

Two streams of literature & practice oriented approaches around IMPROVISATION and MORAL IMAGINATION

ORGANIZATION STUDIES

- Organizational Improvisation (Crossan-Cunha-Vera-Cunha AMR 2005)
- Organization as Theatre metaphor (+ criticism by Cornelissen 2004)
- (Jazz) Improvisation as a Mindset (Weick 1998; Barrett 1998)
- Theatrical Improvisation (Vera-Crossan 2004; Crossan-Sorrenti 1997)

BUSINESS ETHICS

- Moral Imagination for managerial decision making (Werhane 1999)
- Ethics & the arts (Dunham & Freeman 2000; Freeman et al. 2014; de Colle et al. 2015)
- Ethics, Theatre & Leadership (Darden MBA course)

RESEARCH QUESTION: What can we learn form the CdA improvisation 'meta-mindset' to support/activate Moral Imagination within organizations?



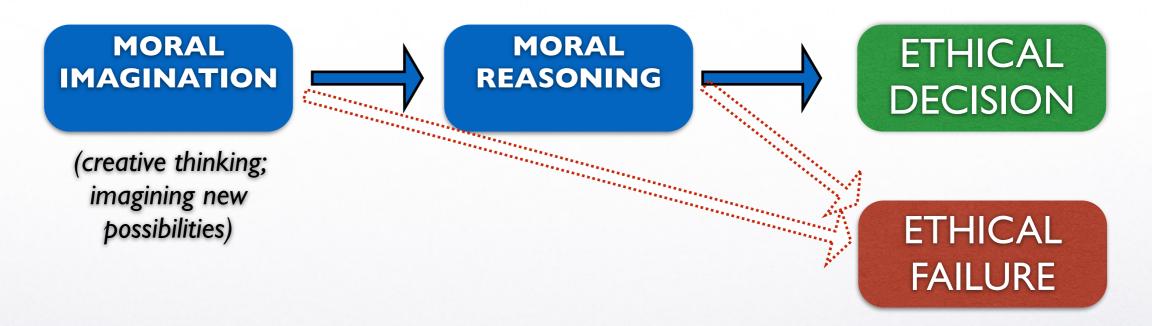
Outline

- What is Ethical Leadership?
 - Moral Reasoning & Moral Imagination
 - Improvisation in Organizations
- The unique elements of Commedia dell'Arte:
- What's in there for us?
 - The Problem with obedience
 - A difficult decision: "CARTER RACING"
 - Conclusion: Supporting Ethical Leadership in managerial decisions
 - Lessons for you? Final Discussion, Q&As



MORAL REASONING and MORAL IMAGINATION

Ethical decision-making process







MORAL IMAGINATION in Business Ethics literature

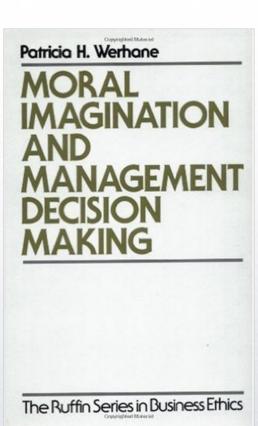
"Refers to the ability to perceive that a web of competing **economic** relationships is, at the same time, a web of **moral** relationships" (Carroll, 1987: 13)



"By 'moral Imagination' I include the awareness of various dimensions of a particular context as well as its operative framework and narratives.

Moral Imagination entails the ability to understand that context or set of activities from a number of different perspectives, the **actualizing of new possibilities** that are not context-dependent, and the instigation of the process of **evaluating** these possibilities **from a moral point of view**". (Werhane, 1999: 5)

The ability in particular circumstances to discover and evaluate possibilities **not merely determined by** that circumstance, or limited by its operative **mental models**, or merely framed by a set of rules or rule-governed concerns" (Werhane, 1999: 93).

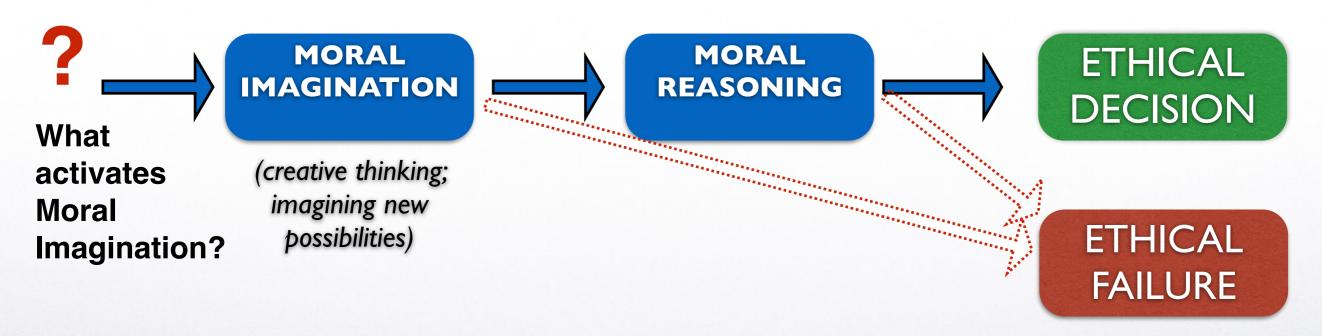


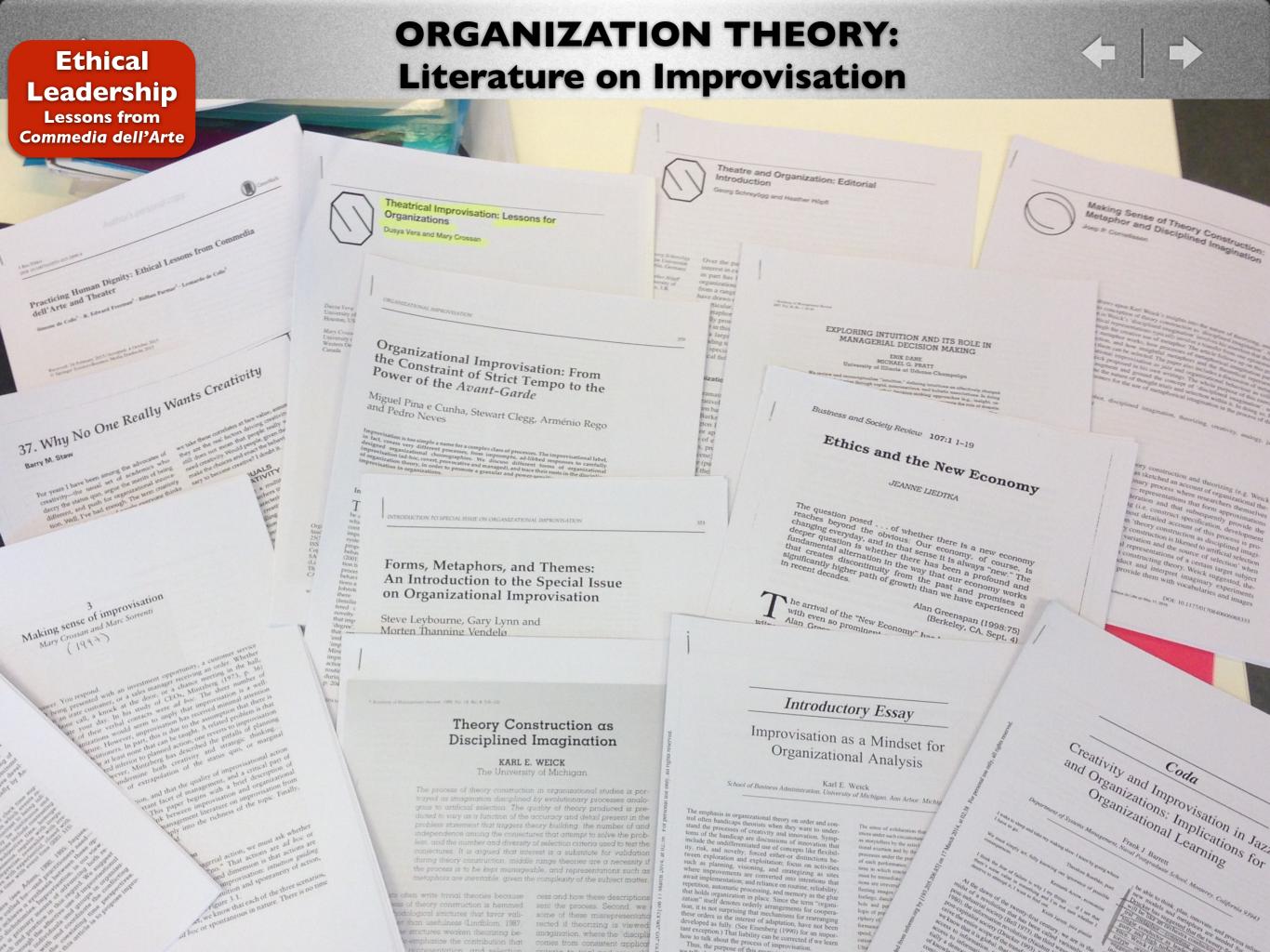




MORAL REASONING and MORAL IMAGINATION

Ethical decision-making process









WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVISATION?

- *just-in-time* strategy (Weick 1998)
- simultaneous *composition* (planning) and *execution* (Moorman & Miner 1998)
- intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way (Crossan & Sorrenti 1997)
- the conception of action as it unfolds....drawing on available cognitive, material, affective and social resources (Cunha, Cunha & Kamoche 1999)
- acting enabling imaginative thinking (Vera & Crossan 2004)
- acting before thinking (Vera & Crossan 2004)
- act in order to think (Weick 1998)

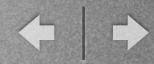
WHAT IS MORAL IMPROVISATION?



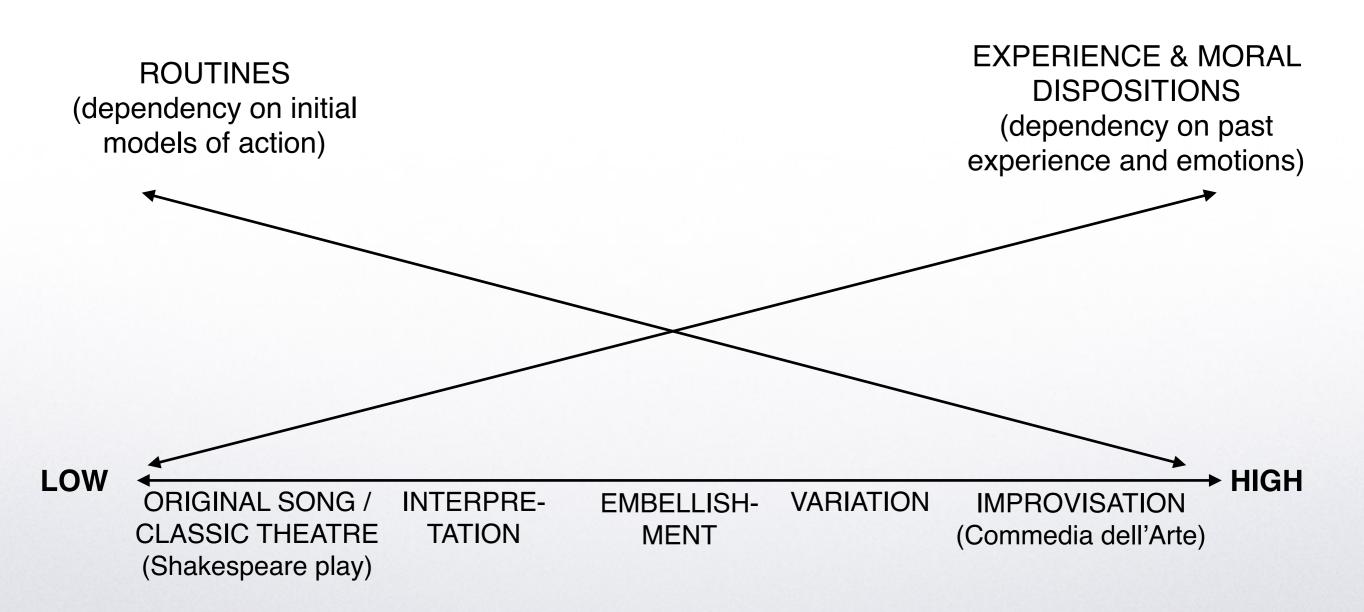
MORAL IMPROVISATION is

 non-routine (non-compliant), emotionally triggered and experience-based action questioning the moral legitimacy of a predetermined pattern of behavior





THE IMPROVISATION CONTINUUM



Source: de Colle's elaboration based on Weick (1999) and Vera-Crossan (2004)



Masks by Renzo Antonello, artisan.

I. The **Mask**

Actors express their own talent, skills and personality by acting behind a Mask



2. The Canovaccio

("Plot on canvas")

Actors are free to interpret their character and develop the story on the basis of a shared 'plot' creating shared meaning



3. The CdA Company

Actors share both the commercial and the artistic purpose of their activity



Pantalone, Leonardo de Colle © Teatro di Messina

4. The Capo Comico

("Chief Comedian")

Actors play without a formal Director but enabling coordination by a leader among peers



5. Engagement with the audience

The actors must be able to:

- a) make the audience 'live' the story and
- b) listen to the audience to be able to adapt/react





Arlecchino - Ferruccio Soleri © Piccolo Teatro di Milano

6. Embodiment

The personal character of the actor (**physicality + emotions**) is important to "make the Mask alive" - it is more about *enacting* emotions rather than 'faking it'



Arlecchino Servitore di Due Padroni © Piccolo Teatro di Milano

The Lazzi

("Improvised jokes")

Actors embrace improvisation as a regular practice



THE GRAMMAR OF IMPROVISATION

	description	knowledge
Jazz	improvisation among musicians	music notes;
Improvisation	while performing a song	music conventions
Theatrical	improvisation among actors	words/language
Improvisation	while enacting a play	conventions
Moral Improvisation	improvisation among decision-makers while making sense of their organized actions	values moral conventions





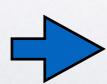
IN WHICH WAYS CAN IMPROVISATION BE BENEFICIAL?

IMPROVISATION in ORG STUDIES is seen as:

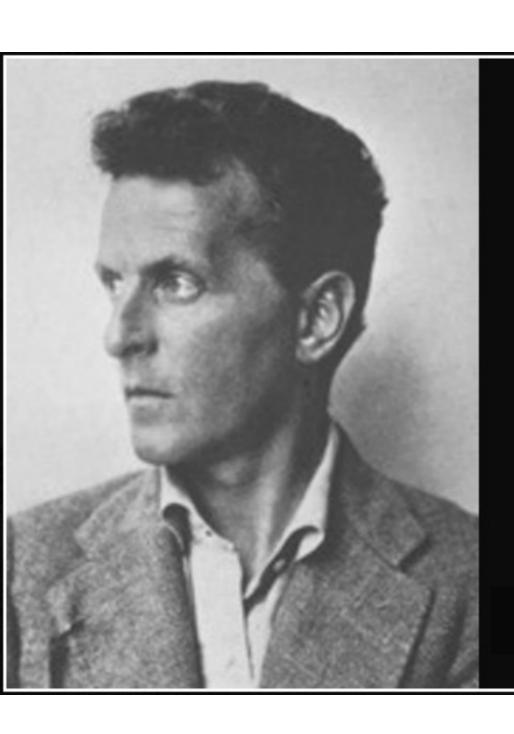
- a way to improve organizational **success** and **performance** (Vera-Crossan 2004)
- a model for enhancing organizational **flexibility** (Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004)
- a device for encouraging **innovative behavior**
- a measure to discourage over compliance (Verfremdungseffeckt, a-la-Brecht)
- enabling managers to continuously and creatively adjust to change (Brown & Eisenhard, 1998)

MORAL IMPROVISATION can help managers to

- activate their moral imagination
- avoid routine-based action that can result in unethical decision-making
- embrace new patterns of sense making that deviate from a prior stipulation
- create new possibilities for their stakeholders



WHY IS MORAL IMPROVISATION IMPORTANT?



When I obey a rule, I do not choose.
I obey the rule blindly.

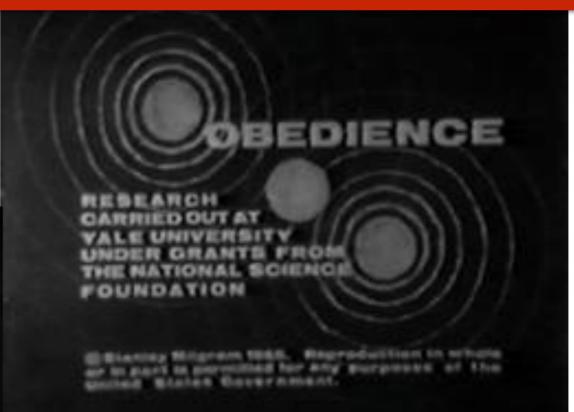
— Ludwig Wittgenstein —

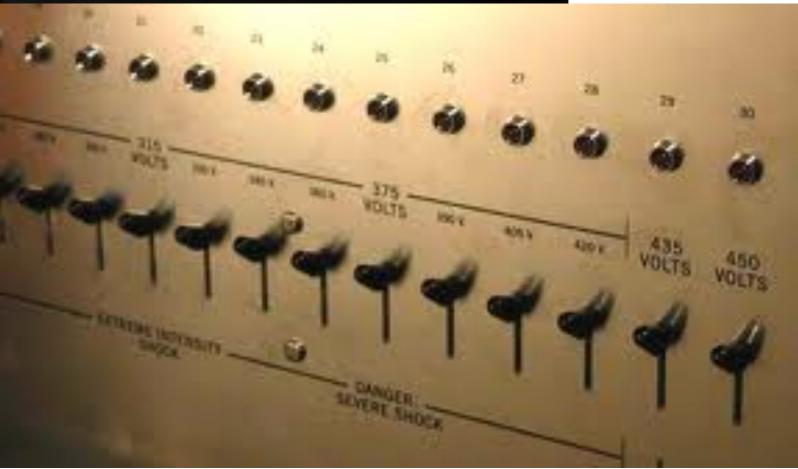
THE PROBLEM WITH OBEDIENCE

1963: S. Milgram's experiment



more than 50% of subjects delivered the maximum shocks





DISCUSS IN YOUR TABLE

One example of a situation when "disobeying" a rule or deviating from a routine was the most efficient and ethical thing to do





OPEN QUESTIONS / AVENUES FOR RESEARCH

- What are the principles underpinning Ethical Leadership?
 - (from CdA: leading among peers; mutual listening; trust...etc.)
- What are the skills/practices that can enable more effective Ethical Leadership?
 - (from CdA: improvisation; embodiment; accept failure...etc.)
- How can we create an organizational culture that is not ostile to Ethical Leadership?
 - (from CdA: focus on the process, not outcome; focus on meaning, not on compliance...etc.)





In conclusion...



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- To make good, ethical decisions managers need to use their moral imagination
- (Code of) Ethics can become an asset for better decision-making (and value creation) IF we can avoid the limitations of the compliance-based approach
- We can learn from the Arts in particular from **Commedia dell'Arte** how to support **Ethical Leadership** in today's organizations

