1. **Overview of the *Elgar Introduction to Organizational Improvisation Theory***

We began to write this book in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. People were isolated in their homes, the vast majority of companies had stopped their regular activities, and those in operation faced a context never before experienced and absolutely unforeseen. The reasons for such unpredictability can arguably be questioned; after all, a few years earlier, Bill Gates had warned us about the next pandemic (Gates, 2015), yet it was a surprise to almost all of us.

On a Portuguese TV news channel, the owner of a plastic hangers factory was being interviewed. She said they had transformed part of their production in order to make protective masks for use by medical personnel. As more and more people were getting infected and dying every day, they had not had time to plan the change in production effectively. She complained that, with more time, they would have designed a better mask. But that was out of the question; the cost of more planning time was too high, as lives were at stake. They had to plan while changing production, which meant they had to improvise. The pandemic brought about a massive experiment with improvisation (Simpson et al., 2021b; Wang et al., 2020; Wiedner et al., 2020): pop-up hospitals, telework, online teaching, food delivery are all examples of new practices initiated impromptu in many organizations (see also Lee et al., 2020).

In 1988, after a study of expert jazz improvisers, Bastien and Hostager claimed that, “as in group jazz, the social task environment for many modern organizations is basically turbulent and only marginally predictable” (p. 598). Never before has this statement been so meaningful. But that was not only true because we were in the middle of a pandemic that we had not foreseen. The sentence was truer than ever because since it was written over 30 years ago, the social environment in which organizations operate had become more dynamic, more turbulent and more unpredictable. If organizations want to thrive in such an environment, they must be able to improvise effectively. This is what this book aims to explore – organizational improvisation, or how organizations, and individuals and the teams within them, can prepare themselves to become masters of improvisation.

This book aims to underline that the management of organizations cannot be exclusively based on the planning paradigm. It is not our intention to relegate
planning to a secondary role; rather, we point out a complementary path that can help organizations to be adaptive and resilient in increasingly unstable environments that demand a measure of improvisation (Giustiniano et al., 2018). This path has long since begun to be paved. As early as the 1920s Mary Parker Follett (1924) advocated for following “the law of the situation” and attending to the organization as an unfolding system rather than counting on predesigned principles to craft action in organizations. In 1965, Emery and Trist identified a type of organizational environment, the turbulent field, characterized by such a dynamic of change that organizations could not reliably achieve fully pre-planned and productive outcomes. In this same era, the Carnegie School of organizational theory flagged the crucial role of bounded rationality and problem-driven search (Cyert & March, 1963) in contrast to precise rational planning. Later, scholars Mintzberg and McHugh (1985) strongly argued that organizations often ended up executing emerging strategies that were not logically planned in advance and actively advocated for managerial training that prepared them for this fact, while Carnegie author James March introduced the idea of fruitful non-rational action as “the technology of foolishness” (March, 1976). Consistent with this line of thought, Lee Tom Perry (1991) translated these ideas into an essay for practitioners that flagged strategic improvising as an alternative to traditional strategic planning. He argued that, by formulating and implementing strategy simultaneously and in real time, managers can learn in an unpredictable and unplanned way, and achieve more immediate adaptation to unforeseen contingencies. These contingencies included disruptions and uncertainties of the sort described events during a pandemic (Lombardi et al., 2021). Subsequently, in 1996, Crossan and colleagues echoed this call to propose improvisation in particular as a highly promising management approach to deal with the new reality of rapidly changing business environments, while other authors explored its specific promise and features (Cunha et al., 1999; Moorman & Miner, 1995; Weick, 1993a). At the time of writing this book, contemporary consultants and management thought leaders stress the importance of agility as a way to deal with unexpected disruptions or harvest unexpected opportunities through unplanned actions consistent with a central role for improvisation (e.g., Rigby et al., 2020). Improvisation, then, has become linked to crucial priorities of current international management and strategy practitioners and thought leaders, as the field has progressed over time.

This book follows in the footsteps of these and other predecessors. It looks at organizational improvisation not as a correction of poor planning but as
a potentially useful approach to navigate turbulent and unpredictable environments. The learning objectives of the book are the following:

• to keep advancing the vision of proactive management beyond the illusory paradigm of perfect strategic planning;
• to frame organizational improvisation as a feasible management approach, complementary to classic planning and action methods;
• to discuss the time element, and how it can affect management processes as well as organizational effectiveness;
• to explain how the effectiveness of organizational improvisation can be improved, either by managing its enablers or by perfecting its processes;
• to create a clear notion of the potential negative outcomes that poor organizational improvisation can yield;
• to understand the different variables involved in improvisation processes at different levels – individual, team and organizational.

A GUIDE TO THE BOOK

The book begins with a detailed discussion of the definition of organizational improvisation (Chapter 2), fundamental to clarifying the reality that is analyzed and discussed, and ends with suggestions regarding the future of research on organizational improvisation that will be useful for researchers (Chapter 7), and practical implications that will be useful for managers (Chapter 8). Between these sections (chapters 3 to 6) the book is organized around an I–P–O (input–process–output) logic. The I–P–O models were developed in team research (McGrath, 1984) and are widely used in social sciences. The model is based on a systemic view of organizational reality where a set of inputs gives rise to processes that, in turn, result in outputs. These models have some limitations: they can underplay the dynamic and circular perspectives inherent to organizational processes at any level of analysis (Ilgen et al., 2005). However, along with its popularity in the literature of organizational science, this model has the advantage of allowing a systemic and structured analysis of organizational processes over time. Still, in order to balance the static perspective of the I–P–O models, each chapter is treated within a dynamic framework where temporal perspectives and different levels of analysis – individual and collective – intersect.

The book aims to engage in an open and comprehensive discussion of organizational improvisation. As such, the risks inherent in the practice of improvisation and its outcome-neutral nature are highlighted. Improvisational action is not unconditionally good or bad (Crossan et al., 1996) but subject to the influence of many factors that can determine the quality of its outcomes (Cunha et al., 1999; Vera & Crossan, 2005). Throughout the volume, several
influencing factors will be discussed that may not only shape the emergence of improvisational action, but also its usefulness. It also seeks to look in detail at the improvisational process and discuss what is known today about what happens inside the black box of improvisation. We further focus on the effects of improvisation both in a short-term dimension and in its more lasting long-term effects, highlighting the potential detrimental and beneficial consequences. Table 1.1 presents the overall dimensions of organizational improvisation as portrayed in the book.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT IN EACH CHAPTER

Each chapter has a similar structure consisting of:

- an introduction that presents the objectives of the chapter and discusses key concepts;
- the fundamental elements of the chapter in question, discussed in detail, always trying to zoom in and zoom out so that the reader can have a general idea of the theme debated, as well as a detailed understanding of the most relevant aspects;
- a conclusion and the take-home message.

Throughout the chapter, and as supplementary elements, some or all of the following boxes are introduced:

- **Key thinkers** – an underlining of the work of some of the scholars who have contributed most to the understanding of the topic being analyzed in the chapter or improvisation as a whole. We consider the roles played by Karl Weick, Mary Crossan and Dusya Vera, Massimo Magni, Anne Miner, and Miguel Pina e Cunha and António Abrantes. We chose to include these authors because of the continuous way they have contributed to the improvisation literature over the years. We were reluctant to consider ourselves, the authors of the book, among these names, but have chosen to do so also to give an insight into how we have contributed to research in organizational improvisation. We hope we are not expressing any unacceptable lack of humility. There are many other influential thinkers in the field, of course, but these illustrate the work done in the area.
- **Motivations** – a look at the personal motives and inside stories that have led varied improvisation scholars to engage with the topic.
- **Brief cases** – paradigmatic cases illustrating the subject being discussed that help to understand it further.
- **A closer look** – an in-depth analysis of a specific aspect related to the main theme of the chapter.
### Table 1.1 Organizational improvisation: an overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Brief description and examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triggers</strong></td>
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| **Situation-driven trigger** | The trigger lies in the emergence of an unexpected situation for which previously established routines and procedures are considered inadequate. It is a trigger foreign to the original intent of the organizational agent, who adopts an impromptu action as a reaction to the unexpected character of the situation.  
  - *External situation-driven triggers*: changes in the external environment, market and/or technological turbulence, small incidents with potentially large impacts, breakdown in the communications system, unexpected opportunities.  
  - *Internal situation-driven triggers*: new vision that requires emergent changes, mental model incongruence, internal conflicts, changes in group structure. |
| **Agent-driven trigger** | The trigger lies in the intrinsic desire of the organizational agent and is independent of any particular occurrence. There is no unexpected circumstance that triggers improvised action, only the intent of the organizational agent to improvise a solution to the activity at hand.  
  - *Self-centered agent-driven triggers*: to nurture a self-image of independence, desire to learn new skills, desire to get positive feedback, desire to get the feeling of transcendence, resistance and deviation.  
  - *Organization-centered agent-driven triggers*: vision-guide strategy, creation of empty spaces, to challenge organizational assumptions, undercover constructive actions. |
| **Enablers**             | Both the incidence of improvisation and its quality can be shaped by individuals’ attitude towards it, their perception of social pressure towards its exercise, and the anticipated ease of its implementation. Among these factors are personality traits and cognitive factors that can increase or reduce the incidence of improvisation and improve or worsen the quality of its outcomes.  
  - *Personality traits*: creativity, tolerance of ambiguity, risk-taking, innovativeness, future orientation, proactivity, emotional resilience, emotional equnimity, emotional intelligence, extraversion, openness to experience.  
  - *Cognitive abilities*: field independence, trust in co-workers, self-esteem, self-efficacy, technical skills and expertise, improvisational skill, ability to react to time pressure, behavioral complexity, ability to communicate effectively, procedural memory, declarative memory, intuitive reasoning, rational reasoning, paradoxical thinking. |
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<th>Element</th>
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<tr>
<td>Collective enablers</td>
<td>Within an organization, improvisation is rarely performed by just one individual. In common with the majority of organizational actions, it is often a group activity. As such, it is particularly subject to the influence of collective factors that may consist of group dynamics, organizational structure and design, culture, and leadership.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Cultural enablers</strong>: experimental culture, innovative climate, “yes-anding” culture, support of improvisation.</td>
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<td>– <strong>Strategy and configuration</strong>: minimal structure and simple rules, loosely coupled organizations, small teams, collateral structures, experience of working together, group diversity.</td>
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<td>– <strong>Emergent states</strong>: group cohesion, transactive memory system, shared understanding of new knowledge, shared temporal cognitions, team mental models similarity.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Collective processes</strong>: team monitoring and backup, team reflexivity (transitional and in-action reflexivity), team implicit coordination, real-time information and communication, team’s ability to gather external knowledge, team behavioral integration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Leadership</strong>: improvisational leadership, rotational leadership, empowering leadership, servant leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Make sense of events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contexts that encourage improvisation often have an unexpected and ambiguous nature. The ambiguity of the action that unfolds, or the violation of expectations caused by the unforeseen, can break the prior meaning held by the organizational agents, forcing them to try to create new meaning and understand what is happening. This sensemaking process often marks the beginning of improvisational action, and its quality imprints the success of improvisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Observation</strong></td>
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<td>– <strong>Cognitive convergence</strong></td>
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<td>– <strong>Decision on degree of improvisation</strong></td>
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| Role of the leader for effective improvisation | As in almost all organizational activities, leaders also play relevant roles in improvisational processes. Leaders have a guiding and goal-setting role, which ensures that all their followers know what is expected of them. The leaders’ role is therefore to ensure the ideal conditions for their followers to effectively implement improvisational processes:  
  – define clear goals  
  – establish dynamic delegation  
  – promote fluid communication and real-time information  
  – ensure structure and flexibility. |
| What to do                    | As sense is restored, or at least the lack of it is minimized, action is unfolding. It is therefore necessary to know what to do during the improvisational process. This is a job for the whole improvising collective. It is not a question of knowing the detailed content of the improvisational action, since this will be constructed as the action unfolds, but of knowing the general lines of action that benefit the improvisational process:  
  – improvise over something  
  – focus on the process and keep it simple  
  – become a bricoleur  
  – cultivate serious play  
  – think and feel, use rationality and intuition. |
| How to do it in an improvising group | Beyond knowing what to do, improvisers need to know how to do it. Everybody knows how to improvise – we do it every day – but in the organizational setting the process seems less natural. There are, however, specific ways of doing it that can contribute to improvisers being more effective and increasing their likelihood of implementing fruitful improvisation:  
  – everyone does “solos”  
  – “yes-anding”  
  – reflect while acting  
  – incremental development and continuous response. |
<p>| Outcomes                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |</p>
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<th>Brief description and examples</th>
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<td>Short-term</td>
<td>Improvisation often seeks to solve unexpected problems or seize unforeseen opportunities in an immediate way. In this way it aims to produce short-term effects. But given the departure from previously determined routines, either in response to contextual changes or on the sole initiative of the members of the organization, the effect of improvisation is uncertain. As such, the short-term outcomes of improvisation can be both beneficial and harmful, whereby the organization and its members may increase the likelihood of success by knowing the factors that reward fruitful improvisation. The short-term outcome of improvisation concerns the resolution given to the improvisation episode at hand, the products of that resolution, and the respective impacts on organizational performance.</td>
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<td><strong>Beneficial outcomes</strong>: short-term performance, agility, organizational flexibility, creativity and innovation, short-term learning, transcendence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>Improvisation is eminently of an immediate nature and therefore may not have any enduring consequences. It is, however, equally possible that there are long-term effects of improvisational action that can also have either a harmful or a beneficial impact on the organization. One of the most relevant potential long-term outcomes of improvisation is learning. The long-term outcome of improvisation is reflected in the far-reaching impact it has on the organization, whether on its routines or processes, its structure, or its culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Beneficial outcomes</strong>: positive learning, long-term performance, motivation, autonomy, innovation, organizational flexibility.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Harmful outcomes</strong>: negative learning (biased learning, opportunity traps), over-improvisation (addiction to improvisation, amplification of emergent action, neglect of planning, drift).</td>
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Chapter 2 introduces and defines organizational improvisation. It begins by addressing the origins of the concept of improvisation, and then focuses on the core elements that define it – a performative action or activity, a measure of novelty, the deliberate character of the action, and the temporal convergence between design and action. The chapter then discusses the concept more broadly, reflecting on associated metaphors, in particular improvisational theatre and jazz, as well as some contours of improvisation that help clarify some of the micro-processes associated with improvisational action. At the end, the chapter addresses what improvisation is not. That is, it contrasts the concept of improvisation with other neighboring constructs, highlighting what distinguishes them. For example, improvisation is often compared with innovation, since both concepts involve the production of some kind of novelty. However, as will be discussed in more detail, improvisation implies concurrent planning and action, which is not the case with innovation. Also, innovation is defined as useful novelty, while improvisation may produce harmful novelty as well. Other concepts are also contrasted with improvisation, namely creativity, adaptation, learning, compression, intuition and bricolage.

Chapter 3 focuses on the triggers of organizational improvisation and its individual enablers. Two types of triggers will be discussed: situation-driven triggers, which result from surprising situational changes; and agent-driven triggers, which focus on the improvisers’ intrinsic desire, regardless of the situation they operate in. Improvisation is not automatically activated by triggers, but its implementation becomes an attractive alternative. Triggers are therefore not sufficient conditions for improvisation to happen, let alone for it to happen with beneficial results. Some enablers are necessary either to increase the level of incidence of improvisation or to positively impact its outcomes. We also discuss individual characteristics that facilitate or even promote improvisation, and those that contribute to more favorable results.

Organizational actors do typically improvise with some goal in mind, if only for the experience it provides while improvising. It is something we do every day – we improvise when we talk to someone, we improvise when we play a game, we improvise when we drive a car. However, improvisation is not the public organizational norm nor a widely honored management strategy, especially in structured processes. Something must happen so that, in an organizational context, one dares to improvise. Moreover, not all individuals are well equipped for improvisation. Some individuals improvise better than others, for example if they are tolerant of ambiguity (Mirvis, 1998). This chapter also focuses on individual characteristics that favor organizational improvisation at various levels, as well as on factors that trigger the need for improvisation.

Chapter 4 looks at collective enablers, both at the group and organizational levels. Improvisational action is usually operationalized in groups, which highlights the importance of collective influencing factors. Like individual
enablers, collective enablers may also exert their influence on the incidence of improvisation, the quality of its results, or both. In this chapter, aspects related to group and organizational culture, group dynamics, organizational structure and design, and leadership are discussed. Like individuals, some teams are better at improvising than others, such as those that are better trained to do so (Vera & Crossan, 2005); also, some organizations are better equipped to improvise than others, such as those with an experimental culture (Cunha et al., 1999), cultures of psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014) and pertinent memory (O’Toole et al., 2021). In summary, this chapter focuses on the collective characteristics that favor the occurrence of organizational improvisation at various levels, as well as those that promote its successful implementation.

Chapter 5 discusses the process of organizational improvisation. When time is scarce and design and execution converge materially and temporally, organizational processes should undergo substantial changes. This is a new reality for which many organizational agents may not be prepared. If, in the case of established processes, the various agents know what to do because they have well-structured routines, when improvising they operate with limited structure and high ambiguity. This new context is characterized by a level of variability that requires a series of conditions for organizational processes to operate effectively. A first fundamental element is to make sense of a situation that is ambiguous and where uncertainty prevails. In this respect, leaders can play a crucial role when plans are no longer fully applicable. Due to the convergence of action and design inherent to improvisation, it is not possible to know in advance what is going to be done, otherwise it would not be improvisation, but it is possible to anticipate some important conditions for the success of improvisational behavior. A prime example is the “yes-anding” concept, in which individuals accept the actions of others and complement them without judgment.

Chapter 6 discusses the consequences of organizational improvisation. As with all organizational processes, the outcomes of improvisation can be beneficial or harmful. Organizational improvisation is not unconditionally useful or harmful (Crossan et al., 1996; Miner et al., 2001), its value being strongly related to contingency factors or to factors inherent to the organizational agent itself. These factors moderate the relationship between organizational improvisation and the outcomes of the process. Vera and Crossan (2005) suggest that practice and collaboration are factors that help corporate actors to achieve positive results through organizational improvisation, and Abrantes et al. (2021a) find that shared mental models can enhance team improvised adaptation while Magni et al. (2013) find that team dispersion can reduce improvisation’s effectiveness. In the case of improvisational processes, there may be a leverage effect in relation to its results making them more uncertain. When
implemented effectively, improvisation processes can have positive results because it is suited to deal with contexts of unpredictability. But, on the other hand, when poorly managed, they can lead to negative results (Giustiniano et al., 2016).

Another relevant aspect concerning the outcomes of improvisation refers to its impacts over time (Ciuchta et al., 2021). Improvisation has short-term impacts, given its immediate nature, but it can also have long-term consequences, whose effects are felt over time. Short-term outcomes refer to the concrete results of improvisational action relative to the activity being conducted, and to the short-term impact. Improvising a technical workaround to a product glitch may have the immediate impact of letting work continue (short term) and contribute to one successful product development project (also short term). They may be performance related, linked to creativity and innovation, or even involve affective factors such as emotions or confidence. Long-term outcomes consist of long-lasting organizational impacts that may also be performance related but also can include long-term learning and continuing adaptation to new contexts. This chapter will cover the consequences of organizational improvisation, both positive and negative, as well as the temporal dimension of its consequences.

Chapter 7 discusses the implications for research, pointing out future lines of study in organizational improvisation. The chapter examines some of the challenges faced by researchers in this area, as well as the potential for cross-over with other areas of investigation. It aims to be a guide for researchers of organizational improvisation by pointing out potential research avenues and areas where our knowledge is still limited. The chapter focuses on the implications for academic research and long-term theory development. The priorities highlighted in the chapter include working to (1) deepen understanding of specific phases of action during organizational improvisation; (2) deepen understanding of distinct types of improvisation; and (3) expand and improve methodological range and quality of research strategies.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the book by looking at the implications for practice. It first presents the case for active explorations and research in practice by managers, thought leaders and academics alike to develop teaching and training tools that can best help organizations prepare to improvise effectively, on tools for specific contexts, as these may change from context to context, and probing of how to improve improvisation in large organizations. Next, this chapter aims to provide a practical guide for preparing for improvisational action and setting up conditions to increase the likelihood of beneficial outcomes. The chapter discusses how organizations can use improvisational competencies as a source of competitive advantage in fast-changing environments, with improvisation becoming a strategic factor. Different phases are important to improvise effectively. Before the improvisation it is fundamental to plan, to
prepare the main improvisational actors, and provide them with the conditions and tools to improvise competently. During improvisation it is important to know what to do and when to do it so that the improvisation works effectively. After the improvisation it becomes vital to learn so that processes improve, improvisation skills are honed, and the likelihood of future unpleasant surprises is reduced.

To the casual eye, improvisation may seem a remedy for poor organizational management or poor planning. The evidence in this book indicates that it represents a crucial organizational capability instead. Even beyond that, navigating the unknown with limited knowledge is part of the human experience and a source of learning and delight (at least for us, the authors of this volume; see Box 1.1 to understand why the authors devote themselves to trying to understand how organizational improvisation works).

**BOX 1.1 MOTIVATIONS: ANTÓNIO ABRANTES, MIGUEL PINA E CUNHA AND ANNE MINER**

**António Abrantes**

I was a manager for about 20 years in both multinational and domestic companies. Before that I had been a high-performance runner. One of the things I always tried to do during my life as a manager was to use my learning as a high-competition athlete. Skills I acquired in sports, such as rigor, work ethic, focus on long-term goals, and perseverance, came in very handy in business management. However, I always felt that there was an important part of what I had built as an athlete that had little room to be explored as a manager. But I could never quite figure out what it was. When I was doing my MBA I had Miguel Pina e Cunha as a professor, with whom I had long conversations about management and in particular about organizational behavior. When Miguel spoke to me about organizational improvisation and how organizations and managers could learn from jazz and improvisational theatre, I finally understood the skill I had acquired in sports and for which I was finding limits in organizations – the ability to improvise.

Planning in top-level sport is pushed to the limit. In the case of 800 meters runners, we have 4 years of an Olympic cycle to prepare a race of less than two minutes. We must program our conditioning to be at our peak on race day. But then, when the starting shot sounds, you must rely on your training, your competence, and improvise as the race unfolds because you can never fully predict your opponents’ reactions. During my experience as a manager, I have always lived under the weight of considering that, if...
we have to improvise, it is because we were not good at planning. The conversations with Miguel not only showed me that nothing could be further from the truth; they made me change my life. A few years later I abandoned my career as a manager and entered a PhD to study organizational improvisation. I wanted to understand how managers and organizations can be properly equipped to deal with the unpredictable. I wanted to understand how managers could be prepared like top athletes – plan thoroughly but be able to improvise.

Miguel Pina e Cunha

My interest on improvisation took off during the fieldwork of my PhD dissertation. I was studying new product development and using traditional, linear, stage gate models. With time I started to grow a discomfort between the model (prescriptive, clean) and the processes that people were describing: complex, sometimes confusing. The work of Karl Weick and a paper by Bastien and Hostager suggested a new way: the processes that my informants discussed were much closer to improvisation than to the prevalent models. This led me to explore “the other side” of organization, namely the processes that deviate from orderly rational views of organization.

Until today, I see improvisation as a process that is more pervasive and important than is habitually portrayed in textbooks. Over time my interest in improvisation and its other side (planning) fermented my interest in paradox, another favorite topic. The recent obsession with agile seems to corroborate the idea that there is a lot to explore in the theory of organizational improvisation.

Anne Miner

From 1972 to 1978 I worked as Assistant to the President and Affirmative Action Officer at Stanford University, trying to help change the university to be more inclusive of women and minorities. Eventually, I concluded that many challenges we faced were challenges to changing any large, complex organization. I interacted with James G. March, W. Richard Scott and Myra Strober during that period, all of whom studied organizations. So, I spent the next six years as a PhD student studying organization theory in the Stanford Business School and sociology department. I was drawn especially to March’s ideas of the importance of play, timing, learning and political processes. For the next ten years or so I helped advance evolutionary (Variation–Selection–Retention) and organizational learning approaches, often with quantitative theory-testing studies.
I eventually found these approaches unsatisfying. Where were human creativity, imagination, emotion, timing and sequences of action? Standard learning and evolutionary models, along with complexity and systems theory, all seemed doomed to miss key issues. I was re-reading March’s work on play and temporal patterns along with Weick’s work on improvisation at this time. I concluded that the most useful thing and fun thing I could do would be to help build the literature on organizational improvisation as a specific, undertheorized and understudied process. I thought we already had an intriguing body of scholarly and practical knowledge about individual artistic improvisation but not a matching understanding of organizational improvisation. My marketing colleague Christine Moorman and I studied organizational improvisation directly in two firms over a two-year period using both quantitative and qualitative process-oriented approaches. I also took up learning how to scat sing jazz standards as a hobby that gave me some beginner’s insight into improvisation’s challenges.

The early steps led to nearly twenty years of thinking about the fascinating and crucial process of organizational improvisation. In the first phase, I was motivated to help offer a hopefully generative construct definition of improvisation, to devise a simple early tool for self-report measures of improvisation’s presence, and to test theory about the role of memory, learning and other conditions that shape improvisation’s impact. Since then I have focused on probing issues of timing, strategic improvisation and nuanced subprocesses. I am especially motivated by interaction with the lively community of improvisation researchers such as my coauthors in this book.

At the most personal level, I continue to study improvisation for two main reasons. First, I believe that we can actually help society by developing an evidence-based, mature body of improvisation-driven theory and practice. I have met student entrepreneurs who assumed that an impeccably researched business plan would keep events controllable enough to survive, but then froze disastrous when the inevitable start-up crises arose. We should have equipped them with complementary improvisation tools. Second, and this is a personal view only, I suspect that by the end of this century our probes of improvisation processes may prove fundamental to fully understating and appreciating organizational life.
GLOSSARY

**Adaptation** – The adjustment of relevant processes in response to a disruption that gives rise to the need of adaptation (Maynard et al., 2015a).

**Agent-driven trigger** – Improvisational triggers that arise from the aspirations and imagination of the improviser, and do not require a problem or even an opportunity to prompt action or to guide the specific design of the novel activity.

**Bricolage** – “Making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities” (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 333).

**Cognitive convergence** – Process of setting up cognitive agreement, a state where two or more people agree on certain assumptions (Fuller & Magerko, 2010).

**Collective improvisation enablers** – Collective elements, be they at the team level (teamwork design, emergent states, and team processes) or at the organizational level (organizational culture, organizational strategy and configuration, and leadership), which promote either the incidence of improvisation or its effectiveness.

**Individual improvisation enablers** – Individual characteristics, be they personality traits or cognitive abilities, which support either the incidence of improvisation or its effectiveness.

**Improvisational leadership** – Type of leadership that is paradoxical and characterized by a synthesis of contradictory or dissonant styles – such as planning and acting, or directive and permissive styles – in which the leader provides guidelines, rules and procedures and, at the same time, allows individual discretion for the achievement of objectives.

**Improvisational trigger** – An event, change in context or intrinsic motivation that prompts a focal actor to improvise.

**Improvised adaptation** – The deliberate and substantive convergence of the design and execution of a novel production by an organization and/or its members, as a reaction to a disruption that gives rise to the need of adaptation (Abrantes et al., 2018).

**Long-term improvisational outcomes** – Outcome of improvisation that is reflected in the pervasive impact it has on the organization, whether in its routines or processes, its structure, or even its culture.
**Minimal structures** – Consensual guidelines and agreements that provide organizational actors with a mixture of freedom and control and consist of invisible controls, clear objectives, short-term milestones, and critical elements of activity.

**Negative learning** – Changes in organizational behavior that have a counterproductive long-term impact.

**Organization-centered agent-driven trigger** – An agent-driven improvisational trigger in which the improvisation is designed to the benefit to the entire organization.

**Organizational improvisation** – The deliberate and substantive convergence of the design and execution of a novel production by an organization and/or its members.

**Positive learning** – Changes in organizational behavior that have a productive long-term impact on the performance of the organizational agent or the organization as a whole (Ciuchta et al., 2021).

**Self-centered agent-driven trigger** – An agent-driven improvisational trigger in which the improvisation is designed to the benefit to the improviser.

**Short-term improvisational outcomes** – Outcome of improvisation that refers to the resolution given to the improvisational episode in question, the products of that resolution, be they new artefacts, processes or interpretations, as well as the respective impacts on organizational performance.

**Short-term learning** – Changes in behavior that occur simultaneously with the experience, and where the experience instructs in real time the design of the performance as it is performed, without producing any long-term learning due to the idiosyncrasies of the specific episode.

**Situation-driven trigger** – Improvisational triggers that lie in the emergence of an unexpected situation for which previously established routines and procedures are considered inadequate.

**Strategic improvising** – Formulating and implementing strategy simultaneously and in real-time (Perry, 1991).

**Transcendence** – A state in which individuals are immersed in pursuit of their desired activity, and feel carried along by a current, as if they are in a flow (Barrett, 1998).
Yes-anding – An action concept in which, when any member of the team comes up with an idea or action, the other members should acknowledge it, accept it and build on it.