have mid-level, middle-aged managers, 20-something year-old students with a few years of work history, and older adults who now have time and resources to pursue a life-long dream of a college degree together in the same classroom, represented in male and female students with diverse racial, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Adults, especially those starting or returning to finish an undergraduate degree, have a

heightened awareness of time. Some experience time "slipping away" (certain they have already "wasted" too much by the time they enter a degree program), some are worried about and are planning for the future (mapping career changes or advancements), and at the same time burdened with memories of past educational experiences, and/or fears of inadequacy—all of this taking place within the framework of competing demands on their available time for work, family, leisure and now education. This primarily linear, clock-time orientation is the context in which students enter the classroom, an environment itself bounded by industrial time[1] and in which they are, paradoxically, invited to "enter the flow of time directly" (Purser and Petranker 2002) through improvisation.

As course instructor, I meet these learners at any point in their process. As I have followed these journeys I became more and more interested in what was happening for individuals as they courageously registered for, arrived at and then participated in a class with the unsettling words "creativity" and "improvisation" in its title. In addition to witnessing learners' fear of improvisation transform into excited anticipation, and delight at their own and colleague's capacity for collaboration, discovery and playfulness during the quarter, I have heard countless reports of the ways students' improvisation experience in the classroom has spilled over into other areas of their lives. These include stories of a former student whom I recently reencountered as a new visiting faculty colleague. He had since gone on to complete his master's degree in counseling, and was now fulfilling a life-long dream serving as a volunteer chaplain for the state police and their families. At a recent faculty meeting, he pointed down the hall, still

[1] Industrial time "is centrally structured to a) the invariable beat of the clock b) the economic commodification of time and c) the scientific use of time as a measure of abstract motion" (Adam, 1998, p. 11).

remembering the room in which the class was held and shared, "I found out what kind of man I am in that room." I was at once moved, humbled and mystified by the transformative power he assigned to his experience there.

I also heard the stories of the busy professional who reported that she began playing with her three-year-old first thing in the morning rather than hurrying her into the morning routine, as she usually did—and not because she felt she "should," but because *she* wanted to start the day playing, too; the commuter rail traffic manager who was able to avert a head-on train collision within minutes by improvising with his team; the factory worker who set aside the tattered bedtime stories he usually read his son, and began making up a new wild tale each night to their mutual delight; the church administrative assistant who broke with tradition and routine, and for the first time in her years of service, pushed back from her desk, walked down the long corridor to the executive office and shared some new ideas with her boss.

These are only a few of the stories I have heard each week over the past decade. While I have always appreciated the power of improvisation principles as they were applied to co-creative processes in the arts and business, these reports and the personal transformations I witnessed told me that my original appreciation was rather superficial and obvious. Clearly, something much more subtle and mysterious was in motion—something that had very little to do with me, the instructor, and everything to do with a more transcendent and emergent process. What, I wondered, was actually happening for these people through the experience of improvisation in the classroom? How were they experiencing themselves when they improvised? And what, if anything, did their various life stories of improvisation have in common?

As I continued to teach, learn, and wonder about my students' experiences, I built a professional practice working with clients on their pressing organizational issues. From them, I heard about the challenges of developing responsive organizations within environments of increasing flux and uncertainty, of improving productivity and efficiency while fostering a culture that supported collaboration and knowledge sharing. They, not unlike individual adult learners, find themselves largely oriented around the linear time tables of planning and, to greater or lesser degrees, influenced by the past and the existing procedures learning or tradition has spawned. Also, like individual learners, they are interested in having (or providing) a meaningful, engaging individual experience on their way to meeting their organizational goals.

These clients were negotiating what Quinn (1988) calls the competing organizational values of adaptability and stability. Drawing on my own predominant metaphor and professional practice as a director of improvisational theatre has proved to be a valuable approach for such organizations. A central contribution of the improvisational mindset is that it provides a way to understand the seeming contradiction or paradox of competing values, and harness their complementary energy. Improvisers in the arts, and mindful improvisers in all domains, understand that structure and freedom are not each other's enemies, but allies in collaborative, co-creative processes.

While not part of my current study, I can anecdotally report on significant changes in work groups and entire organizations that chose to commit to new ways of working together through improvisation. Notable examples are of an ad agency creative team charged with generating ideas for a new major marketing plan for their biggest national client. Going into the campaign they were burdened with memories of twelve years of previous campaigns for the

client, as well as preconceptions of the client and their own CEO's expectations. Beginning with competence development in improvisation skills and language, the individual team members began to shift their focus from the past or future (expectations) to the opportunities in the moment and the generative energy of the team. Today I continue to receive reports of marketing campaigns that are bearing fruit from seeds nurtured by this team.

On a larger scale, I had the opportunity to work with an organization that wanted to make a company-wide commitment to building a culture of collaboration through improvisation. The shift in their orientation can best be described as a shift from an orientation toward meaningful events (Crossan, Vieira da Cunha et al. 2002) characterized by external demands of the calendar, quarterly goals and the national conventions at which they showcased their new products, to flow (Purser and Petranker 2002) or spiral time (Burrell 1992), in which organizational participants became more attuned to collaborative and coaching opportunities in the moment, were less burdened by external time referents, and even elevated flow-time collaboration by creating a "blue sky" room with wall-to-wall white boards available for anyone's use when an idea emerged and needed room to grow. Here, too, the starting point for the shift was individual competence development through improvisation concepts and practice. As individuals shifted the way they worked together, their mindset and time orientation appears to have shifted, as well.

My intention in the rest of this paper, is to continue wondering out loud as I explore one possible interpretation of what is changing for both the adult learners and the organizational participants through the lens of time orientation.

Organizational Improvisation, briefly

Much of the existing research in organizational improvisation fits Lofland and Lofland's (1995, p. 136-45) causal/linear/rational/clock-bound framework for the study of sociological phenomenon:

- What are the conditions under which [X] appears?
- What facilitates its occurrence?
- What are the circumstances in which it is likely to occur?
- In the presence of what conditions is it likely to become an outcome?
- Upon what factors does variation in it depend?
- Under what conditions is it present and under what conditions is it absent?

These studies have included theoretical analysis and research linking improvisation to innovation (Crossan 1997), new product development (Miner, Moorman et al. 1996; Moorman and Miner 1998), organizational learning (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Miner, Bassoff et al. 2001), strategy and decision-making (Moorman and Miner 1998; Weick 2002), organizational theory (Hatch 2002; Kamoche, Pina e Cunha et al. 2002), design and technology (Ishizaki 2003), management and leadership (Berliner 1994; Barrett 1998), organizational memory (Moorman and Miner 1998) as well as other organizational dynamics and dimensions[2].

These studies have all elevated improvisation in both scholarly and, to a lesser degree, business conversations. The focus on antecedents and outcomes of improvisation is of great

[2] I have posted a more comprehensive bibliography on improvisation at www.meyercreativity.com/reading.htm

interest to practitioners, especially if the data contribute to understanding how improvisation enhances organizational performance, and how the quality of improvisation in organizations can be improved. Not unlike the arch of organizational learning from theory to practice (Tsang 1997), organizational improvisation studies are exploring first "what is organizational improvisation?," followed closely by the inevitable practitioner question, "How *should* organizations improvise?"

The current research focus in organizational improvisation is especially delicate, as the very nature of improvisation is, at best, difficult to quantify, analyze and prescribe and, at worst, loses the very dynamic nature of improvisation itself under such dissection. Improvisation, as a socially constructed, co-creative process, cannot be appreciated fully removed from its relational (Park 1999; Park 2001) and experiential context.

This research issue is linked to the concerns raised by various time theorists as they look to push beyond modernist conceptions of time (Adam 1990; Crossan, Vieira da Cunha et al. 2002; Noss 2002; Petranker 2002; Purser and Petranker 2002), while remaining mindful of the organizational bias for representational knowledge (Park 2001). This challenge is not the focus of this paper, yet is worth mentioning as it echoes the challenges individuals and organizations confront as they begin to develop an improvisational mindset and attune themselves to new ways of valuing process and performance, as well as expanding their conceptions of valid knowledge creation and knowledge sharing.

While researchers in the arts are enlarging the discussion of the lived experience of improvisation (Von Emmel 2002; Jeddeloh 2003) little has been done to further such

understanding in organizational contexts. My interest in contributing to this dimension of understanding is neither exclusively descriptive nor prescriptive, but appreciative. Improvisation, not unlike many organizational dynamics, cannot be prescribed; it can, however, come to life under the light of appreciation (Cooperrider and Whitney 2000; Watkins and Mohr 2001) as organizational participants heighten their awareness of what is happening for them when they are improvising and attune themselves to more opportunities for successful improvised action.

The Paradox of Improvisation Competence

Not surprisingly, given the operational concerns of most organizations, much of the practitioner work with improvisation in client settings focuses on developing individual competence in basic concepts and skills. Typically such competence development is delivered in a training or workshop setting by a practitioner with a background in improvisation, or whose predominant framework is organizational development and who has taken some improvisation classes and perhaps performed with an improv troupe. A smaller, but growing number of practitioners are well-grounded in both improvisation and organizational development theory and practice.

The competence-based dimension of organizational improvisation can be dangerous territory because of its inherent contradiction to improvisation itself. Competence models are largely grounded in behaviorist theory and practice which "insist that objectives are meaningless unless they describe *terminal behaviors* in very precise, measurable, and observable terms" (Knowles 1973, p. 129). The competence development framework, then, is highly outcome-

focused and easily lends itself to emphasizing increasing the "fund of knowledge" (Freire 1970), more than the transformational opportunities in the learning process itself. Competence assessment focuses primarily on discrepancies between the desired outcome competence and the learner's current level of development. All of this is not, in itself, problematic. My concern is that the competence/training model does not explicitly or consciously value the less "precise, measurable and observable" dimensions of improvisation, specifically those described by adult learners and organizations that are embedded in the *ing* of transforming.

Viola Spolin, considered by many to be the mother of contemporary improvisation in the United States and an educator-philosopher in her own right, wrote

> It stands to reason that if we direct all our efforts towards reaching a goal, we stand in grave danger of losing everything on which we have based our daily activities. For when a goal is superimposed on an activity instead of evolving out of it, we often feel cheated when we reach it . . .If we are trained only for success, then to gain it we must necessarily use everyone and everything for this end; we may cheat, lie, crawl, betray, or give up all social life to achieve success. How much more certain would knowledge be if it came from and out of the excitement of learning itself (Spolin 1963, 1983).

Even with the limitations of the competence model, for the practitioner looking to support organizational actors to become more comfortable with and effective in improvisation, and

elevate the improvisational mindset within an organization, competence development is often the most tangible starting point.

One of the first concepts novice improvisers learn and competencies they put into practice is "Yes, and …" (Meyer 2000). In the early days of contemporary improvisational theatre improvisers discovered that whenever they denied an idea, discovery, suggestion, or other improvised action offered by their fellow players, or the audience, the action of the scene stalled and often fell apart (Sweet 1994). When they accepted any and all offers (said "yes") and then offered something in return ("and . . .") the action continued to unfold and build. The ability to say, "Yes, and …" is arguably the most important competence for improvisation; it is a skill that individuals can acquire and practice to support improvisation and collaboration in almost any setting. Canadian improvisation teacher and visionary, Keith Johnstone, puts it another way

> There are people who prefer to say 'Yes', and there are people who prefer to say 'No'. Those who say 'Yes' are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say 'No' are rewarded by the safety they attain. There are far more 'No' sayers than 'Yes' sayers, but you can train one type to behave like the other (1979, 1981).

However, if improvisation is described and approached only in terms of competencies, its deeper transformative power will be missed, and its significance to the discussion of time in management minimized.

An Illustration. One of the games my students play early in the course is called "Add-an-Object": Participants are asked to name a space that is filled with interesting objects (e.g. a barn, an industrial kitchen, a grade school classroom). One at a time, each player then enters the imaginary space and uses an object he or she might find there. With each added object, all participants visualize the emerging space. The game is designed primarily to build skills in the use of space, imaginary objects and the acceptance of the givens contributed by other players ("yes, and . . .). I have found the more interesting learning opportunity lies in what happens as the players await their turn to enter the space and contribute an object to the scene. Observationally, it might appear as if they are sitting in their chairs enjoying the unfolding action, trying to figure out what objects their colleagues are using in the space. On further inquiry, after the playing space has come to life with imaginary objects, I discover that the players are also busy in their seats planning what they will do when it is their turn. To the uninitiated, this may seem a natural response to the instructions for the game.

Certainly they have accomplished the skill-building aspect of the experience. They are learning to create imaginary objects in space, and to practice "yes, and . . ." as they accept the previous contributions of other players and build upon them. They have also gotten a taste of what it feels like to be "on stage" with several other eye-balls focused on them as they play the game—and even as much as I de-emphasize the performance aspect of the games—the anxiety of being watched and fear of being judged emerges for many. This constructed "performance anxiety" coupled with a desire to have a "really good" object, be funny or novel, can create in the players' minds even higher stakes. Planning is their response to this anxiety. Better to have a

plan, they reason, than risk looking foolish or unprepared, or as Claxton (1984) warned, risk the loss of comfort, confidence, consistency or competence that attends most learning and transformation. Unfortunately, the casualty of planning for improvisation is, of course, improvisation. Lost is the opportunity for discovery, emergence, possibility and, a heightened experience of self that can discover and process information that "just arrives in time" (Purser and Petranker 2002).

Broadway legend, Barbara Cook, addressed a master class of singing students on this point when she was asked to reveal her "big secret"

> To be as authentic as we know how to be in the moment, so that we can be more and more present in what we do. The more we can do that, the safer we are. The problem is it feels most dangerous, because what I ask people to do is in effect undress emotionally, so that's very frightening and new. But this very thing that seems most dangerous is where safety lies (New York Times, Thursday, August 15, 2002, B3).

Working with adult learners in both undergraduate and client settings over the years, I have come to think of the resistance to this lived experience of the "dangerous" present moment as a kind of "dis-ability." Improviser, Kelly Milani sheds additional light on the distinction by saying that improvisationally, "You don't live *for* the moment, but you live *in* the moment." *For* the moment assumes a pay-off; *in* the moment is the pay-off (Meyer 2000). The opportunity that both the metaphor and the practice of improvisation invites is the opportunity for re-abilitation in

action and experience that takes place in the present moment and embedded in the awareness of context from past experience as well as future goals and/or vision. This disability can, in part, be attributed to Western culture's socialization in and privileging of rational ways of knowing and its valuation of what is external, objective, repeatable and verifiable. This socialization has also left us with a disembodied experience of ourselves in time, or as Purser and Petranker suggest, " To function as moderns, we have suppressed our awareness of participation with the representational nature of the phenomenological world as a whole, including that of time" (2002).

The experience of improvisation, for those willing to surrender to and embody it truly *im*proviso (without provision), is the experience of self that most of my adult students, and client organizations find at once terrifying and exhilarating. The practice invites an experience of the mystery of the non-rational mind that challenges most adults' familiar ways of knowing.

> The lived experience of the body is not just a processor for rational thought. The action of becoming in the world is meaning-making. C*ognition as enaction* implies an embodied process of becoming. The world isn't an object that we as subjects handle; we are engaged in the act of the world becoming, unfolding. In a very concrete way, we are in the act of meaning-making as we eat, as we sleep, and as we improvise" (Von Emmel 2002).

Theatrical improvisation has been described by practitioners as walking a tight rope that is only a foot off the ground. In the safety of the classroom, or other facilitated setting, adults can

experiment with the lived experience of improvisation, slowly releasing their grip on the fear-based compulsion to plan. Improvisationally, Purser and Petranker's challenge to "enter the flow of time" is also an invitation to a more intimate experience of the self and others and to enter the mystery of emergent action that is conceived as it unfolds (Pina e Cunha, Viera da Cunha et al. 2002).

Individual competence in improvisation principles, then, is only the doorway to a richer experience and to greater individual and organizational capacities. It is also an invitation to a mystery that lives in the dynamic space between structure and freedom. Spolin centralized such awareness in her proposal that "It is highly possible that what is called talented behavior is simply a greater individual capacity for experiencing" (Spolin 1963, 1983). Others have named, this "greater individual capacity" in various contexts, including Torbert's advanced stages of Developmental Action Inquiry and the "magician" stage in personal transformation (Fisher and Torbert 1995). The experience is also reflected in Torbert's (1999) description of "triple-loop learning" whereby participants change the "very quality of one's present awareness, of one's actual visioning", Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) description of flow states, Schön's Reflection-in-Action (1983), Atkinson and Claxton's intuition in action (2000), Quinn's descriptions of the master manager and transformational leader (1990; Quinn 1996).

Each of these conceptual frameworks, as well as individual and organizational accounts, attempt to synthesize and transcend dualisms of structure and freedom and, I believe, also point toward a new embodied experience of time through improvisation.

Improvisation "just in time"

> Theory has been time-blind for long enough and practice has still to tap the enabling power immanent in a more instrumental and conscious use of time as a vehicle for change. Additionally, on a broader level, we call on managers and scholars to look beyond the apparent contradiction many have been highlighting in organizational theory and practice, to understand it as a dialectical phenomenon where two opposites share mind-space and mind-time (Crossan, Vieira da Cunha et al. 2002).

As Crossan, Vieira da Cunha et al., and others point out, the challenge of dualistic conceptions is, that in practice we do not have a lived experience that is either exclusively linear or that is exclusively present moment without memory of or influence from what has gone before and of an awareness of a future yet to unfold.

While it is impossible to extract the individual experience of improvisation from a discussion of organizational improvisation (echoing Argyris and Schön's assertion that, while technically organizations cannot learn (1978), it is still valuable to use the learning lens to understand organizational behavior), it is useful to explore the organizational dynamics and dimensions of improvisation. One of the most significant of these dimensions as it relates to the discussion of time in management is that of organizational memory.

Vera (2000) cites organizational memory as one of six "moderating variables"[3] in organizational improvisation, while Moorman and Miner have studied the relationship between

[3] Vera's six variables for OI are (1) real-time information and communication, (2) organizational memory, (3) culture, (4) environmental turbulence, (5) teamwork skills, and (6) individual expertise and skill.

organizational memory and improvisation (Moorman and Miner 1997; 1998; Moorman and Miner 1998). Karl Weick also links improvisation to memory

> Improvisation is not just grounded in forms, but memory . . . Forms and memory and practice are all key determinants of success in improvisation that are easy to miss if analysts become preoccupied with spontaneous composition (2002: 59).

In both improvisational storytelling and unfolding organizational "stories" the content becomes a structure or "given" that is both the result of the existing structure and the foundation for additional structure, similar to the process Giddens describes as duality of structure (1984).

Hatch (2002) discusses the role of memory using the jazz metaphor, citing the improvisational value of memories of prior performances of a piece in influencing how the piece is played *this time.* Here, too, memory serves as structure "the future is invited into the present via expectation created by recollection of similar experiences in the past" (89).

Sitting in the audience during any long-form improvised theatrical performance the importance of memory becomes readily apparent. One of the best-known long-form improvisations, "The Harold," was developed by Del Close (Halpern, Close et al. 1994) and is performed several nights a week at Chicago's Improv Olympic. Based on a single suggestion from the audience the players begin to "jam" together as they explore the interesting dimensions and associations with the suggestion. This jam session may start with a motion, sound, phrase,

exclamation or any number of responses. As the players accept and explore these discoveries soon the first scene and characters emerge, and the players not directly involved on-stage retreat to the sidelines as intent participant-observers to the unfolding action.

Collectively, the players must hold both the original "given" (the audience suggestion) and all of the discoveries that emerge from that given. Their challenge is to use this organizational memory to fuel their discoveries, improvised characters and action over the next forty-five or so minutes. If their relationship to this memory is overly procedural (tied to successful bits and characters from past performances), they will not be able to continue to unfold the action and mine the givens for increasingly surprising discoveries, but fall into recursive routines enacting the original assumptions and one-dimensional dynamics.

Organizations are similarly challenged as others (Crossan et al. 2004; Moorman and Miner 1998b) have described, impeded in their ability to improvise when they are overly tied to routines and procedures. However, memory of past routines and approaches can be useful raw material for a novel response to the unexpected (Moorman and Miner 1998a).

Memory of the "givens" in improvisation, the original inspiration, the organizational vision, the boundaries of available resources, and ready access to various dimensions of knowledge (representational, reflective, and relational), as well as past organizational routines and effective responses are all dependent on a present moment lived experience that includes a relationship to the past and (in the case of vision and goals) the imagined future. This capacity is highly valued on the improv stage. Recently I brought a group of students to a performance at Chicago's Improv Olympics. During the post-show discussion a student asked the improvisers,

"What quality or competence do you think makes someone a great improviser?" One of the seasoned players responded, "A high point of reference. By that I mean, someone who is well read, is up on current events and popular culture and can draw on any of it at just the right moment. That makes for a very rich improvisation."

For improvisers both in the theater and in organizational settings memory itself does not impede successful improvisation, but the individual's *relationship* to memory and the context (and culture) within which the improvisation is occurring. In other words, memory of the "way we've always done things" can be either a limiting routine, or (with "Yes, and…") a springboard to a novel response.

Elevating the Improvisational Mindset

Back in the classroom. Toward the end of the quarter, I invite students to co-create some more imaginary spaces. Someone calls out "a garage!" and soon individuals are jumping up, entering the "garage," discovering an object there, exploring it, using it, and returning to their seats. At times, in their enthusiasm, they overlap each other in the space. This time many take me up on my suggestion to drop their plans/tools (Weick 1993) and enter the playing space truly improviso. They report feeling less anxiety, and a sense of anticipation of the discoveries their colleagues will contribute, of the "gifts" they will receive and then return with embellishments. The energy is forward moving, generative and unlabored—in contrast to their first playing of the game weeks before when they found themselves debilitated by their plans, and their attachment

to not looking stupid, to "getting it right," and being clever and funny. Ironically, delivered to the present moment, the flow of time, their discoveries are more novel and delightful than before.

As the class comes to an end, I hear more reports of how the classroom experience is spilling over into other areas of students' lives. I hear of acceptance and appreciation of their current "givens" (a less-than-fulfilling job, financial limitations, family responsibilities) yet with a renewed sense of possibility—both within their current boundaries, and beyond. Yes, improvisation is, in part, a competence to be learned, *and*. . . learning the language of improvisation, the vocabulary of "yes, and… " is similar to learning any new language—once a certain degree of competence is in place (vocabulary and basic grammar) the words begin to flow, and become only a container for the richer, more mysterious stream of consciousness itself. This mystery is not one to be solved so much as to be appreciated.

Appreciating the lived experience of improvisation in time may be the most valuable approach for organizational practitioners—one that elevates the improvisational mindset, without analyzing the very life out of it. As individuals attune to their experience of themselves in improvisation they expand their "individual capacity for experiencing" (Spolin 1963, 1983); this capacity, once appreciated is generative and contagious to other organizational participants. Attuning to internal and external rhythms (Crossan, Vieira da Cunha et al. 2002) supports individual and organizational action that is responsive rather than exclusively reactive and situational (removed from an awareness of context). For organizational practitioners and change agents Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Sorensen et al. 2000) can be a doorway to an experience of time that engages the memory of past experience at its best in the imagination of a

"dream" that compels action in the present (Purser and Petranker 2002). The organizational implications of elevating the improvisational mindset, and attuning individuals to their experience of themselves in the present moment is significant as, "Under normal conditions no person or organization is aware of the fact that acting is possible only in the present moment" (Noss 2002, p. 50).

As an educator and organizational practitioner I am attuned to the pressures, fears, limitations and possibilities within which individuals and organizations negotiate their relationship to time. I am privileged to work with individuals and organizational participants who are willing to challenge their current meaning-making constructs, including their relationship to time. Though they may still fear that time is "slipping away," and have competing pressures on their available time, they are also willing to enter a new dimension of experience in which they discover their personal creative power *within* time.

As a scholar-practitioner, I continue to wonder how to negotiate the practitioner desire to opperationalize research findings without destroying the mystery and power of the lived experience itself. I wonder how we can continue to elevate the discussion and awareness of the lived experience of time in management in a way that supports individual agency, improvisation, meaning-making and still be relevant to organizational productivity and profitability imperatives. I look forward to continue wondering with you and to expanding the discussion of time and improvisation in both theory and practice when we gather in Fontainebleau.

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