EVERYTHING IS TRUE | DON'T FORCE FUNNY | FAILURE IS OK | LISTEN TO THE SCENE | SUPPORT YOUR FELLOW PLAYERS | LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

COLLABORATIVE

I M P R O V

WORKSHOP WORKBOOK

RAISE THE STAKES | YIELD TO THE STRONGEST OFFER | REMEMBER EVERYTHING | BEST INTENTIONS | AVOID STEREOTYPES | GRANDMA'S WATCHING | YOU CAN STOP ANYTIME | HAVE FUN!

BUILDING BETTER PRODUCTS THROUGH IMPROVISATION

DAVID FARKAS

David Farkas is a UX design consultant based out of Philadelphia. With over ten-years experience, David works across industries and focuses on user research, workflow, and design process. David leads research workshops and workshops on adapting principles of improvisational performing for application across all phases of product design. David co-authored UX Research (2016) and authored Collaborative Improv (2019).

https://collaborativeimprov.com

@collab_improv

@dafark8

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Goals

Your Name

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Starting this workshop, how would you define improvisation?

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What is one goal you have for this workshop?
(to be shared with the group)

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Activity – Single Word Sentence

Goal: A warm-up activity to find consensus and build as a team
Level of Difficulty: Various
Participants: 3+

A leader should identify a topic. It could be as simple as a single word. Go around the room with each person saying a single word, to build a sentence, or story, based on that word.

For instance, if the suggestion was "poker" the sentence, a word at a time might be: The-poker-player-lost-the-hand-because-hotpockets-came-out-blazing.

Intermediate Version

This time, stand or sit in a circle and look at the floor, not each other. Build a new sentence and go in any order. If two people speak at the same time, start the sentence over from the beginning. The goal is to embrace silence and not fill it. Wait for the right time to add content.

Advanced Version

Now in pairs, look your partner in the eye. You will try and tell the same sentence at the same time. Don't lead or follow but wait through the pauses to say the same words at the same time.

Notes

Defining Improv

What Is Improv

- Improv is storytelling
- Improv is NOT comedy
- Improv is reacting

Improv Mindset

- Act like Grandma is watching
- Play with the best intentions
- Play to your highest intellect
- I've got your back
- You can stop anytime
- Have fun

Improv Rules

1. Everything is true
2. Don't force funny
3. Failure is OK
4. Listen to the scene
5. Support your players
6. Details matter
7. Raise the stakes
8. Yield to the strongest offer
9. You are NOT the star
10. Remember everything

Guidelines for Improv
1. Best Intentions
2. Avoid Stereotypes
3. Grandma's Watching
4. You Can Stop Anytime
5. Have Fun!

Notes

Activity – Yes And

Goal: This exercise offers the ability to build and support our teammates. This may be used in brainstorming sessions.
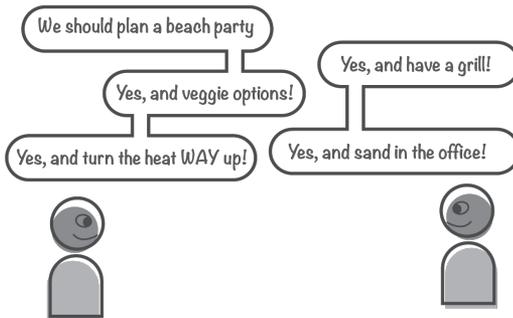**Level of Difficulty:** Beginner
Participants: 2+

Yes And is a simple party planning game. In groups of 3-7 start planning a party. This could be any party but for the sake of examples, we will use a company holiday party. Go in a circle making suggestions about what the party should have. For example:

- We should have a holiday party that's beach themed
- Yes, and we should have sand all over the office
- Yes, and we should turn the heat all the way up, so we don't realize it's cold outside

And so on. Keep going around the circle for 3 minutes. While instinct might say "wait, sand in the office, that's a horrible idea" the nature of this game is to follow the fun and see where it takes us.

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Activity – No Instead

Goal: The best way to communicate the value of Yes-Anding our colleagues is to play the anti-game. Let's see how negation feels.
**Level of Difficulty:** Beginner
Participants: 2+

Using the same rules as Yes-And, use the phrase "No Instead" at the top of each suggestion. Spend 3 minutes crafting a different holiday party. Statements could include:

- We should have a holiday party that's beach themed
- No, instead let's have the party at a bowling alley
- No, instead let's just go to the movies

It's easy to see how No-Instead gets stuck in the early phases of the party planning. For some continued discussion, see the questions below.
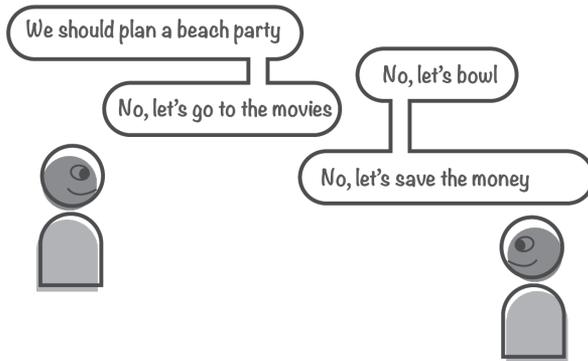
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Improv for Presenting

Common Applications

- Request for Proposals (RFPs)
- Sales Presentations
- Requirement Gathering

Key Considerations

- Who is my audience (stakeholder?)
- What do they want to hear?
- What do they want to see?
- What are they asking for?
- What do they really need?
- Where is the meeting happening? (in person, on the phone)
- When is this/how much time do we have?
- Why is the stakeholder asking for a solution?

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Activity – Premise Lawyer

Goal: How might we find the strongest offer by pushing forward and exploring the unknown?
Level of Difficulty: Intermediate
Participants: 3+

Stand in a circle. One person steps into the middle and someone on the outside offers an absurd prompt. A common example I use is "sharks are really puppies stacked together in a rubber suit".

The person in the middle then agrees with the prompt and starts a 60-90 second explanation of why this is true. Continuing our example, they would say

"Of course, sharks are just puppies stacked together in a rubber suit. That explains why sharks go after people, they want to play fetch. And have you ever felt a puppy bite your arm? Sharks don't realize how big they are..."

The explanation concludes with a round of applause. Someone new steps into the circle and the process continues until everyone has gone.

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Improv for Collaboration

Common Applications

- Brainstorming
- Co-creation
- Participatory design
- Prioritization exercises

Key Considerations

- Who is using the system?
- What are they trying to accomplish?
- What problem are we looking to solve?
- What are the challenges with the existing solution?
- What are possible harmful implications with various solutions?
- Where are they engaging with the system?
- When are folks using this product/service?

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Activity – Body Storming

Goal: How can we design using physical objects that go beyond our original perceptions?
Level of Difficulty: Intermediate
Participants: 3+

For this exercise, you will need a physical prop. Something without batteries or a screen is preferred. I usually offer a large foam dice, but anything will do – a rubrics cube, a stapler, that weird hinge nobody knows what it goes to.

Now, as a group of 3-5 "performers" decide what problem you want to solve. This may be a new check-in experience for hotel travelers, an Electronic Heath Record, or anything else.

Now, play-act a scene with your newfound "device". You can either assign roles beforehand or allow yourselves to discover who is the customer and who is the sales agent.

Explore the physicality of the artifact and see what new, novel features are identified.

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Body Language

Common Applications

- Sales meetings – reading stakeholders
- Presentations – evaluating buy-in
- Research – engaging participants
- Workshops – Finding consensus

Key Considerations

- How does open body language make you more approachable?
- How can closed body language hinder our communication?
- How might mirroring influence our communication?
- How does body language build or destroy trust?

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Activity – Walk in the Park

Goal: Explore how listening and environmental cues impact how we feel and behave, allowing us to listen to our clients and users with all our senses.
Level of Difficulty: Beginner
Participants: 3+

Choose one person as the facilitator. Everyone, including the facilitator, starts walking around the room at your normal pace and gait. After a few moments, the facilitator announces "lead with your ___ " where the blank may be shoulders, forehead, hips, feet, or any other body part. One way to think of leading with a body part is to imagine an invisible string tied to the shoulders, or mentioned body part, and to walk as though that string is tugging you forward.

Get comfortable leading with that body part. After a few moments, the facilitator asks everyone to return to their normal gait.

The facilitator suggests a different body part to be led by. See how leading with a different body part tells you something about your mindset. Listen to your body and what it feels. How does focusing on a physicality elevate that emotion or choice?

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Activity – Peas in a Pod

Goal: Explore mirroring our scene partners behavior and explore interesting things. Discuss how this relates to brainstorming and collaboration.
Level of Difficulty: Beginner
Participants: Pairs of Two

In pairs of two, get a single word suggestion from the broader group. One person initiates a scene with a clear point of view. For ease, you can pick one of the four primal emotions: Glad, Mad, Sad, Afraid. Then, create a scene interacting with your space Yes-Anding each other's points of view.
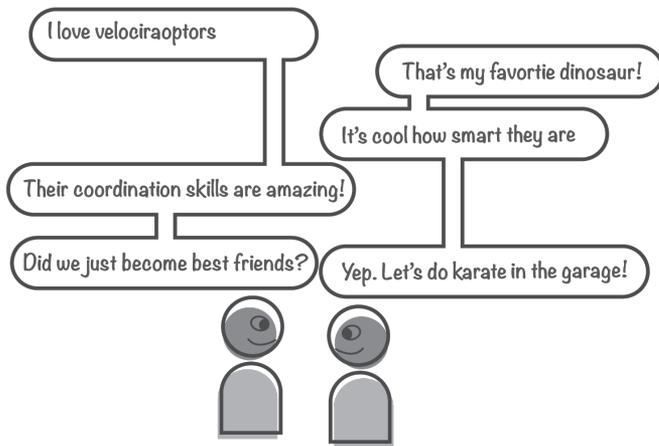
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Closing Questions

Concluding this workshop, how do you define improvisation?

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What is one thing you plan to "bring to work" on Monday?

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What was the most memorable part of today's workshop?

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Please share your thoughts on this workshop. Take a photo of your worksheet and post on twitter with the hashtag **#CollaborativeImprov** or mention us **@collab_improv**

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