

Improvisation in the learning organization:
A defense of the infra-ordinary ¹

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Abstract

Purpose: to describe the hidden presence of improvisation in organizations. We explore this presence through George Perec's notion of the infra-ordinary applied to the study of the learning organization and its paradoxes.

Design/Methodology/Approach. Most studies of paradox and improvisation are qualitative and inductive. In this article we offer a conceptual debate aiming to redirecting conceptual attention on studies belonging to the domains of learning, improvisation and paradox.

Research implications: The study draws research attention to the potential of the infra-ordinary in the domains of paradox, improvisation and learning.

Findings. The authors defend the thesis that improvisation is an example of a paradoxical practice that belongs to the domain of infra-ordinary rather than, as has been habitually assumed in extant research, the extraordinary.

Practical implications: For practice the study shows that improvisation can be a relatively trivial organizational practice as people try to solve problems in their everyday lives.

Social implications: Most organizations depend upon the capacity of their members to solve problems as these emerge. Yet, organization theory has failed to consider this dimension. As a result, organizations may be unintentionally harming their capacity to learn and adapt to environments by assuming that improvisation is extra-ordinary.

Originality/Value: The study of paradox and improvisation from an infra-ordinary perspective has not been explicitly attempted.

Keywords: Learning, paradoxes, infra-ordinary, improvisation

Introduction

Organizational environments have been described as hypercompetitive (D'Aveni, 2010), unpredictable (Milliken, 1987), relentlessly changing (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997) – characteristics that render the capacity to learn especially valuable – hence the importance of the notion of the learning organization. Improvisation is rarely seen or discussed in the context of a learning organization in which being able to learn is regarded as a structured activity. As Senge (Fulmer, 1998) argued, a learning organization entails a group of people working together collectively to enhance capacities to create results they care deeply about. The notion of explicitly coordinated learning is evident. Yet, learning in environments that do not stand still necessarily entails the capacity of learning from that which is surprising and unexpected through improvisation (Weick, 1998), that is learning by synthesizing planning and execution into one fluid action sequence (Moorman and Miner, 1998). As a consequence, as Miner and O'Toole (2018) have pointed out, while learning and improvisation are deeply intertwined not much is known about their mutual entanglement. In this paper we ask: why is improvisation hidden in the learning organization?

We suggest that improvisation is rarely captured in conceptual analyses of the learning organization because of its intrinsic characteristics: it is unpredictable, ephemeral, unplanned. It is also pure practice, consisting in attempts to resolve some themes, chords, hints, clues, objectives from others with whom one is engaged in practice: the emergence of spontaneous organization from the moment of practice in context of organization becoming and process. Organizations exist to achieve

objectives but presume, in terms of their members' theorizing, that they do so through calculations of logic, rationality and linearity (Vince, 2018), assumptions that second order theorizing about practice often takes for granted. Because the characteristics of improvisation are unorthodox, non-linear and often seemingly irrational if viewed from a conventional perspective, improvisation tends to be left out of conceptual consideration. We suggest that improvisation should be incorporated in discussions of the learning organization: organizations generate action, including improvised action, such as when members respond to problems, face unexpected developments, discover untapped possibilities or simply aim to do things differently.

To study the contribution of improvisation to organizational learning we structure the paper by first defining improvisation, after which we explain its relevance to understanding the process of learning. We then elaborate some reasons why improvisation is often covered by a cloak of invisibility. Instead of seeing this invisibility as a problem we frame it as an invitation to study what the French writer, George Perec, called the infra-ordinary. The fact that a process is invisible and infra-ordinary does not mean that it is less relevant: on the contrary we defend the need to appreciate infra-ordinary or mundane contributions to organizing. Finally, we establish a link with paradox: improvisation being a process with some paradoxical features, it can offer some relevant opportunities to study paradox from a mundane, infra-ordinary perspective.

What is organizational improvisation?

Organizational improvisation can be defined as *the deliberate fusion of the design and execution of a new organizational production* (Cunha, Miner and Antonacopolou, 2017). The definition incorporates three core conceptual dimensions (Cunha et al.,

1999; Miner et al., 2001; Moorman and Miner, 1998). These are that there is a convergence of design and performance (*extemporaneity*); the creation of some degree of novel action (*novelty*), and a deliberateness in design created through enactment (*intentionality*). The process also involves some *improvisational referent* (Miner et al., 2001), namely some prior version of an action pattern or plan. The implication is that improvisation represents a special type of unplanned action: a deliberate new design, so excluding random change such that not all unplanned action would count as improvisation.

The theme of improvisation has attracted recent attention for three reasons. First, organizations have learned that formal planning processes are insufficient for dealing with turbulent environments. Second, organizations that do not formulate plans are not necessarily less profitable than those that do (Grinyer and Nornburn, 1975). Therefore, planning itself does not ensure market success (Grant, 2003): events can always throw up surprising potential, the response to which involves a measure of deliberateness *and* spontaneity (Vera and Crossan, 2004). Third, because of the limits of planning, organizations need to develop the capacity to be more open and porous to the environments they enact, which then frame and have an impact on them; they need to learn with the environment as it forms and unfolds not only through improvising but also through incorporating these improvisations in their repertoires of action, enlarging options, changing the organization by reference to eventful materialities rather than merely managerial understanding of these. As Orlikowski (2002: 253) has pointed out, improvisations occur in material practices as people ‘invent, slip into, or learn new ways of interpreting and experiencing the world’. Feldman (2000) adds that such improvisations can result in significant organizational change.

In summary organizations do not simply have to substitute planning for improvisation but instead find ways of being capable of paradoxically engaging with structure, prediction and control. Improvisation entails a capacity to respond in real time to the eventfulness of changing enactments of environments rendered as salient: the essence of improvisation. As such, in line with the definition above, improvisation offers not so much random change in response to events but an intentional openness to other patterns, rhythms, experiences that generate innovation through responses to the experience of events in process.² Improvisational processes become potential sources of learning for dealing with future occasions, their routines and eventfulness. As we discuss next, improvisation can be a source of organizational learning in two fundamental ways.

How improvisation contributes to learning

With regards to the relationship between learning and doing, as Starbuck (1985) pointed out, learning not only changes how people know: it alters their behaviors too; what people *do* as well as what they *know*. Learning is not only a product of thinking and then acting but also the result of acting and then reflecting about one's actions, forging new neural pathways in consciousness (Weiss, 2008; Dreyfus, 2009). As Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2005) argue, expertise cannot be captured in rule-based expert systems because expertise is based on immediate, unreflective situational responses: intuitive improvisation is the essence of expertise. Over-reliance on calculative rationality defeats these capabilities.

² This is the classic view of freeform jazz in which players trade improvisations.

These practices can be assimilated, embodied, rendered tacit, thus creating an improvisational competence that fuels further learning. Improvisation is an important source of action generating learning: people act in order to address events and situations and, in the process, deepen their expertise through further learning by being reflective practitioners. The literature indicates two ways in which improvisation contributes to learning: convergent improvisations and divergent improvisations.

Convergent improvisations. Convergent improvisations aim to keep a system functioning. They have been studied mostly from the perspective of institutional theory as they play fundamental roles in institutional maintenance. People may improvise to keep a system functioning, where improvisation happens not because of some act of creativity or deviation but simply to carry on regardless of challenges and risks. In the face of unexpected circumstances (Deshpandé and Raina, 2011) people improvise because maintaining ongoing systematicity demands immediate action. Improvisation happens because it has to in order to solve immediate pressing issues. Yet, as Smets et al. (2012) point out, such improvisations may produce change that can be retained in organization memory. One successful improvisation may lead to others; it may also lead to new routines.

We define convergent improvisations as those conducted in order to maintain a status quo by impromptu tackling of threats to the perceived normalcy of organizational operations. To keep the system functional they intend to resolve events perceived as problematic. These improvisations have an exploitative nature (March, 1991) aiming at adaption that does not unbalance a system.

Divergent improvisations. Other improvisations are divergent in the sense that they deliberately seek to create deviance from current courses of action. These

improvisations are conducted in order to explore new opportunities and may even incorporate a rebellious dimension (Mainemelis, 2010). For example, corporate entrepreneurs may pursue ideas in the absence of formal support or contrary to formal organizational directives. In such circumstances people improvise because of a commitment to values or intrinsic motivations held dearly, despite their lack of recognition by authorities. These deviations have to be accommodated to circumstances because of the lack of formal acceptance of the actions undertaken. Accommodation is largely made symbolically, through communications and non-communications with and from authoritative channels. Divergent improvisations need to be highly flexible and oftentimes discreet, occurring beneath the organization's oversight; however, given the potential to disrupt the organization's current path, at some point they will have to become visible by assuming an explicit identity.

There are several examples of this form of improvisation, including skunkworks (Fosfuri and Rønde, 2009) and tempered radicalism (Meyerson, 2001). Divergent improvisations stimulate unlearning and exploration. They push a system beyond its current boundaries. When diverging, people engage in behaviors that challenge the status quo. In some rare cases, divergent actions will become authoritatively sanctioned; for instance, when employees are provided with free time to play with ideas; in other cases they will be conducted outside the scrutiny of the normal order; sometimes, they may be a form of creative, productive resistance to this ordering (Courpasson, Dany and Clegg, 2012). In the latter case a dimension of deviance that may or may not be tolerated by subsequent formal decision is involved: a great deal depends on the strategies of the resisters making their case in terms that the authorities can understand and accept.

What do these improvisations have in common? While they are different some characteristics are shared: they begin as something unplanned, agentic-intentional and un-sanctioned. And to this, we may add, they are often invisible to authorities, at least up to the point that they assume strategic significance.

How improvisational learning becomes invisible

In this section we advance possible explanations for the loss of improvisation in the theorization of the learning organization. We advance two explanations: convergent improvisations tend to become incorporated into routines, becoming themselves institutionalized as routines, whereas divergent improvisations fuse with strategy processes and become interpreted as strategic moves.

Incorporated in routine. Some improvisations, namely those that are convergent, become incorporated so that they end up being part of the routine. As authors such as Feldman and Pentland (2003) and Orlikowski (1996) explain, routines are dynamic processes that incorporate change, namely of the improvisational type. Yesterday's improvisations are absorbed and embedded into today's routines. The representation of routines as static incomplete and inadequate is revealed as inadequate: rather, they are dynamic processes incorporating an element of adaptation (Pentland, Feldman, Becker, and Liu, 2012). The incorporation of improvisations in routines ends up embedding deviations in the flow of organizing as Orlikowski (1996) theorizes. Of course, the history of art's 'ways of seeing' (Berger, 2008) was somewhat ahead of the history of management and organization studies in this respect, as the art of M.C. Escher graphically depicts. In Escher's work metamorphosis takes place slowly and gradually by incorporating new elements in continuous and almost imperceptible

ways, rendering visual and spatial improvisation as a sub-dimension, an ingredient or an input of the routine proper that we think we initially recognize.³

The fact that improvisations become incorporated into routines as larger processes does not mean that they should not be studied in their own right. The way some routines are enacted and forgotten without leaving a mark while others are incorporated in the routine is a meritorious research topic requiring reflection and study. In addition, the very fact that some improvisations are incorporated in routines means that some agency exercised the power necessary to embed this improvisation in the dynamic of the routine, a process that needs to be considered in order to understand what makes some people willing to diverge in order subsequently to converge.

Incorporated in strategy. In other cases, as Mirvis and Googins (2018) point out, people might be improvising continuously with the consequence that organizational members improvisations lead to divergence. To put it in other words, improvisations lead the organization to deviate from its current state of affairs. Consider the case of the secretary in Day and Shoemaker's study (Day and Schoemaker, 2008) who diverted the researcher's attention from what the scientists were doing into new directions through her observations, leading to a reconfiguration of product strategy in which the improvisation ended up being subsumed by the strategy. Real-time actions were subsequently transformed into a plan in which the vestiges of improvisation

³ A notable example of this is M. C. Escher's *Drawing Hands*, a [lithograph](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/393290979935919828/) from January 1948. It depicts a sheet of paper out of which, from wrists that remain flat on the page, two hands rise, facing each other in the [paradoxical](https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/393290979935919828/) act of drawing one another into existence (viewable at <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/393290979935919828/>). Another, more detailed example can be found in his 1928 *Tower of Babel*, the paradoxical significance of which was recognised by its use as cover art by one management and organization scholar for a book (Clegg, 1975) while the original image of the lithograph can be viewed at <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/294071050662567290/>.

were no longer traceable. Because the example is potentially viewed as a case of entrepreneurial learning or strategic reaction, its feeble traces as revelations of improvisation become lost in the narrative of strategic innovation.

As happens with the case of routine, improvisation is rendered as a minor trace of the strategic process through narratives that incorporate and subordinate micro-events that to a far grander narrative. Even the notion of strategic improvisation, although present in extant research (e.g. Perry, Smallwood and Stott, 1993) is vestigial: given that the notion of “strategic improvisation” is almost oxymoronic: strategy tends to predominate as the master narrative. While it has been remarked, colloquially, that culture eats strategy for breakfast, it might possibly be the case that strategy feeds on improvisation as strategy’s stress on intention, decisiveness, and boldness ingests improvisation’s chance, luck and happenstance. Improvisations emerging in practice are often incorporated into strategy narratives when such processes are revisited and reconstructed as if they were part of the strategic process rather than relevant objects for processual analysis in their own right. To understand the dynamics leading to these processes it is useful to consider George Perec’s demand to question the habitual rather than accepting that what “speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary”. Instead, he asks how “should we take account of, question, describe, what happens everyday and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?” (Perec, 1989, pp. 9-11). Perec borrowed the term infra-ordinary from his friend Paul Virilio to describe the *bruit de fond*, the white noise of human existence that is normally ignored (Popa, 2016).⁴ That which is

⁴ We interpret the notion of “infra”, Latin for below, as illustrative of the need to study processes that fall into the cracks of organizational irrelevance, such as improvisation.

ordinary sometimes participates in processes that are extra-ordinary (Van Iterson, Clegg and Carlsen, 2017) as well as being the micro-foundation of civility and social ordering (Garfinkel, 1967). The implication is clear: organization theory often offers the ‘extraordinization’ of the mundane (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003) while it should also contemplate the ‘mundinization’ of the extraordinary. In fact, important mundane work needs to be done to provide organizations with continuity and coherence (Lusiani and Langley, 2018) – yet, this mundane work tends to be discounted in favor of more differentiated activities, with few exceptions (e.g. Badot, 2005).

Organizational explanations that stress extraordinary events may be seen as possibly grander and more exciting for the analyst’s attention but they are also as less realistic. Everyday life is mundane rather than a carnival (Bakhtin, Bakhtin, & Bakhtine, 1984). That which is polar, extreme (Eisenhardt, 1989), a matter of life and death (Hallgren, Rouleau and De Rond, 2018) or even simply interesting, something that draws our attention because it is not the run of the mill (Davis, 1971), easily beguiles attention, obscuring the mundane. From table 2, which problematizes the relationship between the extra-ordinary and the infra-ordinary in organization studies, one can deduce that that which unfolds within the domain of the extraordinary is the least interesting and studied. Yet, it is hard to contest that life in organizations is, mostly, mundane, uneventful and infra-ordinary.

Table 2 about here

Even in the case of improvisation, a process that is mostly a trivial operation of tackling unexpected events with available resources (Cunha, Cunha and Kamoche, 1999), the literature highlights processes that are extreme, involving situations of life

and death (Bigley and Roberts, 2001; Weick, 1993) or the search for innovation that breaks radically with the here-and-now (Kamoche and Cunha, 2001, Miner, Bassoff and Moorman, 2001). In fact, much innovation may result not so much from extraordinary insight as from mundane attempts to solve problems that need to be addressed (Cunha, Kamoche and Cunha, 2003). By inserting and embedding the trivial in grander narratives of strategy or routine, researchers empty seemingly trivial processes of their very essence as if only that which is non-ordinary deserves to be studied.

Infra-ordinary paradoxes

Recent discussions of the learning organization have emphasized the paradoxical nature of the learning process: learning involves both the expressed desire to learn *and* resistance to doing so (Vince, 2018), a persisting interplay of mutually composing opposites that creates situations with an element of absurdity (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2018; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Improvisation is a somewhat absurd process, a combination of preparation and spontaneity, plans and departures from plans, structure and freedom (Clegg et al., 2002).

What renders improvisation conceptually interesting, as an infra-ordinary process for the study of organizational learning, is that it articulates a paradox of learning and resisting, change and habit, action and stasis. As we have discussed previously, people improvise not only to learn new ways of sustaining processes but also to perturb existing processes. Improvisation itself involves a paradoxical dimension (Clegg, Cunha and Cunha, 2001), in as much as it incorporates extemporaneity (its impromptu side) as well as significant preparation and tacit knowledge (a dimension

captured in the well-known idea that one can only with great creativity and expertise improvise over nothing).⁵

Paradoxically, then, improvisation typically refers to protecting *and* perturbing the status quo. The two classes of processes involving improvisation that render it unique are the fact that it preserves its ordinary qualities as its accomplishment unfolds. In contrast with some depictions of improvisation as extra-ordinary deviations with quasi-heroic characteristics, in our understanding that which distinguishes improvisation is its infra-ordinariness, its mundaneity and its unassuming nature. Improvisers are people that, most of the times, are simply trying to accomplish something. We all improvise, everyday, as we exercise imagination off-script or mistake or misperceive others' cues and provide inappropriate but potentially creative responses.

Improvisation offers a great opportunity to explore paradox as infra-ordinary practice. Paradoxes have been portrayed as involving tension and drama, difficult choices between opposites, persisting trade-offs. The paradox of improvisation as oriented towards sustaining and disrupting the status quo indicates that the same practice can be used to satisfy opposing interests over time. The fact that the same practice assumes seemingly trivial expressions, even when threatening and deviating from the status quo, means that paradox can also appear in infra-ordinary shapes and dispense the tensions associated with the process.

⁵ Exemplified by artists such as those on the record label Emanem, whose radical approaches to free improvisation are based on silence and the use of very short and fragmented musical gestures.

As indicated, improvisation is an everyday process of responding to challenges or doing what becomes accounted as that which needed to be done. For many employees this will sometimes involve acting to fix some process, whereas in other cases it will involve breaking a routine. The same or different people can vacillate from pole to pole, without much difficulty. Sometimes employees reinforce the status quo, at other times they depart from it. The organization may benefit or not from these polarities depending on how people use and express the tension. As per paradox theory, a balanced use is more favorable (Smith and Lewis, 2011) but to a large extent there is rarely anybody in control of balance because people throughout the organization engage both poles without being steered or governed by any centralized authority. In fact, because most of the problems that people grapple with are local, learning through improvisations happens without holistic understanding of the process.

Implications for the practice of the learning organization. There are a number of implications for the learning organization. First, instead of locating the debate on the learning organization around the concept of ‘learning’ as a fad and toolkit that might or might not be dead (Pedler and Burgoyne, 2017), that has faded away as must every fad be condemned to do, it suggests that learning in organizations is something that potentially happens when people try to do things or when they have ideas that, in their understanding, need to be implemented by more collective doing. In this sense, and in line with the notion of the infra-ordinary borrowed from Perce, learning in organizations can be a infra-ordinary endeavor, something that happens in natural and undramatic ways. Therefore, for practice, instead of studying improvisation and paradox as exceptional moments in the life of organizations, it may be adequate to represent them, referring back to the earlier citation of Perce, as “the banal, the

quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual.”

Remitting these processes to the domain of the infra-ordinary, something equivalent to what happened in strategy with the emergence of strategy-as-practice (Clegg et al., 2004), learning processes gain new qualities as trivial things that happen naturally rather than exceptional moments of discovery that need to be ordained and guided by the organization. In this perspective all that organizations have to do is to relax notions of control based on obsessions with predictability and routine in order to give members space to do what they are able to do and a degree of freedom from the strictures of routine to enable them to do so. Obvious though that this might sound, the fact that, traditionally, hierarchy has dominated organizations (Fairclough, 2006) counters this idea in practice: instead of doing what they have to in order to get by, to accomplish things, people often do what they are told to do – improvisation interrupted.

In this scenario, organizations should be designed to treat improvisation as something trivial and infra-ordinary rather than risky and extra-ordinary. The fact that some new organizational designs assume that people act better with frames instead of orders seems to be a promising movement in the direction of accepting improvisations (Gulati, 2018). In the same vein, learning can hardly be imposed from the top. In other words, people cannot be shepherded like sheep to learn one best way of being in the security of routine. Shepherding is an original form of pastoralization; translated from the flock of sheep or parishioners to ‘human resources’ it entails favouring flocking, attending analytically to individual acts expressed only in terms of global

norms (Foucault, 1983), trivializing and marginalizing spontaneous improvised action. Such action corresponds to learning from teaching as a form of pastoral power.

Organizations can provide spaces where improvised experiments are accepted as legitimate and desirable. In that context, people will potentially reinforce and challenge the status quo. It is possible that some people will act more like adaptors and others like innovators (Kirton, 1989) but that is not necessarily a bad thing as organizations require both adaptors and innovators, both explorers and exploiters (March, 1991). What is more important is that improvisational learning becomes part of the trivial and the quotidian, more than some exception that needs top-level guidance. Not to say that all learning can be like this. Sometimes, in face of significant levels of technological disruption and environmental change, organizations might need, even if they do not want, top-down mandated change (Westerman et al., 2014). Even top-down strategies imply some level of local adaption be sustained in improvisations such as those discussed here.

It is also important to note that we are not assuming that every improvisation is effective or well intentioned. It is inevitable that some improvisations will fail as opportunities to perfect the frame (Gulati, 2018). Assuming mistakes as opportunities to learn (Edmondson, 1999) is critical to build learning organizations, open to improvisation.

Improvisational relevance is probably minor for organizations that depend less on agility and capacity of response. For these organizations learning through improvisation may be secondary. For others, the contemplation of new designs, geared towards agility, implies a new vision of improvisation. One in which improvisation is a behavior required to thrive in face of the unexpected rather than a

failure of control. For the agile organization, therefore, managing more means controlling less. When improvisations are assumed as infra-ordinary there is no point in controlling them. In less hierarchical organizations (Lee and Edmondson, 2017), managers need only to control the frame, the minimal structure (Kamoche and Cunha, 2001). The remaining dimensions may be left to empowered improvisers. To encourage people to improvise, organizations need to make improvisation mundane rather than render it as heroic. In other words, they have to remit it to the realm of the organizational infra-ordinary. Recall that in the jazz metaphor, so popular among improvisation theorists (e.g. Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2003), improvisation is the essence of being in the moment, a fragmentary beautiful thing, whose cues can easily be missed or just as equally lead to something exquisite that is rooted in the mundane.⁶

Conclusion

In this paper we have defended the need to study improvisation as very largely a trivial and mundane process of organizational learning. We use the terms “trivial” and “mundane” not in a demeaning fashion but in relation to Perec’s notion of the infra-ordinary as that which is taken-for-granted as the quotidian stuff of everyday life, yet is integral to “the particularities of everyday life, in all its inconspicuous and unnerving” (Popa, 2016, p. 85). Such an invitation to study improvisation and paradox as infra-ordinary can contribute to the revival of the learning organization not as a fad to be consumed and regurgitated but as a process that unfolds in the everyday life of some organizations’ organizing. As we framed it, the learning organization is

⁶ There is no finer demonstration of this than what the John Coltrane Quartet achieved in 1961, on their album, *My Favourite Things*, where they take an acutely trivial and mundane song, ‘My Favourite Things’ sung by Julie Andrews in a popular musical, *The Sound of Music*, and turn it into a thing of improvisational beauty revealing potentialities that could not even be glimpsed in the source material.

not a grand narrative to be taught by top managers or their gurus but is, in part, the outcome of processes of organizational becoming that are invisible but not necessarily any less powerful. What renders this view interesting for management and organization studies is the fact that from a theoretical perspective, given habit and tradition, the domain of the infra-ordinary belongs to the domain of the extraordinary in the theory of organization.

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Table 1**Some general characteristics of the processes of convergent and divergent improvisations**

	Convergent improvisations	Divergent improvisations
Characteristics	Repairing: they aim at maintaining the status quo, even if they temporarily imply a deviation from standard operating procedures	Perturbing: they imply some deviation from the current organizational status quo. They involve a deliberate rejection of a deviation from standard operating procedures
Origin	Improvisation starts with some disruption in a process that needs fixing	The identification of some act of deviance from the referent that according to the author implies an action
Process	People engage in improvisation in order to fix the problem	People engage in improvisation in order to change the system
Institutionalization	Some improvisations, once completed disappear without a trace. Others are retained as superior solutions for some problem.	Some improvisations, once revealed, are incorporated in organizational activity systems as emergent parts of the strategy process.

Table 2**The nuanced relationship between the infra-ordinary and the extra-ordinary**

	... to extra-ordinary	... to infra-ordinary
Extra-ordinary ...	Process description: Some events start as extraordinary and remain in the domain of the extraordinary	Process description: Some events start as extraordinary and are later rendered infra-ordinary
	Explanation: Extreme events attract attention because of their extraordinary nature.	Explanation: An innovation becomes routine to the point that it is no longer an innovation
	Example: Improvisation in extreme cases such as wildfires or other human tragedies.	Example: Improvisations that get absorbed by routines, such as the case of Ikea's outlet design
	Research exemplars: Weick (1993)	Research exemplars: experiments conducted while developing a new product become part of the organization's memory (Miner et al., 2001)
Infra-ordinary ...	Process description: Some events start as infra ordinary but later ascend to the domain of the extraordinary	Process description: Some events start as infra-ordinary and there they remain
	Explanation: An apparent triviality gains status as a special moment that deserves to be remembered as such.	Explanation: Most events that happen in organizations are trivial and mundane.
	Example: the improvisations around the post-it notes that have been later epitomized as iconic of 3M's culture, e.g. Fry, 1987	Example: Accepting deviations from rules when a specific service problem is solved. Research exemplar: Berry et al. (1990)