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Abstract
Studies show that improvisation in corporate leadership decision making is on the rise and it transpires in the corporate 75-90% of the time, yet very little research has explored this skillset. No other corporate leadership skillset that is applied two thirds of the time has ever been so underdeveloped. The purpose of this article was to assess the effects of a workshop applying a Holistic Improvisational Corporate Leadership Model as developed by the researcher and based on the latest improvisation research. The study employed a mixed methods design to gather qualitative and quantitative data for a descriptive evaluation of the training workshop. No proportional quota sampling and triangulation were used to maximize cross verification and validity of the data. This article explored the skills corporate leaders acquired and applied during, immediately after 1 month after the workshop and in 3 months.

Keywords: improvisation, decision making, strategic planning, stress, celebrating failure

Introduction

This article explored the impact of improvisational techniques in corporate leadership development. The traditional leadership and strategic planning tools of logic and rationality of 20th century assume that the business world is steady and predictable. According to the classic organizational change theory, organisations tend to be homeostatic, incessantly working to maintain a state of equilibrium (Weick, 2007) [31]. However, according to Purser and Petranker (2005) [24], both scholars and practitioners confirm that today's competitive and fast-changing global environment is emergent with continuous change and hence, the future cannot possibly be predicted or planned.

Corporate leaders today would not be able to imagine and create a new future using the traditional tools of logic that have characterized most leadership development and business school education in the past century (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009; Montuori, 2012) [20]. Moreover, modern corporates' fast-changing global environment and growing complexity is resulting in an increasing level of stress among leaders and their staff (Burke, 2011) [9].

Background of the Problem

Although corporate leaders have every intention of following their corporates' formal strategic plan, the ambiguous realities of the 21st century and the resulting amount of stress, drive leaders to improvise and make decisions spontaneously in the face of the new problems. This form of ad-hoc improvisation in business is not intentional, yet it transpires as often as 75-90% of the time (Mintzberg, 1973; Meyer, 2010) [18, 19] and is often ineffective due to the leader's ability to think clearly while under high levels of stress (Bennis, 2001; Boyer, 2009) [5, 7]. According to Montuori (2012) [20], corporate leaders must learn to manage stress and become more adaptive problems solvers, capable of creating, innovating and working quickly and under conditions of great uncertainty. The experiential, emergent and mindful nature of improvisational techniques has shown to be a successful tool for coping effectively with continuous change, making spontaneous decisions, managing stress and developing the adaptable skillset of leaders, teams and corporate (Cunha, Cunha & Kamoche, 1999; Safian, 2012) [12, 25]. Although corporate leaders' interest in improvisation based programs has been increasing in the last decade, research on the topic is still in its early stages (Vera & Crossan, 2004) [29]. The impact of such trainings is still fragmented, conceptual and mainly based on personal and anecdotal stories (Hatch, 1998; Vera & Crossan, 2004, 2005) [14, 30]. If corporate wish to thrive in and adapt to this century's changing requirements, it is vital for academic research to evaluate and further validate the capacity of improvisational techniques in order to serve as a facilitator of this change.

Statement of the Problem

In a complex and ambiguous corporate world, leaders require nimble and adaptive decision making techniques. Numerous studies have emphasized the relationship between leadership and corporate performance (Mumford *et al*., 2000; Burke, 2011) [9, 23]. Without effective leadership, corporate will not be able to succeed in the ever more complex and uncertain business environment (Mumford *et al*., 2000; Burke, 2011) [9, 23]. One of the most critical roles of the corporate leader is decision-making and a strong measure of leader's effectiveness lies in the quality of those decisions (Bass, 1990; Trauffer, 2008) [4, 27]. The corporates presently must navigate through highly complex environments and this level of complexity is bound to increase in the future, causing an increasing amount of stress and burnout (Zaccaro, 2001; Burke, 2010) [8, 32].

Due to the frequency of improvisation occurring in the corporate and the effectiveness of combining of spontaneity of

action and intuition in a powerful yet simple framework, developing improvisational techniques in the corporate leaders can offer s solution (Montuori, 2012) [20]. However, the amount of existing research on the use of improvisational techniques in the corporate is limited and is frequently metaphorical or anecdotal in nature (Vera & Crossan, 2005) [30]. The applied aspects of improvisation have benefited from an even scarcer amount of research. Consequently, empirical research connecting and assessing the concepts of improvisation and corporate leadership development in the corporate greatly needed (Vendelo, 2009) [28].

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article was to assess the effects of a pilot workshop by applying a holistic model of improvisation to corporate leadership development. This article explored the skills the corporate leaders acquired during the workshop, the extent of the application of those skills immediately, in 2 weeks to 1 month and subsequently, in 3 months following the workshop. This article also investigated which facilitation techniques used by the instructor more effectively supported this transfer of learning.

Research Questions

To carry out the purpose of the study, the following research questions were explored;

1. In what ways, if any, did participants' participations of improvisation as a learning tool change as a result of attending the workshop?
2. What changes, if any, did the participants perceive in themselves and others by attending the workshop?
3. What facilitation techniques did the participants perceive to be the most effective in enhancing their learning?
4. In what ways, if any, did the participants' awareness of their spontaneous decision making change as a result of attending the workshop?
5. What changes, if any, did the participants identify in their level of stress by attending the workshop?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this article is fourfold. First, the study of the application of improvisational techniques in corporate is still in its infancy, with minimal existing empirical research. In fact, the very first empirical contribution in the area is dated 1998, by Moorman and Miner, in which the use of improvisation for new product development was examined (Moorman & Miner, 1998) [21].

The second, most studies to date have mainly adopted a qualitative methodology (Leone, 2010) [15], the gap in literature still remains for a mixed method study aimed at holistically understanding improvisation in corporate leadership.

The third, existing studies have investigated the effects of improvisation either at the team level (Akgun *et al*., 2007) or the project level (Leybourne & Sadler-Smith, 2006). Only a few studies have explored the individual aspects of the improvisation or in combination with individual and team level applications (Leone, 2010) [15].

The fourth, the existing research on improvisation frequently follows the jazz model and is not holistic due to it being primarily used as a metaphor. According to McCort (1997) [17] and Morgan (1996) [22], this model has limitations in directly being transferred to business application.

The results of this article benefit the participant corporate leaders, leaders' staff, coworkers, families and corporates, corporate training programs and anyone looking for more research on utilizing techniques of improvisation in corporate leadership development.

Review of Literature

The conceptual framework for this article centered on a Holistic Improvisational Leadership Model that was initially influenced by Crossan's (1998) areas of improvisation and then integrated with the latest research on improvisation During an iterative process of applying grounded theory, the themes found as a result of qualitative analysis were utilized to revise the model after each collection of workshop data (Birks & Mills, 2011) [6], leading to the final version of Holistic Improvisational Leadership Model, as predicted in Figure 1. This model has six key interrelated areas that link improvisation to effective leadership, resulting in creativity, innovation and adaptive problem solving.

The model's six key interrelated areas that link improvisation to effective leadership were:

- Accurate perception of the external environment (Vera & Crossan, 2004, 2005; Montuori, 2012) [20, 30].
- Tolerance of risk and ambiguity (Vera & Crossan, 2004, 2005; Montuori, 2012) [20, 30].
- Realised strategy – merging planning with action (Vera & Crossan, 2004, 2005; Montuori, 2012) [20, 29].
- Shared leadership (Dickerson, 2011)
- Active listening (Vera & Crossan, 2004, 2005; Montuori, 2012) [20, 29].
- Collaboration (Vera & Crossan, 2004, 2005; Montuori, 2012) [20, 29].

With the effective implementation of these six elements in corporate leadership development, the seventh and final element of the model can be achieved.

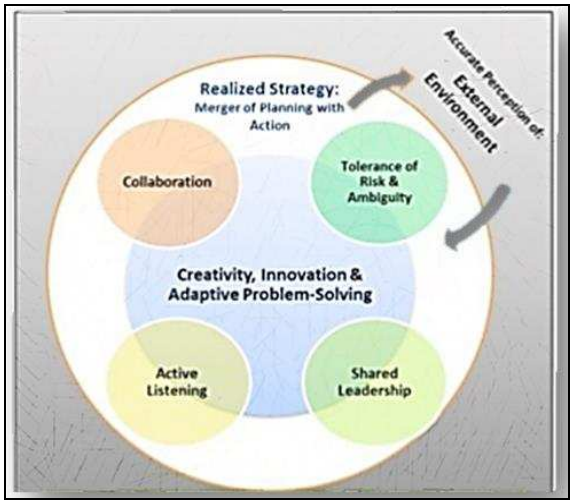

Fig 1: Tabee's First Generation Holistic Improvisational Corporate Leadership Model.

Another conceptual model that was utilized throughout the curriculum design process in this article was the Hiatt-

Michael's Theoretical Model of Curriculum Design. This model was used as a roadmap to ensure all stakeholders' interests had been taken into account in the design and delivery of the corporate leadership development workshop. The model is a valuable tool for workshop curriculum decision-makers, as a designer should consider all stakeholders' interests when development the workshop.

Methodology

This article focuses on the methodology of the study and includes the population under investigation, protection of human subjects, workshop design, data collection procedure and data categories. This study utilized a mixed method design, qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell, 2007) [10], in the form of a descriptive treatment evaluation of curriculum design and application of grounded theory for generating and revising a model through the analysis of data.

Population under Investigation

The target population of corporate leaders included executive management, directors, middle managers, supervisors, team leaders, project managers and anyone who had influence over a team, group or the creation and implementation of new products, services or processes. There were a total of 67 participants and per workshop were 4-24 with a mean of 11 participants. Grounded theory research design was applied to revise the Holistic Improvisational Corporate Leadership Model based on data that did not exist prior (Creswell, 2007) [10]. Triangulation designates a combination of at least two or more theoretical frameworks, data sources, methodological approaches, data analysis procedures or researchers to collect and analyse the data (Azulai & James, 2012) [2]. Triangulation is typically used to strengthen the research design by decreasing, renouncing or counterbalancing the deficiency inherent in any single design strategy (Azulai & James, 2012) [2].

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection methodology included pretests and posttests, participant satisfaction surveys following the workshop, follow-up interviews of workshop participants 2 weeks to 1 month after the workshop as well as observation, field notes and informal conversations. The interview questions aimed at gaining information regarding the participants' changes in learning, behavior and business results when participants were back at their work environments. Data were initially tabulated using standard summary statistics. Next, the details of demographic data analysis were depicted in various tables along with a narrative of most significant findings.

Table 1: Frequency counts for Gender and Age Range

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Female	33	49.3
	Male	34	50.7
Age Range	20-29	19	28.4
	30-39	20	29.9
	40-49	15	22.4
	50 or Older	13	19.4

Note: N=67

Table 1 displays the frequency counts for the demographic characteristics of the sample. There were approximately equal women (49.3%) and men (50.7%) in the sample. Ages ranged from 20-29 years (28.4%) to 50 or older (19.4%) with the median age being 34.5 years.

Table 2: Frequency Counts for Region and Industry

Variable	Category	n	%
Region	South	16	23.9
	East	12	17.9
	Midwest	6	9.0
	West	33	49.3
Industry	Finance/Insurance	12	17.9
	Manufacturing	7	10.4
	Government	6	9.0
	Education	32	47.8
	Aerospace/Engineering	10	14.9

Note: N=67

In Table 2, participants were from four regions of the country with most (49.3%) living in the West with another (23.9%) and living in the South. Participants worked in one of five industries with the most common being education (47.8%).

Table 3: Frequency Counts for Position and Years in the Organization

Variable	Category	n	%
Position	Supervisor	9	13.4
	Educational Leader	32	47.8
	Middle or Senior Manager	11	16.4
	Executive	15	22.4
Years in the Organisation	2-5	33	49.3
	5-10	17	25.4
	10-15	8	11.9
	Over 15 Years	9	13.4

Note: N=67

In Table 3, all participants were in some sort of leadership Position ranging from supervisors (13.4%) to executives (22.4%). The percentage of middle or senior managers (16.4%) included seven senior managers, making the category of 22 executives or senior leaders (33%) of the participants. Almost half the participants (49.3%) had been with their organization between 2 and 5 years.

Quantitative Analysis of Pretest, Posttest and Interview Data

To determine the extent of participants' knowledge of improvisation and the use of improvisation principles in spontaneous decisions, level of stress and benefits the participants received from attending the workshop, the pretest and posttest surveys were developed. The responses from pretests and posttests by item for frequency counts were tallied as shown in Table 4. When the participants were asked at the pretest about how often they experienced stress during an average work week, over a third of the participants (37.3%) reported 'almost every day' and (27%) reported 'Mostly', while only 1% of the participants responded 'Rarely' and almost all (91.0%) reported that they did not know the percentage of time they used the principles of improvisation to

make spontaneous decisions.

Table 4: Frequency Counts for Pretest Stress and Percent Spontaneous Decisions Using Improvisation Principles

Variable	Category	n	%
Pretest-stress times per week	Rarely	1	1.5
	Sometimes	23	34.3
	Mostly	18	26.9
	Almost Everyday	25	37.3
Pretest-percent spontaneous decisions where improvisation principles were utilised	Don't know	61	91.0
	10%-40%	1	1.5
	40%-75%	4	6.0
	Over 75%	1	1.5

Note: N=67

Table 5 displays the frequency counts for change in the amount of spontaneous decision making for the participant both at the posttest and reported later at the interview.

Table 5: Frequency Counts for Change in the Amount of spontaneous Decision Making Both at Posttest and Reported Later at the Interview (N=67)

Variable	Category	n	%
Pretest to posttest-change in the amount of spontaneous decision making	No	17	25.3
	Yes	50	74.7
Posttest to interview-change in the amount of spontaneous decision making	No	41	61.2
	Yes	26	38.8

Note: N=67

At the posttest, when asked if there was a change in the amount of spontaneous decision making from the pretest percentage, 74.7% answered 'yes'. At the interview, when asked if there was a change in amount of spontaneous decision making from posttest percentage, 38.8% answered 'yes.'
Participants were asked a series of five questions pertaining to the benefits they received from participation in the workshop (see Table 6). Five benefits (working with others in your corporate; ability to lead others; aware of your listening skills; personal benefits; aware of how quickly you trust others) were measured using a Likert scale of 1 (Don't know), 2 (Not beneficial, 3 (Unlikely beneficial, 4 (Beneficial), 5 (Likely beneficial), 6 (Highly beneficial).

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Types of Benefits Received from the Training Sorted by Highest Mean Rating

Type of Benefit	M	SD
Working with others in your corporate	5.76	0.50
Ability to lead others	5.69	0.50
Aware of your listening skills	5.54	0.64
Personal benefits	5.54	0.59
Aware of how quickly you trust others	3.22	0.67

Note: N=67. Aggregated Score: 5.55, SD=0.43, Cronbach alpha reliability (α = .79).

Participants indicated that they had received the most benefit from the workshop in the top two areas of "working with others in your corporate" with a mean of M=5.76 (SD=.050) and "ability to lead others" M=5.69, (SD=0.50). The lowest ranking benefit resulted from the construct of "make you aware of how quickly you trust others" with a mean of M=5.22 (SD=0.67).

Table 7 displays the Spearman rank-ordered correlations between the six benefits scores and five demographic variables to describe the strength and direction of the relationship between the benefits scale variables (Pallant, 2011). Specifically, participants who had positions higher in their corporate reported significantly greater benefits for four of the six indicators including total benefits from the workshop, listening skills, ability to lead others and working with others in their corporate. In addition, male participants gave significantly higher benefit ratings for "personal benefits (rs=.22, p<.10)" and "ability to lead others (rs=.21, p<.10)." Also, there was a significant positive correlation between the participants' level of education and benefit of "make you aware of how quickly you trust others (rs=.35, p<.005)".

Table 7: Spearman Rank-Ordered Correlations for Benefit Scores with Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables Benefits Ratings	1	2	3	4	5
Total benefits score	.21 *	.07	.10	.13	.17
1. Personal benefits	.04	.22 *	-.11	.08	.02
2. Make you aware of your listening skills	.26 **	.10	.16	.18	.05
3. Make you aware of how quickly you trust others	.12	-.17	.11	.08	.35 ****
4. Ability to lead others	.28 **	.21 *	.15	.14	.10
5. Working with others in your corporate	.23 *	.15	.03	.03	-.07

Note: N= 67
*p<.10. **p<.05. ***p<.01. ****p<.005.
Demographic Variables: 1 = Corporate Level; 2 = Gender (1 – Female, 2 = Male); 3 = Age; 4 = Years in the Corporate; 5 = Education Level.

Table 8: Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Tests Comparing Levels of Spontaneous Decisions from Three Time Periods

Test	Comparison	M	SD	z	p
First	Pretest	0.56	0.240	2.53	.01
	Posttest	0.61	0.203		
Second	Pretest	0.56	0.240	4.46	.001
	Interview	0.71	0.142		
Third	Posttest	0.61	0.203	4.02	.001
	Interview	0.71	0.142		

Note: N = 67. Ratings are percentages expressed as decimals.

For all three tests, significant gains in spontaneous decision-making were noted. At the final interview, corporate leaders admitted to making 71% of their decisions spontaneously. The figure jumped to 79% for the 22 senior management and executives leaders in the study.

Table 9: Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Test Comparing Pretest and Posttest Stress Levels

Stress Score	M	SD
Pretest	5.14	2.19
Posttest	2.45	1.49

Note: N = 67. Ratings based on an 11-point scale (0=mild to 10=Severe). Wilcoxon test results: z=6.34, p=.001.

At present, 80% participants had moderate to severe stress, with an average stress of 5.14 (moderate to severe) while at posttest 100% of participants had mild to moderate stress with a mild to moderate stress at 2.45 (mild to moderate) indicating a 52% decline in stress.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Eight major qualitative themes were discovered by comparing qualitative data from pretest to posttest and interview data and field notes. Five themes were of significance during the posttest and interview, including responsive listening and expression, collaborate creativity, lowered level of stress and mindfulness, competent risks and celebrating failure and OPTIMAL spontaneous decisions (OSD).

Theme 1: Responsive listening and expression. Calculated separately, 81% of participants in the study reported gaining more effective listening skills, while 62% reported the ability to express thoughts without judgement as a learned skill.

Theme 2: Competent risks and celebrating failure. Out of 67 participants, 54 (81%) reported that this concept had influenced them positively in accepting their and their staff's mistakes and in learning from them. Additionally, participants indicated that the concept of taking competent risks and celebrating failure trickled down positively to other areas of the corporate leader's effectiveness, including allowing them to feel less stress and be more productive by not being as concerned about the possibility of failure as a negative consequence.

Theme 3: Collaborative creativity. Out of 67 participants, 48 (72%) indicated observing this phenomenon occurring at the workshop, or later, back in their work environments. Collaborative creativity occurred during the improvisation workshop, when team members collaborated effortlessly and time flew by, allowing the group to produce highly creative ideas.

Theme 4: Lowered level of stress and mindfulness. A majority of participants believed that the instructor, by bringing own examples of having been afraid when she the instructor started out with improve, helped them reduce their own anxieties.

Theme 5: Affirmative competence. The theme of affirmative competence can be described as having sufficient expertise in olne's content area, combined with the affirmative belief of improvisation, exhibited through the principle of 'Yes.' A majority of participants believed that the instructor's belief in their abilities and belief in the power of improvisation affected their level of positive thinking and confidence in themselves and others.

Theme 6: Shared leadership and delegation. During the 1 month follow-up interview, the concept of shared leadership and delegation came up often and most of the participants expressed that they became more relaxed as they tried to delegate more and listen more instead of try to run the whole show by themselves.

Theme 7: Making Optimal Spontaneous Decisions (OSD). The theme of OPTIMAL Spontaneous Decisions (OSD) were evident when, by applying improvisational principles, one can be open to the present reality and making a decision by combining the rational thought, intuition and mindfulness in action to solve a problem rapidly. In the follow-up interview, corporate leaders admitted their job requires them to make rapid decisions.

Theme 8: Resulting in OPTIMAL strategy and performance, productivity, innovation and retention. The use of OSD and other competencies gained through the improvisation workshop resulted in high performance and productivity after 1 month and 3 months at the participants' work environments. Innovation was another theme that became apparent in participants responses.

Concluding Remarks

For decades, the lingering assumption in corporate leadership and management development have centered on the mastery in areas of forecasting, planning, organizing, deciding and controlling (Barrett, 2012) [3]. However, forecasting, planning and deciding are not conceivable when the business environment is ambiguous and uncertain. In this environment, deciding cannot be made from a place of rational deduction. But from a place of combining intuition with spontaneous action. Attempts to control outcomes in this business environment will result in more unintended chaos. In the face of uncertainty, the added skillset corporate leaders need is not tighter planning and control, but improvisational skills: the ability to take effective action rapidly and with limited resources. This article showed the multitude of benefits that the corporate leaders and their corporate gained from applying improvisation techniques. When the corporate leaders face rapid change and ambiguity and search for ways to make a rapid decision effectively, it is the researcher's hope that they can turn to this study as a guide in assisting them on their journey.

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