

Improvisation in an Organisation: Employee Training for the Application of Improvisation in Cultural Organisations

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This article discusses the concept of improvisation in management, its models, and the impact of employee training on the application of improvisation in cultural organisations. Scientific theoretical material served as the basis for developing a model of improvisation training in a cultural organisation, establishing relationships between improvisation and organisational structure, as well as between training and the application of improvisation in cultural organisations. The article also analyses the impact of employee qualities and skills on learning to improvise within an organisation. In addition, it discusses why, and at which levels of cultural organisations, internal and external training can be carried out, and what impact such training may have on employee transfer between organisational levels. The aim of the article is to reveal the impact of employee training on the application of improvisation in a cultural organisation. This work contributes to scientific research in this field, as the topic of improvisation and employee training in cultural organisations has not yet been sufficiently examined.

Keywords: improvisation, management, cultural organisation, employee, training.

Introduction

Cultural organisations face market unpredictability; thus, it is difficult to predict the success of cultural products. Strategies such as the promotion of creativity and appropriate organisational management are essential for achieving organisational success.¹ Profit-oriented business organisations aim to maximise financial gain. To achieve this goal, they create and/or sell products or services that meet consumer expectations. Non-profit organisations are independent, non-governmental entities that seek to fill the gaps in the private and public sectors. These organisations are non-profit and cannot provide returns on capital to their owners; instead, they provide services to target groups in order to meet their needs. Public sector organisations belong to the state and are subsidised by public funds; as a result, they tend to be less independent and less flexible than business sector organisations.

Improvisation may play a more significant role in organisational learning than previously anticipated. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations were required to reorganise their activities rapidly and, as the pandemic progressed, to improvise continuously. Organisational leaders asked their employees to solve problems efficiently in order to regain control.² Complex circumstances and limited time are among the most important conditions for improvisation. Under such conditions, employees must be prepared to make independent decisions regardless of their individual traits and skill levels; consequently, they need to be continuously included in the processes of learning and training. Employee competencies can be improved through internal or external training; however, there is a lack of research on how training operates at different organisational levels and how acquired skills are applied when improvising in the management of cultural organisations.

The aim of the article is to reveal the impact of employee training on the application of improvisation in a cultural organisation by developing a theoretical model. Comparative analysis and synthesis of scientific

- 1 Domenico Ruta and Ilaria Sala, "HRM in Cultural Institutions," in *HRM in Mission Driven Organizations: Managing People in the Not for Profit Sector* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 145–82.
- 2 Stefan Meisieck and Brendan R. Stanway, "Power, Politics and Improvisation: Learning during a Prolonged Crisis," *Management Learning* 54, no. 1 (2023): 14–34.

literature are employed. In order to reveal the impact of employee training on the application of improvisation, it is first necessary to discuss the concept of improvisation in organisations, its specific characteristics, and existing models, with an emphasis on their features.

Improvisation in an organisation

The word *improvisation* originates from the Latin term *improvisus*, meaning *unforeseen*. Etymologically, this definition suggests that improvisation involves *creating something from nothing or from whatever is immediately available*. On the other hand, the term bears a certain resemblance to the Old French word *emprouer*, meaning *to improve*, or *to invest profitably*. Therefore, improvisation emerges in the moment of action and does not comply with conventional schemes. When improvising, something new is created through working with existing material and improving it.³

Improvisation promotes experimentation and the generation of new ideas.⁴ It connects freedom and structure, novelty and routine, chaos and order.⁵ Improvisation is not only a prospective method for addressing a situation; it is also a unique opportunity for growth.⁶ It encompasses the merging of drafting and implementation, unexpected change and order,⁷ and enables the resolution of unexpected situations without prior preparation.⁸ Improvisation becomes organisational when it is carried out by an organisation or by its members.⁹ Organisations often underestimate the extent to which improvisation, improvisational action, and retrospective understanding are necessary for the performance of daily tasks. In an effort to control results and

- 3 Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 4 Karl E. Weick, "Organizational Redesign as Improvisation," in *Organizational Change and Redesign: Ideas and Insights for Improving Performance*, ed. George P. Huber and William H. Glick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 346–79.
- 5 Dusya Vera and Mary M. Crossan, "Character-Enabled Improvisation and the New Normal: A Paradox Perspective," *Management Learning* 54, no. 1 (2023): 77–98.
- 6 Arie Halachmi, "Management under Emergency: Paradoxes and Improvisation," *International Journal of Public Administration* 2, no. 1 (1980): 81–101.
- 7 Anne S. Miner, Peter Bassof, and Christine Moorman, "Organizational Improvisation and Learning: A Field Study," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2001): 304–37.
- 8 Allègre L. Hadida, Wladimir Tarvainen, and John Rose, "Organizational Improvisation: A Consolidating Review and Framework," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 17, no. 4 (2015): 437–59.
- 9 Hadida, Tarvainen, and Rose, "Organizational Improvisation," 437–59.

simplify work processes, organisations often tend to break down complex tasks into formal descriptions of work procedures that can be followed automatically. However, despite the intention to act according to rational and anticipated plans, they frequently find themselves operating without a clear understanding of how situations will unfold.¹⁰ Therefore, improvisation in organisations should not be regarded merely as a last-minute substitute for planning or as careless and reckless activity, but rather as an unavoidable constituent of organisational life¹¹ and an important organisational competence that enables adaptation and introduces novelty.¹²

Improvisation in an organisation is commonly associated with creativity,¹³ adaptation,¹⁴ spontaneity,¹⁵ learning, research, and experimentation.¹⁶ Improvisation enables an organisation to pursue goals in

- 10 Frank J. Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation in Jazz and Organizations: Implications for Organizational Learning," in *The Aesthetic Turn in Management* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 407–24.
- 11 João V. Cunha, Ken N. Kamoche, and Miguel P. e Cunha, "Once Again: What, When, How and Why," in *Organizational Improvisation* (London: Routledge, 2001), 291–312.
- 12 Kyriakos Kyriakopoulos, "Improvisation in Product Innovation: The Contingent Role of Market Information Sources and Memory Types," *Organization Studies* 32, no. 8 (2011): 1051–78.
- 13 Shona L. Brown and Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, "The Art of Continuous Change: Linking Complexity Theory and Time-Paced Evolution in Relentlessly Shifting Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1997): 1–34; Nigel Dennis and Michael Macaulay, "Jazz and Marketing Planning," *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 11, no. 3 (2003): 177–85; Dusya Vera and Mary Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," *Organization Science* 16, no. 3 (2005): 203–24; Niels Sorensen, "The Metaphor of 'the Jazz Band': Ethical Issues for Leadership," *Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études Critiques en Improvisation* 9, no. 1 (2013); Colin M. Fisher and Frank J. Barrett, "The Experience of Improvising in Organizations: A Creative Process Perspective," *Academy of Management Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2019): 148–62; Arno Kuura and Isidro Sandoval, "Improvisation in Project Management: Lessons from Jazz," *Project Management Development—Practice and Perspectives* 8 (2019): 15–28.
- 14 Brown and Eisenhardt, "The Art of Continuous Change," 1–34; Frank J. Barrett, *Yes to the Mess: Surprising Leadership Lessons from Jazz* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2012).
- 15 Karl E. Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis," in *Organizational Improvisation*, ed. Miguel P. e Cunha and Ken N. Kamoche (London: Routledge, 1998), 103–44; Dusya Vera and Mary Crossan, "Organizational Learning, Knowledge Management, and Intellectual Capital: An Integrative Conceptual Model," in *The Handbook of Organizational Learning & Knowledge Management* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).
- 16 Frank J. Barrett, "Coda—Creativity and Improvisation in Jazz and Organizations: Implications for Organizational Learning," *Organization Science* 9, no. 5 (1998): 605–22; Patricia M. Johnson, "The Relationship of Organizational Improvisation to Market Orientation" (PhD diss., Pace University, 2014).

novel ways¹⁷ without adhering to established rules or mechanically repeating previous actions.¹⁸ It constitutes an essential component of entrepreneurship¹⁹ and serves as a response to a constantly changing environment;²⁰ rather than following a strict plan, it provides an opportunity to find solutions based on core organisational values.²¹ However, it is important to acknowledge that attempts to transcend established rules and redefine the existing order²² do not eliminate the risk of failure.²³

Models of improvisation in management

Various models of improvisation in management discussed in scientific literature reveal that improvisation in organisations operates within a certain structure and is inseparable from learning. Colin M. Fisher and Teresa Amabile²⁴ propose a model of improvisational creativity in organisations that includes two elements: preparation prior to the improvisation process and the stages of improvisation itself. According to the authors, in the case of composite creativity, preparation may encompass the acquisition of relevant skills and the collection of information required to perform a specific task.

Improvisation in management occurs without advance preparation; consequently, individuals rely on existing knowledge and apply established routines to various situations. Rachael Hains-Wesson et al.²⁵ propose a

- 17 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," 203–24.
- 18 Kim Wikström and Alf Rehn, "Playing the Live Jazz of Project Management," Project Jazz LLC Paper, 2002.
- 19 Keith M. Hmieleski and Andrew C. Corbett, "The Contrasting Interaction Effects of Improvisational Behavior with Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy on New Venture Performance and Entrepreneur Work Satisfaction," *Journal of Business Venturing* 23, no. 4 (2008): 482–96.
- 20 Bjørn Alterhaug, "Improvisation on a Triple Theme: Creativity, Jazz Improvisation and Communication," *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* 30, no. 1 (2004): 97–118.
- 21 Nigel Dennis and Michael Macaulay, "'Miles Ahead'—Using Jazz to Investigate Improvisation and Market Orientation," *European Journal of Marketing* 41, no. 5–6 (2007): 608–20.
- 22 Frank J. Barrett, Jeff Huffaker, Chris M. Fisher, and Dominique Burgaud, *Improvisation and Transformation: Yes to the Mess* (Cham: Springer, 2018).
- 23 Fisher and Barrett, "The Experience of Improvising in Organizations," 148–62.
- 24 Colin M. Fisher and Teresa Amabile, "Creativity, Improvisation and Organizations," in *The Routledge Companion to Creativity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 13–24.
- 25 Rachael Hains-Wesson, Vicki Pollard, and Allan Campbell, "A Three-Stage Process of Improvisation for Teamwork: Action Research," *Issues in Educational Research* 27, no. 1 (2017): 82–98.

three-step model of teamwork improvisation designed for working with ideas. This model consists of three stages: idea submission, development of the core idea, and the creation and presentation of the final idea. Each stage cultivates certain abilities, with improvisation functioning as the main element of creativity. Lukas Zenk et al.²⁶ propose a systematic model of improvisation based on real-time action as well as learning and teaching. This model highlights both the possibility of learning and preparing for improvisational activities, as well as the necessity of having improvisational skills. Raji Sivaraman and Chris Wilson²⁷ developed a model of learning improvisation based on the Japanese learning method *Shu-Ha-Ri*. This model analyses and anticipates learner behaviour by distinguishing stages of development—inexperienced, beginner, and expert—through which specific skills are gradually acquired. In the *Shu* stage, learners are required to comply with and follow certain rules; this stage typically includes the highest number of people. The *Ha* stage allows breaking traditions and digressing from the rules, and therefore involves fewer participants. In the *Ri* stage, attachment to form and rules disappears, and actions unfold naturally; this stage includes only the most advanced learners.²⁸ The *Shu-Ha-Ri* model illustrates that larger groups and less qualified employees tend to follow rules, employees undergoing learning and training are permitted to challenge them, and experienced employees can operate beyond formal rules; however, all groups function within the same systemic limitations.²⁹

Eric W. Stein's³⁰ decision-making model analyses improvisation as a decision-making process comprising five levels, ranging from the lowest to the highest degree of improvisation. (1) Replication stands in opposition to improvisation and involves the mere emulation of existing processes, retaining all their structural and functional properties. No improvisation occurs on this level; however, replication can be suitable in situations requiring

26 Lukas Zenk, Natascha Hynek, Gerald Schreder, and Giovanni Bottaro, "Toward a System Model of Improvisation," *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 43 (2022): 100993.

27 Raji Sivaraman and Chris Wilson, *Making Projects Sing: A Musical Perspective of Project Management* (New York: Business Expert Press, 2016).

28 Daniel A. Miller, "Understanding Japanese EFL Learners through the 'Shu Ha Ri' Approach to Learning in the Communicative Lecture Theatre" (2008).

29 Sivaraman and Wilson, *Making Projects Sing*.

30 Eric W. Stein, "Improvisation as Model for Real-Time Decision Making," in *Supporting Real Time Decision-Making* (Boston: Springer, 2011), 13–32.

maximum precision. (2) Interpretation encompasses minor modifications while following the established rules. This stage represents the first step towards improvisation, as core rules are maintained but slight digressions are allowed. Interpretation is suitable in situations where the primary process must remain intact, yet a slight variation is acceptable. (3) Embellishment entails active and purposeful action that replaces a previous action without exceeding clearly defined boundaries. While the main rules continue to be observed, greater deviation is allowed than at the interpretation stage, resulting in a higher level of creativity. (4) Variation refers to the active modification of an action to achieve a specific result. This level allows for the emphasis of certain features and the attenuation of others while preserving the original form. Variation requires a higher level of competence and experience, as the result depends on the decisions made. (5) Improvisation allows the modification of both structural and functional properties within certain constraints. The improviser introduces changes while maintaining an underlying framework that limits the choice of possible solutions, even as routine procedures are altered. At this level, employees have considerable freedom in problem solving, which demand a high degree of expertise, a strong understanding of the situation, and the ability to make quick decisions.³¹

Emmanuel Roud³² emphasises the importance of collective improvisation. His model of collective improvisation reveals how collective learning and organisational factors influence the potential for collective improvisation. Transitional variables—such as organisational memory, internal trust, communication, and information exchange—shape the conditions for collective improvisation. Complex circumstances and organisational structure function as independent variables that affect collective improvisation capacity. This model shows that successful collective improvisation depends not only on employees' skills or personal qualities, but also on organisational structure, culture, and operational processes, which may either facilitate or hinder the application of improvisation in organisational management.³³

31 Stein, "Improvisation as Model for Real-Time Decision Making", 13–32.

32 Emmanuel Roud, "Collective Improvisation in Emergency Response," *Safety Science* 135 (2021): 105104.

33 Roud, "Collective Improvisation in Emergency Response."

Stephen A. Leybourne³⁴ proposes a matrix of improvisation designed to assist project managers in identifying situations where improvisation may be useful and in applying it in practice. Organisational activities within this matrix are classified along two axes: creativity and analytical ability to adapt. Creativity in this context is associated with experience in making novel decisions and with the degree of improvisation; it may be high or low and may involve rejecting an established paradigm within a specific area or process. Analytical ability to adapt refers to the extent of freedom in selecting means and methods and may likewise be high or low. It is important to acknowledge that improvisation must be grounded in, and related to, traditional analytical approaches; however, at the planning stage, a high level of creativity is needed when considering whether improvisation may be beneficial. Situations characterised by *high creativity and low analytical ability to adapt* are typical of non-profit organisations and creative art organisations that implement projects through fundraising. These organisations require high levels of creative energy, and their activities often resemble previous projects. *Low creativity and low analytical ability to adapt* is common in organisations engaged in activities such as software maintenance and information technology services. Such organisations typically inherit characteristics from existing systems, and teams are therefore expected to follow established work protocols. *High creativity and high analytical ability to adapt* are typical of the pharmaceutical industry, where the development of new medicines involves scientific research and, despite strict regulation, remains unpredictable and requires a high level of creativity. *Low creativity and high analytical ability to adapt* are prevalent in many organisations in the public sector that are required to comply with standardised procedures imposed by government regulations. Requirements for data analysis and reporting in these organisations are high, resulting in highly specific and predetermined work plans.³⁵

To sum up, models of improvisation facilitate an understanding of improvisation in organisations as a complex organisational competence. Improvisation should not be perceived as chaotic or disorderly action;

34 Stephen A. Leybourne, "Improvisation and Project Management: What, When, and How" (paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2011—North America, Dallas, TX, Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2011).

35 Leybourne, "Improvisation and Project Management."

rather, it has a clear structure, rules, modes of development, and forms of application. Analysis of organisational improvisation models provides a theoretical basis showing that successful improvisation is not merely spontaneous action but requires learning, knowledge, and skills.

From this perspective emerges an understanding of the need to organise employee training and to cultivate a new organisational culture. Models of improvisation in management indicate that improvisation does not undermine planning processes but instead complements them by creating opportunities to respond quickly and efficiently to complex and unforeseen circumstances. This is especially important for cultural organisations, which compete for advantage while operating in environments that are more dynamic and unexpected than those of many other organisations.

The impact of employee training on the application of improvisation in a cultural organisation

Technological advances drive rapid changes in work requirements, compelling employees to continuously improve their skills. This process creates challenges and financial burdens for both employees and organisations. Within the context of an innovation-driven economy, human resources face challenges such as the rapid obsolescence of skills, conflicts in work relationships, and the ongoing necessity to invest in human capital.³⁶ In a quickly changing work environment, the ability to improvise enables employees to respond more flexibly and reduces resistance to change. This is important, as resistance to change can hinder the efficiency of human resource management and negatively affect employee satisfaction. By integrating the principles of improvisation, organisations can foster an environment that supports trust, creativity, adaptation, and effective communication. These elements contribute to a positive organisational culture, higher employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and organisational growth.³⁷

Organisations that perform effectively in service-oriented sectors not only permit but actively encourage improvisation. As employees are

36 N. I. Khosroeva, L. G. Mamsurova, I. Kh. Kuchieva, A. Sh. Begieva, and Z. Kh. Bekmurzaeva, *Problems of Human Resource Management of the Innovation Economy* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024).

37 A. U. Manekar, "Impact of Organizational Culture on Human Resource Management: A Critical Analysis," *International Journal of Innovations in Science, Engineering and Management* 3, no. 2 (2024): 106–12.

granted more freedom in decision-making, the probability that they will improvise to meet clients' needs increases.³⁸ In the context of non-profit organisations, human resource management faces unique challenges such as financial constraints,³⁹ a low employee morale climate, and difficulties in talent retention.⁴⁰ In the performing arts sector, human resource management is further complicated by insecure employment, financial instability, and the predominance of small and medium-sized organisations.⁴¹ Non-profit cultural organisations typically offer lower salaries and less competitive wage systems than profit-oriented organisations. Consequently, they tend to employ individuals who are more strongly motivated by intangible rewards, and their operations often rely on volunteer labour.⁴²

Scholarly research distinguishes a range of human resource issues specific to cultural organisations, including a lack of formal practices in human resource management;⁴³ challenges in managing creativity;⁴⁴ the need for specialised skills;⁴⁵ employment and retention issues;⁴⁶ organisational structure and governance;⁴⁷ diversity and employee engagement;⁴⁸ training

- 38 Jill John, Stephen J. Grove, and Raymond P. Fisk, "Improvisation in Service Performances: Lessons from Jazz," *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal* 16, no. 3 (2006): 247–68.
- 39 Olga Kolokytha, review of *Arts and Cultural Management. Sense and Sensibilities in the State of the Field*, edited by Constance DeVereaux (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2019); Goran Mihajlovski, "Human Resource Management in Unprofitable Companies," *International Journal of Scholarly Research and Reviews* 2, no. 2 (2023): 118–21.
- 40 Mihajlovski, "Human Resource Management in Unprofitable Companies," 118–21.
- 41 Samuel C. Opara, Patrick Stanton, and Wahed Wahed, "For Love or Money: Human Resource Management in the Performing Arts," *Employee Relations: The International Journal* 41, no. 6 (2019): 1451–66.
- 42 Domenico Ruta and Ilaria Sala, "HRM in Cultural Institutions," in *HRM in Mission Driven Organizations: Managing People in the Not for Profit Sector* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 145–82.
- 43 Ruta and Sala, "HRM in Cultural Institutions," 145–82; Kolokytha, review of *Arts and Cultural Management*.
- 44 Ruta and Sala, "HRM in Cultural Institutions," 145–82.
- 45 Opara, Stanton, and Wahed, "For Love or Money," 1451–66.
- 46 Ruta and Sala, "HRM in Cultural Institutions," 145–82; Kolokytha, review of *Arts and Cultural Management*.
- 47 Ruta and Sala, "HRM in Cultural Institutions," 145–82.
- 48 Kolokytha, review of *Arts and Cultural Management*; Rocco Palumbo, Raffaella Manna, and Michele Cavallone, "The Managerialization of Museums and Art Institutions: Perspectives from an Empirical Analysis," *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* (2021): 1–37.

and education;⁴⁹ work-life balance;⁵⁰ financial limitations;⁵¹ alignment of management goals, adaptation to change;⁵² talent attraction and retention, employee morale and motivation, alignment with strategic goals;⁵³ the irregular nature of work;⁵⁴ and job instability.⁵⁵

Organisations that invest in employee training tend to be more supportive of improvisation. Training enhances individuals' capacity to improvise effectively by equipping them with necessary skills and self-confidence to make rapid decisions.⁵⁶ Organisations whose cultures encourage creativity and experimentation are generally more open to improvisation. Such environments are particularly characteristic of creative industries, where innovation constitutes a primary factor of success.

By contrast, organisations with rigid structures that prioritise security and predictability may restrict improvisation in order to maintain control and minimise risk.⁵⁷ Improvisation within organisations is more readily adopted by individuals accustomed to spontaneity and risk, such as artists and creative professionals. Conversely, for employees performing highly structured or regulated roles, improvisation may prove challenging due to dominant norms of planning and rationality.⁵⁸ Roles that require creativity and problem-solving typically allow greater freedom to improvise; for instance, artists, designers, and musicians are expected to improvise as part of their professional practice. Meanwhile, in positions that require strict

49 Kolokytha, review of *Arts and Cultural Management*.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.; Rocco Palumbo, Raffaella Manna, and Michele Cavallone, "The Managerialization of Museums and Art Institutions"; Mihajlovski, "Human Resource Management in Unprofitable Companies," 118–21; Opara, Stanton, and Wahed, "For Love or Money," 1451–66.

52 Rocco Palumbo, Raffaella Manna, and Michele Cavallone, "The Managerialization of Museums and Art Institutions."

53 Mihajlovski, "Human Resource Management in Unprofitable Companies," 118–21.

54 Kolokytha, review of *Arts and Cultural Management*.

55 Opara, Stanton, and Wahed, "For Love or Money," 1451–66.

56 Miguel P. e Cunha, "Management Improvisation," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

57 S. Robin, "Free Musical Improvisation as an Alternative Model for Organization" (2023); Ana Abrantes, Miguel P. Cunha, and Andrew S. Miner, *Elgar Introduction to Organizational Improvisation Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022).

58 Fisher and Barrett, "The Experience of Improvising in Organizations," 148–62.

adherence to protocols—such as security roles in critical industries—offer limited possibilities for improvisation.⁵⁹

Organisations can cultivate environments in which digression from routine serves as a strategy for addressing emerging problems. Such an approach creates space for improvisation by promoting flexibility and responsiveness to new challenges.⁶⁰ Although cultural diversity can stimulate creativity, it may also create challenges related to conflict and ineffective communication. Conflict or disagreements arising from different cultural norms or expectations can disrupt harmony and spontaneity in communication, both of which are essential for efficient improvisation.⁶¹ Strengthening the adaptive capacity of human resources within cultural organisations is therefore essential for effective human resource management and overall organisational success, as it enhances employee creativity, resilience, and problem-solving skills.⁶² Effective talent management and employee engagement play a key role in fostering a culture of innovation, as individuals with strong internal motivation and creativity are more likely to improvise.⁶³ Human resources are central to generating new ideas and adapting to change, and individuals with leadership qualities tend to improvise more effectively.⁶⁴

It has been determined that improvisation can enhance entrepreneurial orientation among individuals, indicating that creative and spontaneous people tend to improvise more.⁶⁵ Improvisational methods can

59 Abrantes, Cunha, and Miner, Elgar Introduction to Organizational Improvisation Theory.

60 Cunha, “Management Improvisation.”

61 R. S. Jadoun, “Cross-Cultural Human Resource Management in India: Challenges, Adaptation, and Emerging Trends,” *Journal of Scientific Research and Reports* 30, no. 11 (2024): 963–73.

62 S. Bhashanjaly, “Adaptability in the Workplace: A Skill for the Modern Era,” *Journal of Informatics Education and Research* 4, no. 3 (2024).

63 Ikechukwu Ejibe, Daniel O. Olutimehin, and Emmanuel E. Nwankwo, “Strategic Human Resource Management for Sustainability in Creative Industries: A Review and Framework Proposal,” *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* (2024).

64 Adam E. Nir and Pierre-Luc Piro, “The Added Value of Improvisation to Effectiveness-Oriented Transformational Leadership,” *International Journal of Educational Reform* 25, no. 3 (2016): 265–81; K. Albi, “Innovative Strategies in Human Resource Management: Optimizing Organizational Performance in the Digital Age,” *Journal Research of Social Science, Economics, and Management* 3, no. 10 (2024): 1933–41.

65 Magdalena Gojny-Zbierowska and Piotr Zbierowski, “Improvisation as Responsible Innovation in Organizations,” *Sustainability* 13, no. 4 (2021): 1597.

enhance relationships between leaders and teams while fostering creativity, demonstrating that employees across various roles can benefit from improvisation in nurturing a cooperative environment.⁶⁶

In the context of cultural organisations, traditional human resource management methods alone are not sufficient. Here, improvisation emerges as an especially important competence, enabling employees to adapt effectively to constantly changing circumstances and unforeseen situations. Studies show that organisations that invest in employee training cultivate an environment that supports improvisation. Training not only provides necessary skills but also builds employee self-confidence, empowering them to make quick decisions. This is especially important in the cultural sector, where creativity and spontaneity are inseparable from the nature of activities. However, successful improvisation is not a chaotic process; it requires an understanding of structure and rules. Therefore, it is essential to analyse how improvisation operates within organisations and to identify the specific elements that must be developed to make it an effective source of competitive advantage.

Although improvisation is inherently unpredictable, it does not lack structure. Practice, experience, and understanding of cooperative rules enable team members to engage in high-quality improvisation. Key aspects of efficient improvisation include individual competence, teamwork, an experimental team culture, access to real-time information, memory (e.g., procedures and systems), and training.⁶⁷ Organisations that support improvisation training create environments that encourage deviation from routine, which can serve as a source of competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments. This capacity for adaptation is critical for addressing unexpected events and encouraging innovation.⁶⁸ Beyond problem-solving and using opportunities, improvisation also plays an important role in organisational transformation through learning.⁶⁹

66 Farahnaz Tabaei, "Effects of Improvisation Techniques in Leadership Development" (PhD diss., Pepperdine University, 2013).

67 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," 203–24.

68 Cunha, "Management Improvisation."

69 Stefan Meisiek and Brendan R. Stanway, "Power, Politics and Improvisation: Learning during a Prolonged Crisis," *Management Learning* 54, no. 1 (2023): 14–34.

Improvisation can build upon prior learning experiences and can be regarded as a distinctive form of short-term, real-time learning that also impacts other long-term organisational learning activities.⁷⁰ It helps develop dynamic and action-oriented skills in rapidly changing business environments. As a learning mechanism, improvisation encourages learning through action and can contribute to long-term learning from mistakes.⁷¹ Learning is not confined solely to the activities and results of improvisation; it also encompasses the capacity to improvise continuously.⁷²

Mistakes represent a crucial source of learning, providing opportunities for feedback and for gaining a broader understanding of the task environment. Through the process of learning from mistakes, individuals progressively approach the final goal—performing work with minimal errors.⁷³ Courage and self-confidence are essential for employees to engage comfortably in real-time learning through improvisation and to accept failures as part of the learning process.⁷⁴ In large-scale systems, organisations encounter improvisational paradoxes, which relate to learning (learned improvisation and reflective spontaneity), organisational processes (planned action and structured chaos), and dependence (collective individuality and anxiety).⁷⁵ Learning experiences generate specific capabilities,⁷⁶ and rapid processes in uncertain situations can be both organic and improvisational, as real-time learning is coordinated within them.⁷⁷ Although training

- 70 Anne S. Miner, Peter Bassof, and Christine Moorman, "Organizational Improvisation and Learning: A Field Study," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2001): 304–37.
- 71 Dusya Vera, Leslie Nemanich, Sara Vélez-Castrillón, and Sandy Werner, "Knowledge-Based and Contextual Factors Associated with R&D Teams' Improvisation Capability," *Journal of Management* 42, no. 7 (2016): 1874–903.
- 72 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," 203–24.
- 73 Frank J. Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation in Jazz and Organizations: Implications for Organizational Learning," in *The Aesthetic Turn in Management* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 407–24.
- 74 Dusya Vera and Mary M. Crossan, "Character-Enabled Improvisation and the New Normal: A Paradox Perspective," *Management Learning* 54, no. 1 (2023): 77–98.
- 75 Allègre L. Hadida, Wladimir Tarvainen, and John Rose, "Organizational Improvisation: A Consolidating Review and Framework," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 17, no. 4 (2015): 437–59.
- 76 Miner, Bassof, and Moorman, "Organizational Improvisation and Learning," 304–37.
- 77 Kathleen M. Eisenhardt and Behnam N. Tabrizi, "Accelerating Adaptive Processes: Product Innovation in the Global Computer Industry," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1995): 84–110.

in improvisation can enhance self-confidence and interpersonal skills, its effectiveness varies across organisational contexts and industries, making the adaptation of training methods essential.⁷⁸ Training programmes that focus on the development of improvisation skills can improve organisational results by enhancing employee skills, knowledge, and motivation, which in turn increases productivity, profitability, and innovation.⁷⁹

Efficient improvisation within an organisational unit should be supported by training systems that promote experimentation.⁸⁰ Improvisation in an organisation requires a certain level of training focused on adapting to various service situations; without this, employees may apply innovative approaches unevenly or incompetently.⁸¹ Organisational members can enhance their improvisational skills through training that develops key elements essential for effective improvisation—such as creativity, spontaneity, experience, and quality of teamwork—and that helps establish an environment conducive to improvisation, including an experimental culture, access to real-time information, communication, and memory.⁸² Learning facilitates the transition from one form of improvisation to another by enabling the transfer of knowledge from the individual to the group, and from the group to the organisational level.⁸³ The primary outcome of such learning is the accumulation of organisational knowledge. Contemporary research identifies multiple types of learning processes, including learning from organisational experience, learning from others, experimentation, learning from mistakes, study and improvement, and sharing knowledge.⁸⁴ The degree and level of organisational improvisation may be impacted by the extent and nature of training provided. Structured

- 78 J. Cole, *J. I've Got Your Back: Utilizing Improv as a Tool to Enhance Workplace Relationships* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania) (2016).
- 79 P. Vanitha and R. S. Ganesh, "Impact of Employee Training and Development on Organizational Performance," *Shanlax International Journal of Management* (2024); Siti Nur Fauziyah and M. Kuswinarno, "Analisa Peran Pelatihan dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Karyawan: Kajian Literatur," *Jurnal Rimba Riset Ilmu Manajemen Bisnis dan Akuntansi* 2, no. 4 (2024): 56–63.
- 80 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," 203–24.
- 81 John, Grove, and Fisk, "Improvisation in Service Performances," 247–68.
- 82 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," 203–24.
- 83 Hadida, Tarvainen, and Rose, "Organizational Improvisation: A Consolidating Review and Framework," 437–59.
- 84 Miner, Bassof, and Moorman, "Organizational Improvisation and Learning," 304–37.

learning may, in fact, limit the freedom of improvisation while enhancing readiness.⁸⁵ However, although improvisation training offers many advantages, it is not universally effective. Its success depends on the readiness of an organisation to embrace change, including the alignment of leadership support, training initiatives, and organisational goals. It is also important to avoid the misconception that improvisation inherently produces positive results, as its efficiency depends on multiple factors.⁸⁶ Implementing improvisation training presents certain challenges, such as the limited sustainability of certain teaching methods and the difficulty participants may have in applying learned skills in practice.⁸⁷ Therefore, to better understand training efficiency and to develop more targeted and practical training programmes, additional empirical research is needed on the application of improvisation training in the workplace.⁸⁸

To sum up, modern cultural organisations face human resource management challenges driven by technological progress, financial limitations, a rapidly changing environment, unstable employment, and the specific needs of the cultural sector. Consequently, traditional management methods are often insufficient. Improvisation emerges as an especially important skill, enabling employees to adapt effectively to constantly changing circumstances. However, successful improvisation is not purely spontaneous; it requires structure, individual competencies, teamwork skills, an experimental organisational culture, access to real-time information, and organisational memory. Employee training plays a crucial role in cultivating an improvisation-supporting environment. Training not only develops the required skills and enhances self-confidence but also fosters learning from mistakes, encourages experimentation, and facilitates knowledge sharing across organisational levels. While improvisation training can improve organisational results, increase productivity and profitability, and stimulate innovation, its success depends on the readiness of an organisation to

85 Hadida, Tarvainen, and Rose, "Organizational Improvisation: A Consolidating Review and Framework," 437–59.

86 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," 203–24.

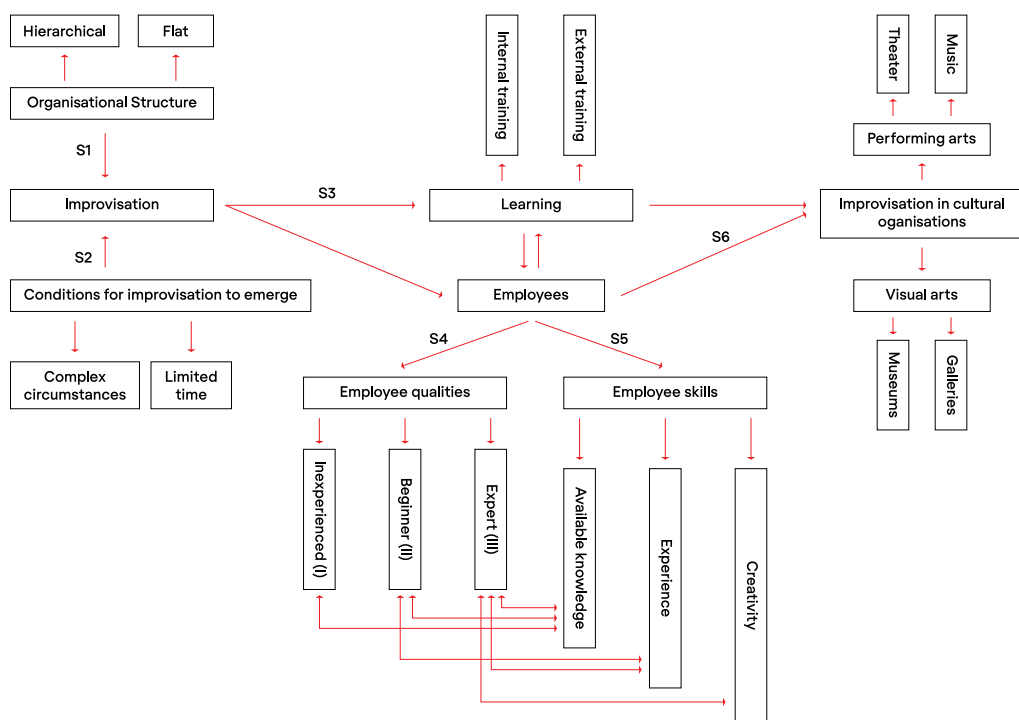
87 David L. Olson, *Integrating the Arts into Organization Development: Using Improvisational Theatre to Enhance Personal and Interpersonal Effectiveness at Work* (2016).

88 Jonathan Hodge and Vanessa Ratten, "Time Pressure and Improvisation: Enhancing Creativity, Adaption and Innovation at High Speed," *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal* 29, no. 6 (2015): 7–9.

embrace change, leadership support, coordination of training and organisational goals, and adaptation to the specific needs of the cultural sector. These considerations highlight the need for a systematic approach that integrates the principles of improvisation into the broader human resource management strategy.

Model of the impact of organisational structure and employee training on the application of improvisation in cultural organisations

Analysis of the scientific literature reveals that employee training plays an important role in fostering improvisation within cultural organisations and developing employees' ability to improvise. Training not only provides required competencies but also enhances self-confidence, nurtures creativity, strengthens communication skills, and promotes psychological security—all of which are essential for successful improvisation.



1. The impact of organisational structure and employee training on the application of improvisation in cultural organisations, compiled by the authors

Organizacijos struktūros ir darbuotojų mokymo įtaka improvizacijos taikymui kultūros organizacijose, sudarė autoriai

Organisations that invest in employee training are better equipped to respond effectively in unexpected situations and tend to cultivate environments in which deviation from routine is accepted as a legitimate approach to problem-solving. Figure 1 presents a model illustrating the impact of organisational structure and employee training on the application of improvisation in cultural organisations [Fig. 1].

The model reveals how organisational structure and employee training impact the application of improvisation in a cultural organisation. It shows that organisational structure directly affects the scope of improvisation: organisations with a strict hierarchical structure tend to limit improvisation, whereas flatter organisational structures provide the flexibility necessary for improvisation to occur. This distinction is especially important for cultural organisations, where creative activities require both originality and adaptive flexibility. The model also identifies key conditions that facilitate improvisation, namely complex circumstances and limited time. Complex circumstances refer to external factors that cannot be resolved using standard procedures, while limited time indicates situations in which employees must act more quickly than usual, relying on existing experience and intuition. Both factors can often be observed in cultural organisations during project-based activities, such as directing new theatrical productions, organising concerts, or curating exhibitions. Employee training constitutes the second main factor influencing the application of improvisation in cultural organisations. Its impact is expressed through employee traits and abilities. Employee traits—classified as inexperienced, beginner, or expert—correspond to degrees of improvisational capability, which are directly linked to employee abilities: existing knowledge (professional competence), accumulated practical experience, and creativity (the capacity to generate innovative solutions).

The model distinguishes between different types of cultural organisations. Performing arts organisations, including theatre and music, rely heavily on improvisation, whereas visual arts organisations, such as museums and galleries, tend to manifest improvisation more through adaptation to changing environments and audience needs. The model shows how

training develops the abilities of employees at different levels and how these abilities translate into the practical application of improvisation within a cultural organisation.

The interactions depicted in the model support the following statements: (S1) organisational structure has a direct impact on the application of improvisation in an organisation; (S2) complex circumstances and limited time influence the manifestation of improvisation in an organisation; (S3) employee training affects improvisation in a cultural organisation; (S4) employee traits influence improvisation in an organisation; (S5) employee abilities affect improvisation in an organisation; (S6) employee training has a direct impact on the application of improvisation in a cultural organisation.

Discussion

The analysis of scientific articles and existing models indicates that improvisation within organisations occurs in distinct stages and reflects varying levels of capability. At the first level, inexperienced employees must adhere strictly to established rules, as they lack sufficient experience and competencies to make independent decisions. At the second level, employees with growing knowledge and experience are permitted to deviate from rules, gaining greater freedom of action and opportunities to solve problems creatively. At the third level, experts operate intuitively and without restrictions; however, their actions remain aligned with organisational goals. This does not imply the creation of chaos; rather, expert improvisation is based on accumulated experience and enhanced through training. Organisational structure provides the context for improvisation. Flexible, flat structures tend to encourage greater improvisation than hierarchical ones.

Employee training plays an important role in organisations seeking to integrate improvisational elements into their management practices. Training enables improvisation to become a valuable tool for navigating undefined situations.

This is especially important for cultural organisations due to financial limitations, the unstable nature of employment, and the complexity of balancing artistic missions with practical management needs. In this

context, training enhances not only the professional abilities of employees in cultural organisations but also the creativity and communication skills of specialists across different roles, including artists, administrators, and technical staff. The importance of training for the application of improvisation in cultural management is evident through its impact on employee knowledge, experience, and creativity. This is further supported by Emmanuel Roud's⁸⁹ model of collective improvisation that emphasises the importance of organisational memory when improvisation draws on prior knowledge and experience.

The proposed model of improvisation training in a cultural organisation is grounded in a broad conception of training. Scientific literature indicates that training not only provides employees with additional knowledge but also strengthens self-confidence, fosters motivation, develops creativity, and encourages independent decision-making—all of which are essential for effective improvising. At the first level, inexperienced employees require certain knowledge to begin practicing improvising. The subsequent level of training focuses on accumulating experience.

Given the financial constraints of many cultural organisations, inexperienced employees can receive training internally from experts who possess sufficient knowledge and experience. Experts, in turn, can further develop their creativity and expertise through external training, and the knowledge gained externally can be applied to internal training programmes. It is important to note that the majority of employees are at the first, inexperienced level. The number of second-level beginners is smaller than the first level but larger than the number of experts. Only a few employees reach the expert level, capable of improvising in management and possessing the highest level of knowledge and skills. Not all employees can reach the expert level, as various positions within the organisation require staff to perform their duties accurately and without deviation from established procedures.

This article does not differentiate improvisation training that applies elements of theatrical or musical improvisation from general training; thus, the impact of increasing improvisational experience on the application of

89 Roud, "Collective Improvisation in Emergency Response."

improvisation in an arts organisation remains unclear, as does whether such specialised training would differ from broader training approaches.

However, it can be assumed that cultural organisations associated with the performing arts, given the improvisational nature of their activities, are more likely to improvise than organisations in the visual arts. Moreover, it remains undetermined whether external training should be targeted solely at experts or extended to beginners and inexperienced employees to maximise organisational effectiveness, particularly in cases where a cultural organisation could secure funding for such training.

Conclusions

Scientific literature presents multiple concepts of improvisation. It is generally described as the freedom to experiment and generate new ideas, balancing freedom and structure, novelty and routine, chaos and order. Improvisation involves creating something new by working with existing material and improving it, offering a unique opportunity for growth.

Analysis of models of improvisation in management shows that improvisation is not a straightforward process. It occurs across different levels, each with a defined role and purpose within organisational activities. Various authors highlight the stages, degrees, and levels of improvisation and emphasise the necessity to learn, identifying the specific skills required at each level.

The impact of organisational structure on the application of improvisation in an organisation is particularly significant, as is understanding the circumstances in which improvisation can be most effective.

The developed model of the impact of organisational structure and employee training shows how these factors affect the application of improvisation in cultural organisations seeking to integrate improvisational elements into their activities to remain competitive. This is especially important for cultural organisations, which mostly operate on project basis and often face financial constraints. The model emphasises opportunities for employees to learn from one another through the knowledge and experience of experts. It also reveals that training is beneficial in both hierarchical

and flat organisational structures; however, the effectiveness of applied knowledge depends on the organisation's internal culture and the level of improvisation permitted within it.

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Santrauka

Improvizacija organizacijoje: darbuotojų mokymai taikant improvizaciją kultūros organizacijose

Daiva Masaitytė, Virginija Jurėnienė

Reikšminiai žodžiai: improvizacija, vadyba, kultūros organizacija, darbuotojas, mokymai.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama improvizacijos reikšmė organizacijose ir darbuotojų mokymų įtaka ją taikant. Aptariama, kad improvizacija, palengvinanti prisitaikymą nuspėjamoje aplinkoje esant laiko apribojimams, nėra chaotiškas procesas; ji reikalauja struktūros, žinių, komandinio darbo įgūdžių, kūrybiškumo ir patirties. Straipsnyje taip pat analizuojami organizacinės improvizacijos modeliai, jos poveikis darbuotojų mokymams, iššūkiai, su kuriais susiduria kultūros organizacijos ir galiausiai sukuriamas improvizacijos taikymo mokymų modelis.

Straipsnyje pateikiama nauja mokomosios aplinkos perspektyva, nurodant, kad tiek vidiniai, tiek išoriniai mokymai yra labai svarbūs improvizacijai įgyvendinti organizacijose. Straipsnio autorės siūlo darbuotojus suskirstyti į tris grupes pagal jų savybes ir kompetencijas. Kultūros organizacijose išoriniai mokymai turėtų būti siūdomi tik labiau patyrusiems ekspertams. Jie savo ruožtu gali apmokyti mažiau patyrusius kolegas. Akcentuojamas praktinis pritaikymas kultūros organizacijose, pabrėžiant, kad tiek hierarchinės, tiek plokščios struktūros organizacijos geba improvizuoti, nors improvizacijos laipsnis ir pobūdis jose gali skirtis.