

Characteristics of Japanese Style Improvisation in Business

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I Introduction

In this paper, the authors focus on the theoretical and practical implications of improvisation, which are not so familiar in Japanese business. Section 2 outlines the transition of organizational improvisation (OI) research conducted mainly in the United States in relation to research themes. It also reviews the definition of improvisation in the US OI research from a process perspective.

In Section 3 of this paper, two cases will be introduced to analyze the actual state of utilization of improvisation in Japanese business. One is an example of the use of improvisation in the development of “Shunsoku,” which was a big hit for Achilles. Another case is the use of improvisation in a series of shopping district revitalization measures.

In Section 4 of this paper, we would like to consider the dimensions of improvisation, which is considered to be one of the important strategic tools of business strategy in the VUCA world and post-corona age. In addition, the characteristics of Japanese-style improvisation will also be revealed. Finally, Section 5 describes the conclusions of this study and future research issues.

II Application of Improvisation in Business

1. The Overview the Research of Improvisation in Business

Originally, the word “improvise” derives from the Latin “providere,” that is, make preparation for, and its derivative “improvises,” that is, unseen. Thus, Hadida et al. (2015, p. 440) concludes that improvisation involves dealing with the unforeseen without the benefit of prepara-

tion.

In the first place, improvisation has been popular in the fields of theatre and music (jazz). In the late 1980s, scholars paid attention to the possibility of applying improvisation in business and management. From the 1990s onward much literature on improvisation in business has been published as a result of ambitious attempts. Karl Weick is one of the early advocates of improvisational activity, who argues that they make use of improvisation in the management of organization (Leybourne and Sadler-Smith, 2006). In those days, they tried to transpose several some elements of improvisation from jazz or theatre into organization in order to improve the efficiency of management.

From the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, scholars dealt with improvisation mostly in the angle of organizational theory. The concept of organizational improvisation (OI) has taken root in the field, where they put focus on the question: how to define or describe OI, discussed in the next section of this paper. A number of scholars made attempts to develop better and more appropriate definition of improvisation. Moorman and Miner (1998) defines improvisation as a convergence of composition and execution of an action. Cunha et al. (2003) defines improvisation as bricolage, that is conception of action as it folds, drawing on available resources.

Thus, on this stage, scholars were interested in explaining how improvisation played an important role in business that was not exclusive for music and theatre and how they could adapt it to management and organization while trying to clarify the nature of organizational improvisation itself. The advancement of theoretical research provided the foundation to subsequent empirical work on improvisation (Leybourne and Sadler-Smith, 2006). It is noteworthy that they had already a practical image of adapting improvisation to new product development. It gave a great influence on the next direction of research.

In the mid-2000s, they showed more enthusiasm to practical application of improvisation, especially in the new product development, attempting to clarify how to make the improvisational activity more effectively, and how to apply it in management. In this term, a number of quantitative studies were published to identify the factors necessary for more effective introduction of improvisation (Leybourne and Sadler-Smith, 2006; Hmieleski and Corbert, 2006; Arshad and Hughes, 2009). With a focus on “collective improvisation occurring in firms, that is, improvisation by work teams,” Vera and Crossan (2005) clarifies how improvisation had an effect on team innovation as testing the hypothesis 1 through 5, that is, “the

greater the team's expertise (domain- and task-relevant), the more positive the relationship between collective improvisation and innovation (H1),” “The greater the teamwork quality (e.g., cooperation and trust), the more positive the relationship between collective improvisation and innovation (H2),” “the more experimental a team's culture, the more positive the relationship between collective improvisation and innovation (H3),” The greater the team's level of real-time information and communication, the more positive the relationship between collective improvisation and innovation (H4),” and “The greater the team's level of memory (e.g.) procedures and systems), the more positive the relationship between collective improvisation and innovation (H5).” From a perspective of the role of improvisation and team learning, Akgun et al. (2007) argues that team unlearning (that is, forgetting the existing knowledge and/or routines to accept new information) stimulates team improvisation, and team improvisation leads to a success in new product development.

On the other hand, theory construction has been steadily advanced. The scholars dealt improvisation no longer as a metaphor of jazz or theatre, but tried to review the meaning of improvisation as a method of organizational theory and management, and to compare with other methods to show the essence and effects of improvisational activity (Montuori, 2003; Leybourne, 2007, 2009). Based on the previous literature as above, Leybourne (2007, p. 228) declares that improvisation as an accepted organizational practice is finally “coming of age.”

From the mid-2010s onward, improvisation has entered a new phase of applied research, The topic ranged from the impact of organizational improvisation on market orientation (Kim and Shim, 2012), the use of theatrical improvisation for leadership development (Oelke, 2013), the role of service improvisation in improving hotel customer satisfaction (Secchi et al., 2016, 2019), to the influence of organizational improvisation on strategic reasoning and managerial factors (Arshad and Hughes, 2009).

In the late 2010s and 2020, there was a remarkable movement for further pursuit of the possibility of applying improvisation in organization. To name the titles of papers, there are “Stimulating organizational creativity with theatrical improvisation” (Nisula and Kianto, 2018), “Creating value through real time knowledge generation: Improvisation and organizational learning in new product development” (Tonikidou et al., 2018), “Relationship between organizational improvisation and organizational creativity” (Xue and Sun, 2019), “Organizational learning and organizational improvisation” (Miner and Toole, 2020). In an empirical study, Xiang et al. (2020) examines how a specific organizational learning activity could be related

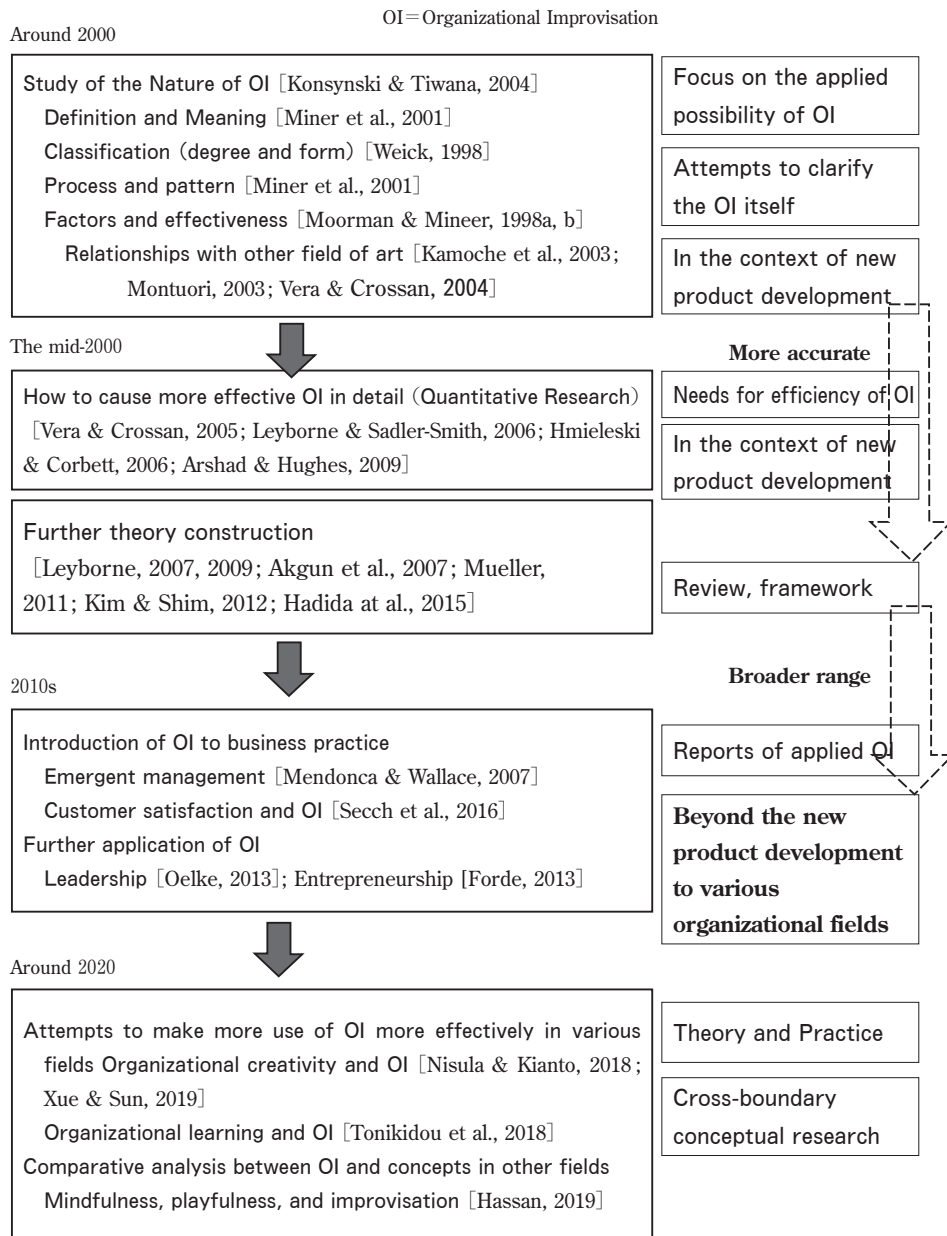


Figure 1: The Classification and Changes of Themes of Improvisation

to opportunity identification by highlighting improvisational learning. On the other hand, some scholars have been working on comparative analysis between improvisation and some academic concepts in other academic fields that have never dealt with together with improvisation. Hassan (2019) decodes the relationship between playfulness, mindfulness, and improvisation.

The overview of improvisation research as explained above is shown in Figure 1.

2. Definitions of Improvisation in Business

As reviewed in section1, research of improvisation in business started as attempts to develop more appropriate definitions of the term. A large number of scholars have shown their definitions of organizational improvisation or improvisation in business setting in different way (Miner, 1997; Moorman and Miner, 1998; Weick, 1998, 2001; Kamoche and Cunha, 1999; Cunha et al., 2003; Vera and Crossan 2005; Leibourne and Sadler-Smith, 2006, Akgun et al., 2007; Hmieleski and Corbett, 2008). In this section, we deal with variety of definitions provided from around 2000s. We extracted essential elements of definitions which appear in every definition and which is indispensable for occurrence of improvisation, and organized them into two categories. After explaining these two categories, we will show the additional component elements according to the chronological order in which a concrete improvisational activity starts and proceeds. Traditionally, there have been very few attempts to examine fully the various kinds of definitions of improvisation to divide the essential elements and additional elements, even though some scholars have made lists of definitions in an alphabetical order.

The first essential element of definition of improvisation is “convergence or simultaneity of composition and execution,” (Moorman and Miner, 1998; Kamoche and Cunha, 1999; Crossan et al., 2005; Akgun et al., 2007). Moorman and Miner (1998b) argue that “the more proximate the design and implementation of an activity in time, the more that activity become improvisational,” because spontaneity is the most important for improvisation (p. 698). Moorman and Miner (1998a, p. 1) starts their paper as follows: “the fields of marketing strategy and new product development in particular appear to assume that marketing strategy should occur by first composing a plan on the basis of a careful review of environmental and firm information and then executing that plan...we question this assumption by suggesting that there are cases when the composition and execution of an action converge in time so that in the

limit they occur simultaneously. Here, Moorman and Miner (1998a, p. 1) defines the convergence of composition and execution as improvisation. In other words, their definition of “convergence of planning and execution” seems to be established on the striking difference between the traditional routine of planning and execution in order and the brand new way. The definition of improvisation on the basis of the effectiveness in the context of new product development has been basically accepted till today. In almost all papers of improvisation in business, similar definitions which share the description above have been introduced as accepted assumptions.

The second essential element of the definition is spontaneity and creativity. Vera and Crossan (2004) explains the definition as follows: “we extract the descriptive elements of spontaneity and creativity, defining improvisation occurring in teams as the creative and spontaneous process of trying to achieve an objective in a new way” (p. 205). Compared to the first essence of the definition, it appears to be associated with artistic factors, for example, jazz and theatre. It may be worth mentioning that Vera and Crossan (2004) focuses on the improvisational theatre metaphor, not on the jazz music, in their paper.

Thus, as suggested here the essential definition of improvisation involves (1) the convergence of planning and execution, and (2) spontaneity and creativity. On these essential elements of the definition, there are several additional components. Now, we will clarify them in a chronological order where improvisation starts and proceeds.

First, the antecedent factor of the occurrence of improvisation is a situation where people face something unexpected and/or troublesome. Improvisational activity occurs “in the face of unexpected change” (Hadida et al., 2015). Karl Weick (1998, p. 544) states that “thus, improvisation deals with the unforeseen, it works without a prior stipulation, it works with the unexpected.” Here it may be implied that the improvisational activity is different from the normal procedure which involves planning and implementing in order.

On the other hand, Vera and Crossan (2005) criticizes that the spontaneous facet of improvisation is “overemphasized” in the previous literature. They argue that there should be much preparation and study behind effective improvisation (Vera and Crossan, 2005, p. 203). In addition, they suggest that “the decision to improvise may be made on the spot or may be an option considered in advance, as when firms have formal or informal norms enabling people to depart from routines at certain times to come up with something new” (Vera and Crossan, 2005, p. 205).

Then, we are going to clarify the additional components seen in the process of improvisation occurrence. In face of the unexpected situation, it is impossible for people to bring new tools or materials to use to solve the emerging problems. They are supposed to draw on available resources at hand, that is, bricolage (Vera and Crossan, 1999; Cunha et al., 2003; Leybourne and Sadler-Smith, 2006). Weick (1998) introduces the definition of a previous literature as follows: improvisation involves reworking precomposed material and design in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed (p. 54). In addition, they should deal with the unexpected situation in an extemporaneous way (Moorman and Miner, 1995; Weick 1998, 2001; Hmieleski and Corbett, 2008). In the process where improvisation occurs, intuition plays an important role (Crossan, 1998; Leybourne and Sadler-Smith, 2006). Leybourne and Sadler-Smith (2006, p. 484) points out that intuition is a cognitive conclusion based on decision maker's previous experiences and emotional inputs, as they suppose that accumulation of experiences and analysis gives influence on the pattern of behaviours upon the basis of an unconscious reasoning process.

Concerning the additional components in the process of improvisation occurrence, there are few consensus on the other factors. For example, Moorman and Miner (1998, p. 704) argue that collective improvisation may be produced by the joint activities of individuals, who are themselves improvising. With a metaphor of Indian music in mind, Kamoche et al. (2003) suggests that the element of competitiveness should not be ignored, arguing as follows: "In a departure from jazz, the social experience in Indian music is defined by competitiveness rather than cooperation. While the jazz soloist is accompanied by others who provide harmonic and rhythmic support, Indian solos are an exchange of phrases between players who try to outphrase each other without diverting from the tonal order" (Kamoche et al., 2003, p. 2033). With a focus on "short-term learning," Miner et al. (2001) concludes that "improvisation as a special type of short-term, real-time learning." Miner et al. (2001, p. 306) also point out that in improvisational learning, experience and related change occur at the same time and reveal how improvisation influenced long-term organizational learning and adaptation, though further examination is needed in this point.

The purpose and goal of improvisation is innovation. Moorman and Miner (1998, p. 706) even declares that improvisation is a form of innovation. It might be natural that organizational improvisation aims at innovative goal and actually leads to innovative solution, when we consider that organizational improvisation research originally evolved from the context

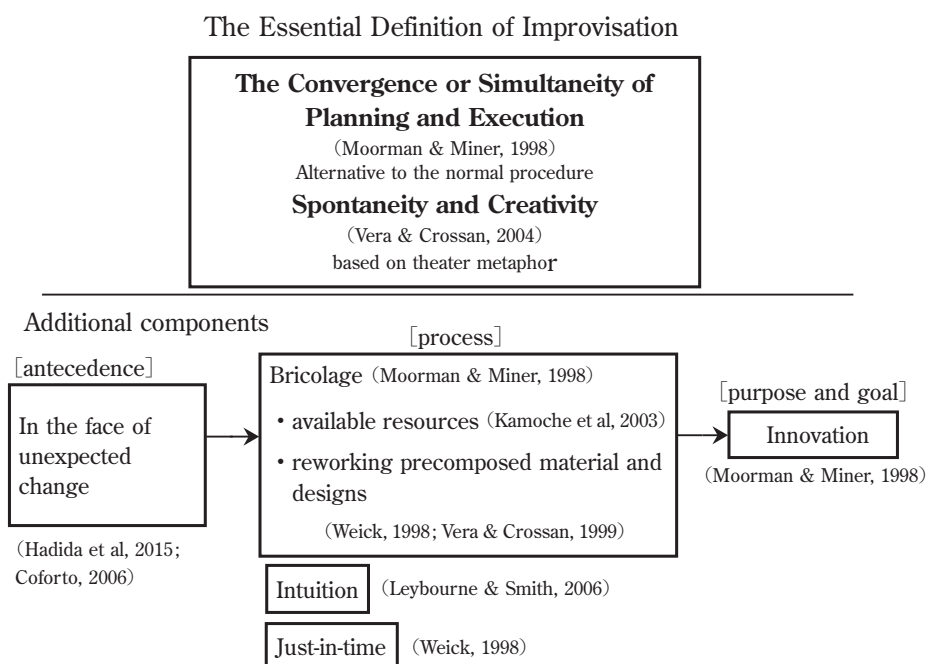


Figure 2: The Classification of the Definition of Improvisation

of new product development.

The classification of the definition of improvisation explained above is shown in Figure 2.

III Improvisation in Business: A Case Study in Japan

In this section, we introduce examples of improvisation application in Japanese business. One is an example of using improvisation in product development. The other is an example of the use of improvisation to activate the shopping districts. What is interesting is that in these cases, the parties were unaware that they were actually using improvisation. First, we will introduce an example of new product development (the following description is based on Sato (2013)).

1. The Case of Achilles'Shunsoku

An elementary school near Tokyo in the fall of 2000. Hiroshi Tsubata was shocked when he visited the athletic meet for his eldest daughter. This is because when pupils approached a corner in a relay competition, many athletes were slipping and falling, or swelling and stall-

ing. The elementary school days of Tsubata from Niigata prefecture were barefoot athletic meets. Tsubata felt, “The corners where you tend to slow down show most clearly your power. Even though children wear good shoes, why are they so weak on curves?”

At that time, Tsubata had just been selected as the manager of the product planning and development team for sports shoes for children. Sales, which occupied the 1st and 2nd place in the industry, fell due to the entrances of foreign-affiliated manufacturers, and they were searching for ideas for new products. When Tsubata talked about the eldest daughter’s athletic meet at a meeting of four persons team, the members said that they witnessed the same scene at the children’s athletic meet. With the camera in hand, Tsubata’s team started to go to many athletic meets.

What about children’s shoes? Are there any problems with running or posture? Over two years, the number of photographs of fixed-point observations carried out by four people at their children and a nearby school has exceeded 1,000. They argued by comparing countless photographs of feet, shoes, and corners. “Many children wear shoes for commuting to school.” “They can’t hold on to a curve, and they are blown away by centrifugal force.” However, although they analyzed the photographs, no good idea came out to them.

2002 summer. Shinichi Otaki, a development member and designer of the Ashikaga Plant No. 1 in Tochigi Prefecture, thought if they put more spikes on the left side of the shoes where the curve’s effect was strong, pupils could grasp the soil firmly and run through, and proposed they try it. Tsubata jumped at the idea. While the company opposed that “spikes have never seen in children’s shoes” and “the shoes will tilt if the height is different on the left and right side,” with the enthusiasm of Tsubata and others, they agreed on the condition that the shoes could be used for attending school.

The employees’ children became experimental players for determining the size, hardness, and placement of spikes. Due to the imbalance, the soles were peeled off many times. The soles were stabilized with 15 rubber dots on the outside of the left foot and 11 on the inside of the right foot, with dotted rubber spikes. But height of the spike was a real challenge. If it is too low, the ability to step on it will not work, and if it is too high, it cannot be used in daily life. By assuming a small weight of first grade pupil and measuring the frictional resistance of the shoe sole, they finally found that if the left side was raised by “1mm,” both conditions were met. This 1mm difference applies 10 kg of force to the sole of the foot, allowing it to move around the curve of soil well. It dented on the concrete and became flat, so it could

be used as school shoes. Tsubata said, “When I saw pupils running through the curve of the schoolyard without falling down, I made a small jump in my heart.”

Their request to manufacture the shoe was refused by dozens of factories, saying, “If it’s asymmetrical, the cost of drawings will double.” However, one company accepted the production of 6,000 pairs, and in May 2003, “the first model of the “Shunsoku” had been released. Taichi Yamamoto, a sales promotion section manager who had been visiting retailers nationwide for a display that showed soles, thought, “Is this kind of unusual shoe really selling?” Early summer the news that their new products were sold out arrived from Niigata, the hometown of Tsubata where a sports day was held. “I didn’t like the athletic meet, but I was able to run to the end without falling.” “Although I always finish last, I got a little better and gained confidence.” The 6,000 pairs were sold out in an instant through the word-of-mouth communication. “I have never experienced such selling pace,” recalled Yamamoto.

In the first year, the numbers of the Shunsoku sales were 240,000 pairs, but in 2006, it increased to 3 million pairs. The ability to run fast at the athletic meet attracted the parents who wished for their children to win the athletic meet. The lightness of shoes is important for running fast. Conventional sports shoes for children used to be about 20 cm, and weighed about 180 g on one leg, but the lightest product of Shunsoku was 130 g. By eliminating the waste of parts used in shoes, the design resembled that of adult athletes’ shoes, and was appealing to mothers and children seeking genuine articles.

In the shoe industry, the standard for hit products is one million pairs of shoes sold annually. “Shunsoku” sold a peak of 6.3 million pairs in FY2009, and Shogakukan publishing company released an official guidebook for “Shunsoku” in 2010, that made Shunsoku to establish the status of a sports equipment brand for elementary school students.

2. Case Study of Improvisation which Led to Revival of Old Shopping Area

The cases of making use of improvisation related to planning and implementing of the activation action of shopping areas are shown below, based on Yukawa (2015) and Ishihara (2007).

Yukawa (2015) introduced the case in Yonkacho shopping area in Nagasaki prefecture. Keizo Takemoto attempted to revive the area with a strong leadership, involving volunteer members belonging to the town. First, he provided a place for free and open discussion. He called for participants who would like to join the shopping area activation, with the spirit that

“anyone who wants to join is welcome, even if he belongs to different area.” Takemoto said to the members, “Let’s meet at the hotel with 1000 yen at 7:00 in the morning.” He suggested they hold morning meeting discussion while eating breakfast buffet-style meal at the hotel. The meeting time of 7:00 am to 9:00 am was set as it was more convenient for the shop owners in the area to come. In the meeting where young people, positive-thinkers who defied the accepted idea, and strangers gathered, they were supposed not to say “it is impossible, but to say “how we should do it.” In addition, they assumed that the meeting was where to discuss and share their opinions, not where to decide on a final policy.

Takemoto explained the outcome of the efforts as follows: while talking about thoroughly what they should do to do for local people, they shared various kinds of idea. Then, the members of the shopping area came to have enthusiasm and cohesiveness which they had lacked before. Moreover, young people who had just followed their routine business became so confident that they believed they could realize their dream and that they could involve the local people. They told the junior members about their own experience. The junior members asked the seniors for tips earned through such experiences. In this way, human education which was the most important for building community was developed.

As the case shown above, when a moderate sense of togetherness was established among the shopping area which originated at the common scope where they shared the opinions and/or consciousness, they could make a quick move. Ishihara (2007) called Takashi Nohsoh, chief director in Daikokucho shopping area in Hiroshima prefecture, “thorough and thorough behaviorist,” who said “I think, I say, then, it will be realized. I thought I’d like to be like this, and I said that aloud. Then, I have become like this,” “Do something. Do it now. Do it yourself.” The 40 year-old man (at that time) succeeded in making a “revolution” when he defeated a senior member for the chairperson of the shopping area association by a vote margin. He removed the old arcade of the street, to produce a town with classical style of Rokumei-kan of Meiji period (Ishihara, 2007). Nohsoh, the man of a principle of “I think, I say, then it will be realized,” said, “when I don’t know what to do, I prefer to paint on a wall in my store, rather than just worry. If you paint the wall, people passing by will stop and ask what you are doing. Yes, it helps,” in an interview with Ishihara (2007). It might be supposed that Nohsoh advanced the revival of the shopping area, involving those around them with a strong leadership, as Ishihara (2007) described how he showered “words like a machine gun,” and how he showed “the power which no one could defy.”

Yukawa (2015) also showed some cases of shopping area reform by the leaders of young generation, including the case of Kiichiro Katayama of Motomachi shopping area in Kobe. Katayama invited the young people to form the youth group of the shopping area in 2014. 12 people with high motivation joined the group, on average at age 30s to discuss about how to increase the attraction of the whole area. Based on the discussion, various events were designed and implemented, which he suggested to the Motomachi joint association that was its superstructure. From the start, Katayama understood that their efforts of activating the area could not bring on results immediately. Thus, he did not mind if they failed some time. For him, the trial and error process was a necessary investment for continuous initiatives for the area activation. That was why Katayama always got going first. He said to himself, “If we fail, then we stop it.” In this way he took challenges to activate the local area one after another. His efforts stimulated and encouraged other members in the shopping area to do something new for themselves: it caused a chain reaction.

In this situation, they might nurture a common scope where they share their ways of thinking. What is necessary for promoting improvisation is to expand the scope and improve the atmosphere within for them to provide ideas, though it is not easy.

Ishihara (2007) quoted the remark of Shin Kato, who worked on community building in Shinsemba shopping area (currently in Namiki shopping street) in Hiroshima-shi. Kato said, “In community building, we have four types of persons. A visionary leader starts, and a positive thinker follows. A conventional person ridicules their attempts while a person without wisdom disrupts their work.” The case of Kato is as follows based on Ishihara (2007).

Kato opened a small store of men’s apparel on an obscure street near the intersection adjacent to the central shopping street in Hiroshima in 1971. Kato thought that he could do nothing particular to flourish by himself, and that he should make the area more attractive first in order to make his store attractive. He turned his eyes to outside of his own business. Through his friends, he invited three shop owners to open their stores on the three corners of the intersection. Then, he filled the street with stores one after another. When they started moving as a community, local government suggested to them that they should institutionalize with the support of the city, though they had not recognized them before. Far from being satisfied, Kato kept on thinking what they should do to improve the community and Hiroshima-shi. He was always said to himself, “To make the street more attractive, we have to make the town more attractive. To make the town more attractive, we have to make the city

more attractive. To make the city more attractive, we have to....” As a result, he called for the cooperation between the neighborhood associations and shopping area which had had no lateral relationship as the vertically divided structure, so as to make an alliance. Furthermore, Kato realized the intercommunity alignment with some underpopulated areas. Kato explained that it was a cause that made the idea come true. “With the cause, we leave no room for complaint,” he said.

How the reform was advanced is clearly shown in his comment as above. First, a visionary person with the cause leads his close friends to solidify the foundation of the initiative. Next, their efforts draw the local government, local companies, and people that passively observe or ridicule on the sidelines to the project so that they follow their initiatives. When the activity became larger in scale, some people may refuse to cooperate or try to hinder them in the project. Despite the disturbance, they find their way to advance the reform through discussion among the members, including those who are not cooperate, under the cause which the visionary leader has in his mind.

In this section, we have introduced the case of the product development process of Achilles’ Shunsoku and the cases of the activation of the shopping district as examples of utilizing Japanese-style improvisation. In the next section, we will clarify the characteristics of Japanese-style improvisation based on these cases.

IV The Characteristics of Japanese Improvisation

On the case of the development of Achilles’ Shunsoku, which became a big hit product, Ikematsu (2011) analyzed how the development teams used ethnography as follows.

The Achilles development team also practiced ethnography “without knowing it” (Mr. Hiroshi Tsubata, Deputy General Manager, Product Planning & Development Division, Shoes Business Division). The key to its utilization lies in how to efficiently extract potential customer needs. Roughly speaking, the processes adopted by many manufacturers are: ① observation, ② analysis, ③ customer image formation, ④ product planning proposals, ⑤ prototype production and evaluation. What is remarkable as the trend of these years is that many manufacturers are trying to involve engineers who are in charge of R&D from the stage of ① observation.

One of the merits of adopting an ethnographic approach (...) is that all team members, including development, product planning, design, and manufacturing design, can share the cus-

customer image from an early stage of development. Since various engineers from various departments participate in product development, sharing this leads to enhancing team cohesion.

The other is that it is easier to overcome the “language barrier” that tends to occur in multi-sectoral joint work. Even if you belong to the same project, you may not understand the technical terms used by the other person whose field is different, or you may not be able to convey exactly what you intended to convey. The goal of the project is to meet customer needs. By always thinking about things from the “customer’s point of view,” loss of communication is likely to decrease.

As a result of enjoying these two merits, the development process is expected to be speeded up. Because everyone’s vector is heading to the customer from the beginning, there is less risk of tripping sideways. Regarding this point, Shinichi Otaki of the Achilles Product Planning and Development Department, who was in charge of the design of Shunsoku, declared that “the time required to design one design proposal was reduced to about 2/3 of the usual time.”

Takeuchi and Nonaka (1986) makes an interesting discovery through a case study of product development. They say there are three types of product development. They describe that NASA’s PPP (Phased Program Planning) is taken as an example of Type A, in which “a group of experts in each process relays batons in writing to the group in the next process. In contrast, Fuji Xerox is an example of Type B, and Canon and Honda are examples of Type C. They particularly describe the development of Type C as “the team is carrying the ball as a rugby while rolling it back and forth.”

Takeuchi and Nonaka (1986) argues that: In the scene of new product development that requires speed and flexibility, it would be useless to write the output of each process on paper and relay it. Human resources with various specialties should form a cross-boundary team that crosses departmental boundaries and takes charge of the development from the beginning to the end. By doing so, breakthroughs will occur and the time to market will be shortened.

The definition of improvisation, “convergence and simultaneity of planning and execution,” is, in reality, justified by the successful Type C team discussion in Takeuchi and Nonaka (1986). Then, what kind of communication style is needed for rugby-type improvisation? It is the sharing of a persona (a concrete customer image), as shown in the case of Achilles’ Shunsoku development. By sharing this persona, improvisation becomes possible.

Edmondson and Harvey (2018) said there are three walls to the cross-boundary team, that is, language, technology, and interest barriers. Interests mean conflicts of interests among the participants. Improvisation ceases to occur when each tries to prioritize the interests of each department. Cross-boundary team leaders must overcome these three barriers before they can implement improvisation. Then, what made Japanese companies implement Type C product development? The answer is to be found in the difference between the organizational structure and the organizational organization principle in Japan and the United States.

A concise explanation is as follows (Hayashi 1994). The organizational structure of Japan is an O-type (organic organization), and its organizational principles are based on analogue thinking and high-context communication. On the other hand, the American type organizational structure is M-type (mechanistic organization), and its organizational principles are digital thinking and low-context communication. According to a study by Sato and Hongo (2018), the characteristics of the Japanese-style organizational principles are that flexible internal adjustment (in some cases, external adjustment) is also performed. In many cases, the sales manager or product development manager plays that role. However, there are many cases where recent Japanese companies have adopted the M-type structure. The O-type organization is considered to be the organization principle suitable for the VUCA era. When considering improvisation in business, the problem of organizational principles is an important issue that cannot be avoided.

It is considered that the “convergence or co-occurrence of plan and implementation,” which was shown as the first essential definition of improvisation, will increase in importance in the VUCA world. It is because under VUCA, agility becomes critical. In fact, this paper has already pointed out “in the face of unexpected change” as a leading factor of improvisation. This is exactly the response to VUCA in the business environment through improvisation.

In that sense, improvisation research in business is considered to be highly compatible with the concept of effectuation, which is an essential tool for business in the VUCA world.

For example, this paper points out the importance of bricolage in connection with the definition of improvisation. The emergency response in the event of an unforeseen event is to “collect and reorganize” (Bricolage) the management resources that you have and can use now. This is exactly the first principle of effects, the “principle of Bird in Hand.” Bricolage itself is the third principle of effects, the “Lemonade principle” and the fourth principle, the

“Crazy Quilt principle” (Sarasvathy, 2011). Similarly, intuitive judgment is important in business in the VUCA world. As mentioned earlier, intuition has become one of the important keywords in improvisation research.

Next, we will explore the characteristics of Japanese-style improvisation from the case of revitalization of Japanese shopping districts. This paper introduced Keizo Takemoto’s leadership in the Yonkacho shopping area in Nagasaki Prefecture. Takemoto first set up a free and open forum for discussions, but he said, “At this meeting where young people, positive-thinkers who defied the accepted idea, and strangers gather, they were supposed not to say ‘It is impossible,’ but to say ‘how we should do it.’” Also, Shin Kato who was the leader in activating the shopping streets of Hiroshima-shi, said, “A visionary person starts, and a positive-thinker follows. A conventional person ridicules their attempts while a person without wisdom disrupts their work.” Kato’s statement describes the state of the open meeting.

In particular, Takemoto’s “not to say ‘It is impossible,’ but to say ‘how we should do it’” is the real mindset of improvisation. It reflects the very title of “Yes, and” in Leonard and Yorton (2015), an instruction book on improvisation.

Playwright and director Oriza Hirata makes a distinction between conversation and dialogue (Hirata, 2015). According to Hirata, conversation is communication that involves maintaining existing human relationships, while dialogue is communication between people who have different values to create new ones. The flow of reform, which consists of members such as “young people, positive-thinkers who defied the accepted idea, and strangers” or “A visionary person, a positive-thinker, a conventional person, and a person without wisdom” to revitalize the shopping district, expresses the relationship between people with different values. In that sense, the cross-boundary team members introduced in the case of Shunsoku are the same.

In addition, Ishihara (2007) describes about Takashi Nohsoh, the chairperson of the Daikokucho shopping district in Hiroshima Prefecture as “he showered words like a machine gun” and “[showed] the power which no one could defy.” His expression of “I think, I say, then it will be realized. I thought I would like to be like this. I said that aloud. And I have become like this” is also interesting as a case of “one-man one-person improvisation.”

This point is related to the point by Kamoche et al. (2003) that “in Indian music, it is solo for performers to ‘play out in front of the other party’ and exchange phrases among players themselves.” This is a useful research theme that should be considered further in. Possibly,

the decision-making field that was uniformly considered as one-man leadership may consist of “airlike improvisation” with followers who support such one-man leaders from around. Yamamoto (1983) showed just such a situation with the expression “air.”

In connection with the above, we will look back here at the case of revitalizing a shopping district through improvisation using Japanese-style “air.” Yukawa (2015) generally describes the flow of the air as follows. “First, a visionary person with the cause leads his close friends to solidify the foundation of the initiative. Next, their efforts draw the local government, local companies, and people that passively observe or ridicule on the sidelines to the project so that they follow their initiatives. When the activity became larger in scale, some people may refuse to cooperate or try to hinder them in the project. Despite the disturbance, they find their way to advance the reform through discussion among the members, including those who are not cooperate, under the cause which the visionary leader has in his mind.”

What Ishihara describes above can be interpreted as follows. In other words, he created the air to guide the change, and positively inspired others with the air of the change. Specifically, it is shown in the development of “one-person improvisation” to fill all the four corners of the intersection with stores, and then came the support from the local government’s attention on its commercial accumulation. Concretely, it is thought that the “change in the air” at the intersection where the four corners were filled moved the local government to support.

Yukawa (2015) also introduces the case of Kiichiro Katayama, a young next-generation leader in the Motomachi shopping district in Kobe, as follows. “Katayama...always got going first. He said to himself, ‘If we fail, then we stop it.’ In this way he took challenges to activate the local area one after another.” His efforts stimulated and encouraged other members in the shopping area to do something new for themselves: it caused a chain reaction.” In other words, it is the flow of first performing improvisation for the revitalization measures in the youth group who share a sense of problem, and their air is transmitted to young people in other neighboring shopping districts.

It is considered that research on “Japanese style improvisation through air” is of importance Sato and Aishima (2017) carefully analyzed the impression management of Hikaru Genji in *the Tale of Genji*, and they found out that he drove the target by “air” through a little improvisation using conversation and dialogue. It seems to be more significant for people to empathize with “a feeling of air” rather than “persuasion” in the communication in Japanese society.

V Conclusion of this Research and Future Research Directions

In this paper, we have reviewed the trends in improvisation research introduced into the US organizational theory and the conceptualization of improvisation and have investigated the possibility of applying Japanese style improvisation in Japanese business. On this stage, it may be thought that few Japanese businesses are consciously utilizing improvisation. However, as discussed in this paper, Japanese companies have been adopting the idea creation method, that should be called Japanese improvisation, in the development of new products and the revitalization of shopping districts as shown in this paper.

In the future, in order to respond to VUCA world and the new era of post-corona, it would be necessary to use improvisation effectively and efficiently in business. Then, how should Japanese companies use improvisation in Japan? This paper extracts some measures for that as follows.

- For improvisation to be effective, openness and positive expression that does not deny the content of the other party's speech is essential. This is a universal requirement.

- Relationship between dialogue and conversation in improvisation should be considered. The elements of dialogue are necessary to create ideas that bring about innovation, while conversation is necessary to bring about movement through human relationships. Both conversation and dialogue are necessary to activate improvisation.

- For cross-boundary teams, it is important to be able to set a common target, a persona, as in the case of Shunsoku. Generally, such an object also contains invisible information. It is called an boundary objects (Star and Griesemer,1989). Proper setting of boundary objects is a prerequisite for improvisation.

With regard to topics for future research, a research on the “feeling of the air” in improvisation discovered in this paper is particularly needed. Firstly, there is a need to study improvisation within a team and its transmission among other groups. The other is a study of the “feeling of the air” in “one-man one-person improvisation.”

As another research topic for the future, it is still significant to analyze “one-person improvisation” or asking oneself and answering oneself. Especially in the age of VUCA, agile decision-making based on intuition is needed. In that case, “one-person improvisation” and “one-man one-person improvisation” are of great importance.

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