

Theatrical Improvisation in Teaching Organizational Creativity: Improvisation Games as Pedagogical Practices

Improvisação Teatral no Ensino da Criatividade Organizacional: Jogos de Improvisação como Práticas Pedagógicas

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ABSTRACT

Creativity has emerged as a core competency for the training of managers and for coping with increasingly complex, uncertain, and dynamic organizational contexts. However, there is still a scarcity of systematized pedagogical practices that guide educators in developing creativity as a practice in management. How is it possible to develop it as a skill or competency? How to teach and learn creativity in management? Theatrical improvisation through games provides a powerful and effective means for this development. The objective of this article is to systematize pedagogical practices derived from theatrical improvisation to support the teaching of organizational creativity as a practice. Based on qualitative research, with classroom applications, over approximately two years, four academic semesters, the research results offer practical and didactic knowledge for educators: eight theatrical improvisation games applied to the teaching of organizational creativity.

Keywords: management teaching and learning; organizational creativity; theatrical improvisation; improvisation games.

RESUMO

A criatividade emergiu como competência central para a formação de gestores e para o enfrentamento de contextos organizacionais cada vez mais complexos, incertos e dinâmicos. Entretanto, ainda há escassez de práticas pedagógicas sistematizadas que orientem educadores a desenvolver a criatividade como prática na administração. Como é possível desenvolvê-la como habilidade ou competência? Como ensinar e aprender a criatividade em administração? A improvisação teatral por meio de jogos fornece um meio poderoso e efetivo para esse desenvolvimento. O objetivo deste artigo é sistematizar práticas pedagógicas provenientes da improvisação teatral para alimentar o ensino da criatividade organizacional como

Received on: 16/07/2024
Approved on: 29/11/2025

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RESUMO

prática. Com base em uma pesquisa qualitativa, com aplicações em sala de aula, durante aproximadamente dois anos, quatro semestres letivos, os resultados da pesquisa oferecem um conhecimento prático e didático para educadores: oito jogos de improvisação teatral aplicados ao ensino da criatividade organizacional.

Palavras chave: ensino e aprendizagem da administração; criatividade organizacional; improvisação teatral; jogos de improvisação.

Introduction

In an era of uncertainty, when traditional skills can be outsourced or automated, creative skills remain highly sought after and valuable (Amabile, 2017; Schonfeld, 2011; Kaufmann & Glăveanu, 2019). For decades, creativity was primarily associated with artists and writers (Guilford, 1950). Today, in addition to the expansion of the creative class to include programmers, designers, and information professionals, creativity has also come to mean innovation and the ability to reinvent oneself.

Creativity is an even more necessary skill in the training of managers, as it drives different economic sectors (e.g., the creative economy, manufacturing, and services), permeating the work of scientists, engineers, artists, musicians, designers, and knowledge professionals. This highlights the need to develop and train individuals who generate social, environmental, and economic value through creativity, including in sustainable ways (Robinson, 2011; UNCTAD, 2010). In the knowledge society, it is necessary to design new and more appropriate products and services, thereby generating creative and innovative outcomes (Chim-Miki, Campos & Melo, 2019; Ponti & Ferràs, 2006; Dardot & Laval, 2017).

Maintaining creative fluidity – a state known as flow – is essential for creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2015). Without it, creative blocks limit potential. Many teaching methods aim to reach this flow. However, collective creative work, in particular, emphasizes cooperation, the sharing of diverse perspectives, and the enjoyment of jointly addressing problems and achieving results (Ponti & Ferràs, 2006). Thus, creativity is critical for managers, leaders, and entrepreneurs (Araújo & Davel, 2018; Muzzio, 2019; Śledzik, 2013; UNESCO, 2013), especially when manifested and directed at organizational issues, termed organizational creativity (OC). If this is the case, how

can OC be reliably developed as a practice? Current research suggests a practice-based pedagogy (Coldevin et al., 2019; Dourado & Davel, 2022), yet pedagogies for fostering OC in management education remain scarce.

Viewing OC as a practice, we propose theatrical improvisation (TI) as a pedagogical pathway for developing OC in professionals. Although the application of artistic elements in organizational studies and management education (ME) is not new (Araújo & Davel, 2022; Davel & Barbosa, 2024; Davel, Vergara & Ghadiri, 2007; Gagliardi & Czarniawska, 2006; Strati, 2008), art represents an essentially human potentiality and a highly relevant resource.

In social interactions, individuals perform different roles, design costumes, use “masks,” and modulate tone of voice and facial expressions – elements that are inherently theatrical (Boal, 2014; Goffman, 2016). Theater maintains that all people can create and improve if given the opportunity. These abilities are more closely related to opportunities for committed experience than to innate talent or personal inclination (Johnstone, 2012; Spolin, 2007). We argue that theatrical practices can foster, stimulate, and develop creativity organically, allowing greater freedom to create, perform, and experiment with different roles in the classroom, beyond traditional linear knowledge transmission between teachers and students.

Learning OC through theatrical art is, therefore, a relevant yet still underexplored task in existing research. From a practical perspective, TI stimulates essential skills for OC, such as keeping the creative process open, trusting in distributed or collective leadership, renouncing individual sovereignty over creation, demonstrating courage and generosity in contributing to collective dynamics, and immediately accepting what others propose during the creative process (Boal, 2014; Johnstone, 2012; Spolin, 2007). Furthermore, artistic pedagogies are fundamentally practice-based. TI practices mobilize corporeality, narrative creation, and social interaction among participants (Barbosa, Davel & Cunha, 2021; Barbosa & Davel, 2022). These characteristics align with the conditions necessary for creativity to be collectively stimulated and understood as a practice.

Academic ME production has strong emphasis on gamification (including serious games and business games), as well as on participatory and experimental research approaches in its design (Abdullah, Hanafiah & Hashim, 2013; Pretto, Filaridi & de Pretto, 2010; Gray, Brown & Macanuso, 2010; Taha, Tej & Sirkova, 2016;

Takahashi & Peres, 2000). Dourado and Davel (2022) propose TI as a practice for developing OC. Davel and Barbosa have used TI techniques to foster organizational improvisation skills. However, pedagogical practices specifically adapted to the OC context – particularly within ME research – are still lacking.

This article seeks to organize TI-derived pedagogical practices to support the teaching of OC as an active practice. It prioritizes a practical guidance, providing educators with a concrete pathway for training professionals in OC.

The results – TI games for OC development – are supported by qualitative empirical research. The methodology is grounded in educational and learning practices conducted with undergraduate management students within a curricular component offered across four semesters. Throughout this process, the games – as well as their rules and principles – were developed, tested, evaluated, reevaluated, and continuously refined until their effectiveness was confirmed in practice and reflected in students’ learning narratives. This study seeks to revitalize OC teaching and learning through TI-based pedagogical practices, which are presented, illustrated, and discussed here.

Improvisation, Theater, and Teaching Organizational Creativity

Creating does not necessarily mean producing something entirely new or revolutionary as the exclusive prerogative of brilliant individuals (Amabile, 1996; Florida, 2012). If that were the case, creativity would be restricted to a select group of great artists or scientists – individuals supposedly endowed with a kind of divine gift and therefore unattainable. The capacity to create is inherent in all human beings. By thinking, feeling, and acting, we create. By imagining and realizing, we create. Human activity can be understood—in a fundamental sense—as creative action (Joal, 1996). Creation occurs in everyday life through associating content, combining information, and seeking solutions to pre-existing problems. Therefore, creativity does not necessarily originate from entirely new elements resulting in radically unprecedented outcomes detached from their initial environment. It is a capacity that can – and should – be stimulated in everyone. Creativity itself may not be directly “taught”,

since it is inherent to thinking, but there are resources and stimuli that can enhance, direct, and cultivate this potential.

Although ideas originate in individuals, creativity extends beyond purely individual or cognitive dimensions. Because we live in society – and because ideas, products, and processes are mediated by specific social and cultural contexts – any initial idea must eventually be exposed to the validation of its environment (Choi et al., 2020; Kaufmann & Glăveanu, 2019). Ideas are rarely born fully formed or immediately applicable. When shared, they may be acclaimed, reformulated, adapted, rejected, or improved throughout a creative process involving multiple actors and both material and immaterial elements (Glăveanu, 2010, 2014).

Creativity is neither necessarily linear nor exclusively individual or theoretical. The practice perspective—particularly practice-based studies (PBE)—suggests a theoretical and epistemological renewal in how we understand and research organizational creativity (OC) (Dourado & Davel, 2022), although this approach remains relatively underexplored in management research. In several subfields of management (e.g., organizational studies and strategy), however, the practice perspective has gained strength by privileging situated action and collective doing, emphasizing practice as socially sustained within a community (Gherardi & Strati, 2014). We argue that applying the practice perspective to OC enhances both our theoretical understanding and the professional practice of administrators.

Conceptualizing creativity as practice enables OC to be more directly linked to situated action and helps address organizational demands for constant adaptation, collaboration, innovation, and reinvention. This approach contributes to renewing both research activity and managerial practice, with implications for educational and professional development. Managers, leaders, and entrepreneurs are expected to practice creativity collectively in the search for and implementation of effective and innovative solutions to diverse problems, in conflict resolution, and in collaborative teamwork (Edmonson, 2012; Mainemelis et al., 2019; Sawyer, 2017). Aligning OC as practice with educational processes can contribute significantly in this direction.

Some ME researchers have already applied TI as a pedagogical practice capable of sustaining and renewing training processes (Davel & Barbosa, 2024; Barbosa & Davel, 2022). TI represents a powerful way of regenerating OC teaching due to its dynamic nature, in which creativity functions as a driving force that encoura-

ges the deconstruction of established patterns and the creation of new possibilities (Boal, 2014; Goffman, 2016). Theater maintains that all individuals are capable of creating and improvising when given the opportunity, and that these capacities depend less on innate talent and more on opportunities for engaged and fully present experience (Johnstone, 2012; Spolin, 2007).

TI practices therefore have strong potential to foster, stimulate, and organically develop creativity, allowing greater freedom to create, act, and experiment with different roles in the classroom – beyond traditional linear and static models of knowledge transmission between teachers and students.

Accordingly, we propose interdisciplinarity – specifically through TI practices – as an effective means of mobilizing sensory and embodied experiences and dynamically catalyzing creative potential (Achatkin, 2010; Davel & Barbosa, 2024; Bureau, 2018). The question that ensues is how to adapt TI pedagogical practices (hereafter also referred to as games) to OC teaching.

Research Methodology

The TI games developed in this study are grounded in a qualitative, empirical, and inductive research design, guided by a practice-based epistemology (Bispo, 2015; Gherardi, 2019). The fieldwork spanned two years (four academic semesters) and was conducted with undergraduate management students enrolled in a curricular component at a Brazilian federal university. The TI games and their respective rules, as presented in this article, were designed, implemented, tested, and continuously refined in collaboration with a theater professional and PhD in Performing Arts, Daniel Becker, throughout the entire research process. The pedagogical experience focused on developing creativity as practice through TI practices as catalysts for OC. At the same time that the games fostered organic and spontaneous creativity – through experimentation and trial-and-error – they consistently positioned students in collaborative interaction, requiring them to incorporate and build upon contributions from others in real time. This dynamic unfolded within the rapid cognitive and embodied responsiveness characteristic of improvisation (Davel & Barbosa, 2024; Spolin, 2010).

Across four academic semesters, the teaching–learning process was structured to integrate theory and practice. Students developed creative projects for organizations in the local cultural sector, engaging collectively (in teams) in activities of ideation, planning, presenting, and receiving iterative feedback until final project completion. Both the TI games and their rules were continuously adapted to the specificities of each cohort and refined in response to feedback received throughout the process. Knowledge construction was therefore participatory, involving students, partner-organization managers, and researchers.

From a methodological standpoint, the practice perspective aligns with the development of OC in educational contexts by recognizing that individual mental action is socially mediated through meaning-making and interpretation within a specific social setting (Bispo, 2015; Gherardi, 2019; Nicolini, 2012; Raelin, 2009). Creativity is thus embedded in social relationships and interactions, operating within a collective or distributed logic (Glăveanu, 2014). Within this framework, situational aspects of teaching, learning, and creative practice assume central importance, in contrast to paradigms that reduce creativity to strictly individual cognition. The empirical material was generated from four primary sources:

- **Creative learning documents (CLD)** – 60 documents totaling more than 600 pages, including individual creative learning journals in which each student reflected on their learning experience throughout the semester.
- **Contextual course documents (CCD)** – 16 documents totaling over 160 pages, including course syllabi, teaching plans, supporting materials, and partial and final versions of the creative projects developed for partner organizations.
- **Direct observation** – 128 hours of classroom observation, documented in more than 100 pages of field notes. Observations focused on interactions among students, emotional expressions, facial and bodily expressiveness, and instructors’ reflections during TI practices and project development.
- **Semi-structured group interviews** – 4 interviews with the student group from each class, totaling 42 students and over 360 hours of interviews. The interview script sought to discuss (a) the practice of TI as a foundation for OC learning (How did TI practices reflect on the OC learning process? What are the main obstacles faced? Was it possible to overcome them?

If so, in what way?) and (b) OC as a learning practice (How did the team develop creative cultural projects? How did the creative process unfold among team members? What were the experiences and main difficulties encountered? How were they resolved? Is there anything we have not addressed that would be important to consider about learning OC?)

The empirical material was analyzed using narrative analysis (Kim, 2016; Riesman, 2008). Students' narratives concerning learning and creativity enabled a nuanced understanding of the educational process and supported the evaluation and refinement of the TI games used. At the end of each educational experiment, the narratives derived from documents, observation notes, and interviews were analyzed and then compared with the analysis performed in the previous educational experiment. In other words, the theoretical, conceptual, and practical results (the games) of experiment E1 were added to the results of experiment E2, and so on.

The narratives were coded and categorized in search of patterns and explanations regarding the use of TI in teaching and learning OC. The result of the narrative analysis involved a reflection on the principles (rules and pitfalls) of TI, categorization of types of TI games (warm-up, familiarization, and consolidation) that were considered relevant, and games that were classified within each type. These games were re-analyzed to identify their shortcomings and ways to adjust their relevance in the context of EAA, as well as their instructions and examples. With regard to research ethics, at the beginning of each of the four courses, students were informed about the research (purpose, method, publications, and the like) and about the confidentiality of information and individuals. During the class, there was a period of explanation and discussion about these research questions. Then, the students gave their free and informed consent to participate in the research throughout the semester.

Theatrical Improvisation Games in Teaching Organizational Creativity

We understand that TI games are powerful pedagogical practices for leveraging OC learning. Before applying the games, students need to understand the principles of

the games: rules and pitfalls. This prior understanding contributes to the games having greater pedagogical value. In general, the rules can be adapted and collectively reinvented for the specificities of the group. It is important that when choosing the games, they have a degree of ‘formalized unusualness’, a ‘possibility of success,’ and a certain ‘degree of difficulty’ (Denovaro, 2022).

The ‘formalized unusual’ would be an uncommon situation in everyday life, established in a formal state, with rules and tasks to be fulfilled, as is the case in the Game of the 4 Dead, in which one has the possibility of hearing the story of a death told by the dead person themselves; or the Sudden Death game, in which a person is offered the opportunity to ‘die’ in an unexpected, absurd, illogical, casual, and accidental way (it cannot be suicide).

The possibility of success refers to ensuring that students are motivated to play the games. It cannot be too difficult or too exposing if the group is not prepared for it. We need to adjust the degree of difficulty of the game to the experience, but discreetly ensure that the game is successful, that students feel confident and encouraged to continue taking risks. To this end, small successes should be encouraged and valued.

Similarly, if the game does not have a certain degree of difficulty, it does not become stimulating. We need to create a place of challenge, accept the space of the unpredictable, of throwing ourselves into the void of not being able to guarantee the outcome, but believing that failure is worth it. Playfulness makes this possible; because it is a game, we can take more risks, broaden our perception, innovate, and say absurd things.

The act of playing itself strengthens team spirit. Playing together creates intimacy among those who suffer the same pressure of exposure to ridicule and error. Even the simplest practices (such as playing shuttlecock) can show us important aspects to be developed. Among these aspects, we find: proactive attitude, effort, commitment, and the participation of everyone present to achieve the collective goal. To help educators apply TI games in ME, we will present in this section:

TI principles:

- **Rules:** start positive, make proposals (strong statements), accept, hyper-accept, take risks, put yourself and others in difficulty, don’t think ahead,

if the theme is horror start sweet, don't rush (let things happen), the more words, the fewer feelings, few people on stage at the same time, enter and exit with good reasons, tell stories, choose defined roles, establish relationships, stay in one place, do not transfer the story outside, have intentions (roles that "want something"), act out the status, go against expectations, break routines, do not forget the title, end the scenes.

- **Pitfalls:** being negative, nullifying, blocking, diverting, wanting to be "original," running away, immediate conflict, agreed activities, hiding, chattering, gagging.

TI games:

- **Warm-up games:** "hop", "nouns", "shuttlecock."
- **Familiarization games:** 'shuffled circle', 'pendulum'.
- **Consolidation games:** 'patchwork story', 'story after chaos', 'status war'.

In the classroom, educators who wish to apply TI to develop OC should:

- Present and discuss TI rules and pitfalls with students.
- Begin the TI experience with one or two warm-up games, followed by a familiarization game.
- After all games have been played in class, set aside enough time to talk collectively about the lessons learned and difficulties identified during the games. Each student narrates their experiences within the context of group conversation. This moment of reflection is essential for the learning process to be made explicit and consolidated.
- In the following classes, follow the sequence of warm-up games, familiarization games, and, if appropriate, include a consolidation game. After any improvisational practice, it is always important to take time to reflect collectively on individual learning experiences.

RULES OF THEATRICAL IMPROVISATION

TI games have the following basic premises: (a) focus, which constitutes that which "generates the energy (power) necessary to play, which is then channeled and flows through a given structure (form) of the game to configure the

theatrical event”; (b) instruction, that is, “the statement of that word or phrase that keeps the player focused” and that emerges from the circumstances generated by the game itself; and (c) evaluation, which, instead of mobilizing right/wrong judgments, should function to reestablish focus and verify whether the proposed problem has been solved (Spolin, 2010). Despite the structures proposed for TI games, the ideas of experience and spontaneity are also valued and encouraged, so as not to stifle the participants. Notably, spontaneity has little to do with a lack of preparation, but rather as a possibility to free the subject from static frames of reference (Johnstone, 1981).

Among the TI pedagogies mobilized in this study, there is a kind of assumption that contributes to the convergence of these proposals: the need for preparation, exercise, and technical development based on experience, based on the assumption that it is possible to create and recreate experiences that can benefit training. In this direction, it is possible to suggest a list of scenic attitudes (Denovaro, 2022) that, once consciously assumed, will contribute to the construction of fundamental postures for TI. These rules are interrelated, being understood as propositions that complement each other, constantly referring to each other, in order to form a coherent whole. They are:

- 1.** Start positive: the idea is based on positivity, a quality that comes from the good state of mind with which one should begin the scene. The key idea is the possibility of consciously maintaining a state of joy in theatrical interaction, even in adverse situations.
- 2.** Make proposals, strong statements: this rule concerns the potential of assertiveness as a form of creative expression. When making a statement or proposal, the actor positions himself/herself as author, creator, someone who actively participates in the creation of the scene.
- 3.** Accept: due to the quality of the partnership, the rule suggests a dialogical stance, open to proposals, which contributes greatly to learning collaborative work. In its etymology, the term “accept” (from the Latin *accipere*) conveys the idea of receiving; hence the suggestion of being open to the other with whom one interacts, or to the situations presented on stage, so that a proposition is never denied, but, according to the rule of “making proposals”, can be complemented or even modified.

4. **Hyperaccept:** this involves valuing what has been created, giving it special meaning from a scenic point of view. If student 1 says, “I brought my dad’s watch”, it is suggested that the other student interacting with them hyperaccept, emphasizing the information, attributing dramatic importance to the watch, and valuing its presence with more information. Once incorporated into the dynamics of the scene, it may become the key element in a situation that requires measuring time, for example.
5. **Taking risks:** in improvisation, the challenges that arise can be of various kinds. This rule proposes precisely the conscious perception of this fact, taking it lightly, according to the poetics of scenic readiness. Thus, associated with the rule of “acceptance” and “starting positive”, the idea of taking risks is enhanced, promoting an elaboration on the fear of making mistakes, a factor that blocks free creative expression.
6. **Putting yourself and others in difficulty:** deeply related to “taking risks”, this rule also considers the challenges that improvisation imposes on the actor, with the addition that, in this case, he/she is the agent of such situations, as someone who calls on others to take their own risks. He/she is the one who proposes challenges, provoking others and setting the scene in motion.
7. **Not thinking ahead:** when starting rehearsals, many individuals are afraid to enter the scene because they are unfamiliar with the whole or because they feel “they have nothing important to say, or because they have not imagined a conflict or established a character for themselves, as traditional dramaturgy dictates” (Achatkin, 2010, p.49). However, these are precisely situations in which the text does not yet exist and any questions will only be answered through action during the construction of the moment: the scene. The rule of “not thinking ahead”, combined with the idea of “not rushing”, is echoed in such formulations and constitutes an important prerequisite for conscious interaction in improvisation.
8. **If the theme is horror, start sweet:** the key idea of this rule is associated with “breaking expectations”, more specifically regarding pre-established styles. The act of creation is presented as a possibility for aesthetic renewal, in order to expand cultural codes, consciously reinterpreting them.

Furthermore, starting sweet when sweetness is not the expected standard requires a cultural repertoire that makes it possible to reengineer what was initially proposed.

9. Don't rush – let things happen: this rule dialogues with “acceptance” and the rule of “taking risks”, consisting precisely of a posture of dialogue. In situations of interaction, whether with others or with the world, it is essential not to rush, lest you coerce others or the world. This is a rule that contributes to the development of notions such as time and space in scenic dialogue. Similarly, it is good to discard the first idea that comes to mind and allow time for thought and creativity to flow. The idea is to allow yourself to explore other possibilities for action and speech.
10. The more words, the fewer feelings: this rule suggests rethinking the excess of verbal signs (or more precisely, the primary role that Western culture attributes to verbal language as the form of human expression par excellence). The idea is to engage in an exercise that trains the body as a language capable of expressing what one wants to say, without necessarily using words – something like learning ways of saying things with the body. Since the rule does not presuppose the elimination of words, it is also suggested that, when speaking, one should say something precise, important information, or a strong statement.
11. Few people on stage at the same time: in improvisation, it is very difficult to organize ideas, creative thoughts, and spatial movement if the situation involves many people. If the interest is to produce stories and present content, the actors/characters should have moments of intimacy for this and be alone for a frank conversation. With two people, the scene tends to flow well. With three people, the difficulty of sustaining a logic and a story increases. Understanding this rule has implications for the application of the following rule.
12. Enter and exit with good reasons: this rule is aligned with the idea of motivation. It is an improvisation strategy that helps in the construction of stories. In everyday life, those who leave do so for a reason. Similarly, on stage, stories are built by the characters' intentions; justifying entrances and exits helps in building content and arguments for the development

of the plot. Leaving can be a good move when there are more than two people on stage. One of the characters must find a reason to leave and try to relate that reason to the story being created.

- 13.** Storytelling – reincarnating established material: when addressing visibility as a quality for stage readiness, attention was drawn to the fact that, in the performing arts, character building is a skill that comes from experimentation, imagination, and observation of concrete situations in life. Expanding on this idea, the rule of “storytelling” assumes the reincarnation of such situations, as an exercise that allows feelings and emotions to be mapped in a particular poetic-somatic cartography, attempting to make them visible through images, evocations, and representations.
- 14.** Choose defined roles: this rule can be thought of in terms of accuracy, linked to multiplicity, through the possibility of translation, and visibility, by triggering the imagination. It is proposed to bring personal goals, intentions, or plans to the character, as well as to establish a timeline in that character’s life, demarcating where they came from, what occupation they have, and what they want in life in the short, medium, and long term. Although this abstraction may seem superfluous, the rule assumes that it is these nuances that give depth to the characters, giving them a “soul”, making them desire things, as happens in everyday life.
- 15.** Establishing relationships: this rule is based on the relational nature of interaction processes. As in linguistic interaction, the generation of meaning in theatrical improvisation depends particularly on the ability to understand that someone (or something, a situation, and the like) always exists vis-à-vis another person (another thing or another situation). Nothing is simply what it is without the relationships established by this rule. It is necessary to immediately state, on stage, what kind of relationship it is, what the bond between these characters is. Generally, the closer they are, the greater the chances of establishing complicity, promoting mutual knowledge, with fewer introductions and more substance. Wasting precious scene time with clichéd introductions, such as “Who are you?” or “What do you do?”, for example, usually has a tedious effect.

- 16.** Stay in one place, referring to it right at the beginning: here it is necessary to return to the idea of presence, understood as being in the here and now of the scene. The rule is based on the assumption that defining this place allows a consensus to be created about the stage space, the objects, or any situations that could potentially occur in that space, favoring interaction. In improvisation, the stage is empty. Everything is created by the actor's imagination and defined at the moment of creation. When this body language, which defines actions, objects, and spaces, is well executed, the audience understands and crystallizes that information. Actors should respect what has been created, which shows consistency in the cast and acceptance of each other's ideas.
- 17.** Do not transfer the story outside: what is proposed in a scene makes sense, that is, it finds its axis of coherence within the scene itself. It is within what is proposed as a scenic arrangement that the laws according to which this theatrical event emerges are established. Since there is nothing on stage in improvisation, everything that is created is very valuable. It makes no sense to create a space or object and then abandon them in order to create another space, other objects, and the like. This rule assumes that keeping the story in one place has the effect of deepening the content.
- 18.** Have intentions and roles that "want something": this is an idea very close to the issue of motivation. The rule guides the proposition of roles that operate through desire, through the impulse that compels action. Someone who desires, who wants something, is potentially someone capable of transformation. Considering that every story is, at its core, the transformation of the character(s), intention functions as the engine of action.
- 19.** Acting out status: the concept of status reminds us that we are, first and foremost, animals, and therefore we tend to establish territories as a form of shelter, protection, and, ultimately, a condition for the preservation of our own survival. These territories are more than just physical places – they are social places from which we interact both on and off stage. They are threads that drive relationships.

- 20.** Go against expectations: this rule implies enhancing creative capacity and, closely related to the rule of “starting sweet” in a context adverse to sweetness, guides an attitude of reconfiguring pre-established paradigms. Breaking expectations is, in essence, proposing something new, opening up the possibility of a creative and challenging scenic event for those with whom one interacts.
- 21.** Breaking routines: in the same vein as “contrasting expectations”, the rule that proposes breaking routines is based on the premise of reshaping habits to establish the new, the unfamiliar, and, from there, mobilizing oneself and others on stage, according to the quality of Calvinian multiplicity, for example. Aligned with what is proposed in somatic education, the idea is to promote re-standardization, which allows for the exploration of expressive potentialities.
- 22.** Don't forget the title: one of the possible stimuli to be used to start the scenes, although not the only one. The experiences conducted during the research suggest that the title functions as an element that orders the creation of the scene. When interacting with the audience that suggests a title, this title should be used and quoted, valuing those who suggested it and demonstrating that the story is really being created at that moment, that it is all improvised.
- 23.** Finalizing the scenes: the importance of this rule lies in the logic of producing something whole and coherent. Finalization contributes to the construction of meaning in a scene, so that it contributes during the formation to the development of consistency. Finalization gives narrative body to the scene constructed from improvisation, offering the audience a coherent and consistent whole.

In contrast, it is also important to pay attention to what should be avoided in TI (Denovaro, 2022). Following the logic of giving more concreteness to what is produced on stage, a set of attitudes that can make dramatic action unfeasible is presented objectively. The idea is to highlight such practices so that the harmful effects that certain attitudes can have on stage become clear.

PITFALLS OF THEATRICAL IMPROVISATION

The pitfalls that can destroy a story are attitudes that undermine the practice of TI, as they destroy the narrative. The idea is that everyone involved in the games can understand which scenic attitudes should be avoided (Denovaro, 2022) to improve the practice of TI:

1. **Being negative:** acting pessimistically, emphasizing problems, rejecting others' suggestions, not believing in the success of the scene. We always say that in improvisation it is forbidden to say "no", it is forbidden to deny. This rule goes against the rule of acceptance, which suggests always being positive.
2. **Nullifying:** this refers to not valuing what was created, minimizing what was said, forgetting important information revealed in the scene during improvisation. This is a counterpoint to the rule of hyper-acceptance.
3. **Blocking:** contrary to rules such as "don't rush" and "accept", the problem stated here concerns preventing the normal flow of the plot, always imposing individual needs, assuming that you have the best idea, and wanting to forcefully lead the story toward a strictly personal goal.
4. **Deviating:** straying from the subject, developing plots parallel to the main plot already created. Avoiding the natural logic of things and the fluid course of the plots to create subterfuges that avoid the organic path.
5. **Wanting to be "original":** the trap concerns attitudes such as having absolutely incoherent and absurd ideas; making unreasonable connections or excessive articulations to justify such ideas, such as painting an elephant pink to put it in a Volkswagen Beetle. Improvisational theater is not a space for protagonists, for big solos or stardom. It is a space for the collective, for cooperation, designed for everyone to shine. Originality is a desire to shine solo, and this weakens the scene.
6. **Running away:** similar to "deviating", this is avoiding, postponing confession, not saying what is necessary. This is a theatrical attitude that disrupts the action, as it unnecessarily frays the dramatic temporality.
7. **Immediate conflict:** this is the failure of the desire to establish conflict in the plot. It occurs mainly when tensions arise such as "Was it you? No, it was you! It wasn't me, it was you!". Immediate conflict prevents

the scene from advancing, blocking its flow, since it is not mediated by narrative purposes.

8. Agreed activities (games, payments, talking about what you do, and the like): saying what you are doing while doing something is a dangerous trap for the scene (and the same can be said about talking about what you are doing). The danger lies mainly in stating the obvious, which embarrasses the scene, making it tedious. For example, if someone is stirring a pot and says, “Pass me the onion”, and the other responds, “It’s here, I already cut it!” or “Do you have tomatoes? What kind of sauce are we making?” these characters are not saying anything interesting or productive for the story. On the contrary, if while stirring the pot someone says something like “this recipe is especially for you, Mom, to celebrate your recovery”, for example, what is introduced here is the relationship between the characters, a plot to be developed (a mother recovering).
9. Hiding: the word “theater” comes from the Greek *teastai* and its semantic meaning points to that which is made to be seen, that which is placed before the eyes. Hiding is against the main principle of theater: to reveal. Furthermore, if nothing is given in improvisational theater, everything that is created must be visible to everyone, so that everyone knows what it is about. This is a trap that can be avoided by Spolin’s concept of monitoring. Not hiding also means being clear about what you create, how you create it, and when you create it.
10. Chattering: this is the opposite of the rule of “speak little, few words”. The more you talk, the greater the chance of getting lost. Talking too much creates or leads to information overload, which makes it difficult to maintain coherence on stage.
11. Gagging (teasing, mocking): this is a trap that must be constantly pointed out – it is not acceptable to humiliate others in any way. Using the device of provoking laughter by demeaning others or with antics and ready-made jokes is the opposite of what is proposed in improvisational theater – which is a place of acceptance at all levels. There is a whole tradition of thought and practice in theater, from Aristotle to contemporary thinkers, that demonstrates this: what moves and wins the audien-

ce's support and empathy is a fair, credible, honest ending to a story, even if it is a tragedy or drama.

In short, to improvise well, you need to pay attention, let things flow, and use everything, all available resources (Poynton, 2013). The practice of TI requires a unique state of presence, which combines the rational need to respond and give meaning to the story with the intuitive side of living and feeling what is happening. The sum of these perceptions is what generates the creative state we seek in the educational practice of TI. Theater is a space for experimentation.

Understanding presence in TI is also fundamental. Presence here also refers to what is presented and who is present. This means the platform of the story: where, who, and what. Where the story takes place, who is involved and what they are doing, what the goal is, and what the story is about. In TI language, presence means being in the here and now, attentive to everything that is said and done by the people involved in the action, to ensure minimum consistency with what is being presented. Defining and understanding the location where the action takes place immediately ensures the creation of a common agreement regarding the space, objects, atmosphere, geographical location, and the like, so that a consensus can be reached around the situations that can be developed in that environment. Knowing who someone is also defines what they want, what their intention is in the scene.

The quality of positivity corresponds, in TI, to the idea of starting the scene with characters in a present state of mind, regardless of where the story unfolds. For example, if the character is a prisoner, the actor must present some reason for being energized. Another characteristic of improvisation is affirmation. It corresponds objectively to telling the story, revealing to the audience who you are and what it is about. Affirmation is also about reinforcing your attitudes, saying who you are and what you came for. Affirming strong aspects highlights your own qualities and those of the other people in the scene.

Partnership is the company and support of the other, of a co-worker, of someone in the family, or of anyone with whom you exchange a few words and form a dialogue. When we play with partnership, the scene grows. Partnership is revealed in the subtle understanding of what is happening, in the collective construction of a story. For this, it is crucial to accept the creation made by the other. In TI, we learn

to serve our scene partners and create possibilities for the other to feel encouraged to play in the same way. When we start playing like this in improvisation, the work grows in results, leading us to grow as professionals and as people. Learning to share is a human necessity.

In the scope of TI, acceptance consists of always saying yes, in any and every situation. Everything that is said by the people on stage comes into existence. It is up to those involved to act on these facts. Acceptance is also knowing how to recognize what is already in place and cannot be changed.

The principles of TI can renew and improve management education, especially in the creation of educational environments and conditions to develop creativity with tools already consolidated in the field of theater. For these reasons, we have chosen the practice of TI as a privileged way of teaching and learning about OC. Since there is already theoretical and conceptual knowledge about TI, we seek to channel it towards the development of OC through creative projects.

WARM-UP GAMES

Warm-up games should be used at the beginning of TI practice, regardless of whether it is the first time students are encountering TI or whether they are already familiar with it. This type of game aims to warm up the body, break down initial stiffness, and promote initial integration among participants.

Hop

Organizational objective: to promote and increase synergy among the members of a given group through collective involvement around a common goal.

General objective: To exercise attention, readiness, and physical and bodily attitude.

Estimated time: 5 min.

How to perform:

- Ask participants to stand in a circle, leaving some space between them so they are comfortable.
- Demonstrate the ‘hop’ gesture through speech and body language, which consists of saying ‘hop’ and immediately transmitting a gesture with the hands (a clap) from one participant to another (Figure 1).

- Whoever receives the hop should immediately pass it on to the colleague next to them, and so on, forming a chain.
- Instruct participants to move clockwise.
- Change the direction after the group has become familiar with the movement: it can go counterclockwise and then randomly, with each participant choosing who to pass the hop to.
- Demonstrate clearly (verbally and physically) to whom the gesture is being passed.

Challenges: The participant who actually received the hop does not recognize who the gesture was intended for. Test the ability to pay full attention when returning the Hop to the person who initially transmitted it, changing direction, or passing in random directions within the group.

Figure 1. Illustration of the HOP dynamic.



Source: recorded by the authors (2024).

Nouns

Organizational objective: To stimulate creativity and verbal communication.

General objective: To exercise speed of reasoning by associating different content, forming associations and connections with different and unexpected themes.

Estimated time: 15 minutes

How to perform:

- Participants are invited to arrange themselves in a half-moon formation.
- Initially, the rhythm is set by snapping fingers and moving arms, establishing a steady pace. Start slowly and gradually increase the pace to increase the difficulty.
- The player who starts must associate nouns with the word previously said by the person next to them. The facilitator stands in front of the group. The noun must be said to the leader, looking directly into their eyes and with the conviction that you are saying the most appropriate choice possible.
- The game begins with the leader saying a noun, between one snap of the fingers and another. The first person has to say another associated noun and, in this interval of time determined by the snapping of the fingers, the next person says other nouns and so on.
- The rules are: words previously said cannot be repeated; verbs, adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions, pronouns, and proper nouns are not accepted, only nouns. Those who make a mistake the first time receive a warning; the second time, they leave the line, with the previous dynamic continuing with the next participant.

Challenges: dealing with anxiety about not trying to anticipate answers, frustration, inhibition, association with unusual content, staying confident.

Shuttlecock

Organizational objective: To promote the integration and motivation of members of a given team around a common goal.

General objective: Warm up the body with movement, set a common goal for the group.

Estimated time: 15 min

How to perform:

- With the participants arranged in a circle, one of the members throws the shuttlecock with any part of the body, starting with the hands.

- By pushing it from the bottom up and throwing it high, the other team members will aim not to let it fall to the ground, positioning themselves in such a way as to anticipate the downward movement and catching the shuttlecock as it falls, pushing it again to the next participant in a synergistic and uninterrupted movement.
- Everyone in the group counts aloud each time the shuttlecock is bounced, that is, each time someone returns it to the cycle.
- After a warm-up period, a feasible goal is set for the number of hits the group can achieve without letting it fall.

Challenges: Controlling anxiety about hitting the shuttlecock before it falls and frustration when letting the shuttlecock fall to the ground.

FAMILIARIZATION GAMES

Familiarization games allow students to gradually approach the language of TI, which is very physical and narrative. These games promote better integration and trust among participants. Educators should decide how many warm-up games are necessary before starting the familiarization games. In general, it is not advisable to reflect with the group on what happens immediately after each game, as excessive reflection can make it difficult for people to enter the mode in which the body also plays an important role in the creative process (Barbosa & Davel, 2022; Davel & Barbosa, 2024).

Shuffled Circle

Organizational objective: to foster flexibility and interpersonal cooperation.

General objective: to create intimacy and physical contact with the team.

Estimated time: 5 min.

How to perform:

- Form a circle with the team holding hands.
- The rule is: you can't let go of hands!
- Start scrambling the circle, passing under colleagues' arms, filling each empty space until no one can move anymore (Figure 2).
- When everyone is stuck in the tangle, raise points for reflection. If someone walked into the room now and saw this group like this, would they think

there was any order to it? It looks chaotic, but is there an order here? When a group creates a problem, that same group has the possibility to solve that problem. Ask everyone to return to the circle without letting go of each other's hands.

Challenges: Start with everyone very close together and their hands tangled in the middle of the circle. Each left hand should hold a right hand. When everyone is holding hands, try to form a circle without letting go. Sometimes you can form a circle, other times you can't. Sometimes two or more circles are formed. It is interesting to observe the results and everyone's commitment to resolving the conflict.

Figure 2. Illustration of the shuffled circle dynamic.



Source: recorded by the authors (2024).

Pendulum

Organizational objective: To foster trust, reliability in task delivery, and bodily expressiveness.

General objective: To promote group awareness and mutual trust.

Estimated time: 15 minutes

Procedure:

- Form a small, tight circle with all participants standing close to one another.

- One participant is invited to act as the “pendulum”. This person stands at the center of the circle, crosses their arms over the chest, and closes their eyes. The person in the center must keep their body upright and rigid, without bending at the waist.
- Slowly, the participant allows themselves to fall gently to one side of the circle, like a pendulum. The participants forming the circle should place one foot behind them for stability and hold their hands open in front in order to support and return the person in the center to an upright position (Figure 3).
- The pendulum then allows themselves to fall toward another side of the circle, continuing this dynamic of losing balance and being supported and repositioned by the group.
- For safety, it is recommended that at least two participants support the person who is leaning. Participants should not push the pendulum, but simply guide them back to a standing position.

Figure 3. Illustration of the pendulum activity.



Source: recorded by the authors (2024).

Challenges: Developing trust in the face of the imminent risk of losing balance and falling without immediate physical support; maintaining coordinated movement while supporting the pendulum when off-center.

CONSOLIDATION GAMES

Consolidation games make it possible to intensify TI capacity, as they require greater involvement and creativity from participants. These games involve a higher level of complexity and should be proposed when students have already played the familiarization games multiple times, across different classes, and have developed a certain level of intergroup trust.

Patchwork Story

Organizational objective: To develop a sense of cooperation and collectivity around a common goal.

General objective: To create collectively and collaboratively.

Estimated time: 15 minutes

Procedure:

- Standing in a circle, each participant constructs only one sentence of a story. The story must have a beginning, middle, and end.
- There are two versions of this game. In the first version, the story must be completed in a single round. In the second version, there are three rounds of sentences.
- In the first round, the story develops in a positive upward progression until the circle is completed.
- In the second round, something negative happens in the story, progressively worsening until the end of the circle.
- In the third round, the story shifts again, and positive events begin to occur until reaching a highly positive ending.
- There are three rounds in total, in which each participant contributes one sentence per round: the first round is positive, the second negative, and the third positive again.

Challenges: Providing a title for a non-existent yet intriguing story that will then be created. Characters, styles, and/or themes for the story may be suggested.

Story After Chaos

Organizational objective: To stimulate creative flow and the capacity to organize ideas.

General objective: To create from randomly provided elements.

Estimated time: 15–30 minutes

Procedure:

- In pairs, one person speaks to the other, verborragically (rapidly and without stopping), for one minute, saying random words that arise spontaneously.
- Next, the other person must tell a story using as many as possible of the words previously mentioned.
- At the end, the group forms a circle and the first person recounts to the group the story that their partner created. Roles may be reversed so that participants alternate experiences.

Challenge: Introducing specific themes to guide the selection of random words.

Status War

Organizational objective: To work on creativity, leadership, and power relations.

General objective: To create based on the logic of high- and low-status power relations.

Estimated time: 15 minutes

Procedure:

- Participants are invited to form pairs, one pair at a time.
- They are then asked to initiate a dialogue in which each sentence must either raise the other person's status vis-à-vis their own or lower their own status vis-à-vis the other's.
- For example, one person might say: "I am here at Your Majesty's disposal". The interlocutor might respond: "I called you because I need your advice; I do not know how to act at this moment". The responses must make sense within the story and reinforce this dynamic of elevating the other's status or lowering one's own.

- In the case of low status, one might say: “But I am ignorant; how could I possibly contribute?” Or: “You have shown yourself to be an excellent King and do not need the advice of a beggar like me”.

Challenges: The dynamic may be reversed by asking participants to construct sentences that elevate their own status and lower the other’s. In fact, this model is easier and more common in everyday life. However, elevating oneself while diminishing the other may lead to unpleasant feelings such as anger and resentment. The low-status model – sentences that diminish oneself while elevating the other – tends to generate feelings of empathy, solidarity, and compassion.

Discussion and Implications

Creativity is highly valued in all aspects of life and organizations. In organizations, its value is reflected in practice, whether applied to creative leadership, organizational innovation, or the capacity to formulate new solutions to emerging problems (Amabile, 2017; Coldevin et al., 2019; Muzzio, 2019). In other words, OC is of interest as a practical capability, since creative professionals are sought after in all sectors of activity. Regarding the education of such professionals in the field of management, the pedagogical concern lies in how creativity can be developed as a skill or competence with practical application. That is, how can creativity be developed as practice in management education?

This study explores how theatrical improvisation (TI), from a practice-based perspective, can renew education aimed at OC. The research results consist of a set of practical proposals for management educators to apply TI in the classroom: principles (rules and pitfalls) and games (structured into types: warm-up, familiarization, and consolidation). Guidelines on how to implement these activities were also provided.

The findings represent a contribution primarily to educators, as they offer original pedagogical practices (TI games) adapted to the field of management. Studies that provide improvisation games do exist, but they are generally designed for actors. When developed for non-actors, they do not address specific issues related

to the field of management. Thus, this is one of the first studies to systematize TI games for the field of ME.

The contribution of these results also extends to ME research. Theater has been studied as a fruitful avenue for learning (Coopey, 1998; Yanow, 2001), and improvisation stands out within this avenue as a powerful ally of ME (Davel & Barbosa, 2024; Barbosa & Davel, 2022, 2021; Barbosa, Davel & Cunha, 2022; Robson, Pitt & Berthon, 2015). However, TI has only been studied regarding organizational improvisation. No previous research has, to date, focused on the relevance of TI for the development of OC. Future research may delve deeper into this connection between TI, OC, and ME, revealing additional theoretical dimensions and pedagogical practices.

The more future research advances this connection, the more ME and management professionals will tend to benefit, as TI strongly contributes to the development of essential capabilities. For example, it helps maintain the creative process in an open state, fosters distributed or collective leadership, encourages relinquishing individual sovereignty over creation, and cultivates courage and generosity in contributing to collective dynamics, as well as the immediate acceptance of what others bring into the creative process (Boal, 2014; Johnstone, 2012; Spolin, 2007).

However, we are aware that one of the main barriers to using an interdisciplinary resource from the field of theatre is that educators in ME do not necessarily have easy access to the theatrical world, as they do not typically come from the arts. This represents a disruption to the traditional approach in management education, in which teaching is considered fundamentally a cognitive activity, external to the student and dependent on the teacher, characterized by the linear transmission of knowledge (Anderson, 2002; Chim-Miki, Campos & Melo, 2019; Schmitz et al., 2015). This study facilitates such approximation and reinforces the need for active and experiential pedagogies by enabling the use of TI in ME. Presence is a state that is essential to TI. Without the practical learning of this state, students are unable to improvise or create. Thus, presence – a quality highlighted as essential for management professionals (Kahn, 1992; Senge et al., 2008) – is also practiced and developed throughout TI practice.

The theoretical results (types, characterizations, categorizations of principles, and the like) and practical results (games) developed in this research indicate that ME aimed at creativity stands out for its experiential character. TI invites not only

cognitive learning but also bodily, affective, and relational learning. During the practice of the games – whether narrating, feeling, sharing, or playing in the classroom – students are encouraged to practice, reflect, and experience learning fluidly and collectively. Researchers and educators are invited to review, rethink, and expand pedagogical practices by developing additional games and exploring further pedagogical potentials of TI for ME.

In a complementary direction, future research may focus on producing quantitative data and more specific evidence regarding managerial impacts and the particular competencies that these theatrical pedagogies may generate in ME. Generating additional detailed empirical evidence about the outcomes of applying this pedagogy may be valuable in consolidating and opening new educational pathways for the use of TI in the field of management.

Conclusions

Creativity is a precursor to innovation in organizations, with significant impact on contemporary economies and societies. However, there is still a lack of integrated and up-to-date knowledge regarding academic production on creativity, due to the dispersion of existing approaches and the lack of systematization on how to apply it in educational practice in the classroom. This article adopted a more practice-oriented approach and sought to systematize pedagogical practices derived from TI in order to support the teaching of OC as practice. The focus was on developing applied knowledge that professionals and educators can use in their learning and teaching environments. In doing so, the understanding of OC as practice is expanded, and a pedagogical and interdisciplinary pathway is proposed to renew and foster future research.

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