

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 33

Company policy and procedures are fine, but sometimes there is a need to improvise ...

Improvise to Innovate and Transform...

"I am more and more convinced that our happiness or unhappiness depends far more on the way we meet the events of life than on the nature of those events themselves."

Wilhelm von Humboldt, German Statesman



"Yes! And...it's an elephant that croaks"

Do you or your organisation cope well with unexpected events or are you held back by inflexible policies?

Imagine you went online to cancel a full cost airline ticket you had purchased. Due to a software error on the site you were unable to cancel it. On contacting the company's call centre you were told that you would have to pay a £15 surcharge for cancelling by telephone. That happened to me this week.

I suggested perhaps they could use some initiative and discount the charge as they were aware of the problem. No, the charge was company policy. I felt my blood pressure rising faster than an empty 747 as my mental "stall warning" kicked in.

As the word implies, many organisations value the ability to organise. A great deal of effort and training goes in to developing and using policies, processes and procedures (organisational "scripts"), to ensure consistency of performance and to attempt to exert control over events.

However, reliance on these methods assumes that the organisation's internal and external environment will remain reasonably stable. For good or bad, unpredictable events happen and those organisational "scripts" can fail.

It's at this point that people need to be capable of improvisation, be they an operator or a manager. Not at the expense of planning and evaluation but to complement it.

Ideally, when something unexpected happens, everyone would improvise brilliantly and the problems would disappear. However, there are issues:

- If the culture places more value on organisational skills, people will focus on that at the expense of improvisation skills
- If people spend a great deal of time using their organisational skills, the ability to improvise can wither

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- Many people prefer evaluation and planning when problem solving [source: Basadur "[The Power of Innovation](#)"] and so are less likely to improvise as a matter of choice

SO

It may be that you need to train yourself or others to improvise. This is where skills learned in improvisational theatre can help. Imagine yourself on stage with a group of four others. Out front is an expectant audience, waiting for your improvised show. You have no script, just a couple of rules that provide a basic structure to progress. The lighting man dims the "front of house" lights and raises the stage lights. Ready?

What skills and qualities do you think the group will require to provide a performance?

There are quite a few, but three skills that would help in reacting to events are:

- Thinking and acting quickly
- Thinking divergently i.e. generating ideas
- Being calm when required

All of these can be trained using improvisational theatre techniques.

ACTION

- Think about where in your organisation you most need improvisation skills.
- If you would like a copy of my article on the topic of improvisation in training, click [here](#).
- Click here to view our [training](#) on improvisation

TO CLOSE

Only the week before I wrote this article, my stationery supplier had sent me the same order twice. I telephoned to let them know.

The operator explained how they would pick up the duplicate material and with no prompting from me, gave me half of my remaining materials free of charge because they had inconvenienced me. I'd like to think their company policy is "when faced with the unexpected, improvise."

May you find a company policy this week that says "If the unexpected happens, just make the customer feel good about us!"

[.John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.](#)



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