

DREAM,  
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# Executive Summary

## SUSS Research Forum [Beyond the Stage: Developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies Through Improvisational Theatre Training]

The SUSS Research Forum on ‘Beyond the Stage: Developing 21st Century Competencies Through Improvisational Theatre Training’ by Principal Investigator (PI) A/P Wang Jiunwen took place on 26 August 2024 and was moderated by Dr Brandon Koh. The session’s focus was to demonstrate the importance of utilizing improvisation to develop 21st century competencies based on the research studies led by A/P Wang.

Improvisational theatre refers to a form of theatre that is almost entirely performed unplanned or unscripted, created spontaneously by performers in a collaborative manner in real time. Core elements include no use of script meaning no predetermined rules, “Yes, and” which drives active listening and co-creation, as well as creativity. At an organisational level, improv can be used for cultivation of divergent thinking by using “Yes, and”, and zoning in on a solution with the use of “Yes, but”.

In view of a rapidly changing world in the 21st century, improv proves beneficial for gaining skills such as adaptability, cognitive flexibility, tolerance for complexity and ambiguity, and inventive thinking by considering alternative realities. Improv training is widely used for development of workplace skills like communication, active listening, and risk-taking at top companies, capturing positive feedback from leaders. Key emerging applications of applied improv include education and leadership development, mental health and wellbeing, and organizational and team development. Building on growing evidence from the West that highlights the role of improv in enhancing competencies, the studies presented for this forum seek to validate these findings within the context of Singapore.

The team conducted three studies. The first study interviewed improv hobbyists to explore how improv impacted them and their lives, such as changes they saw in themselves, or impact on their approach to life. The second study compared a group taking an Improv 101 course with a control group, using surveys to assess their levels of adaptability, comfort with ambiguity and divergent thinking before and after the course. The last study assessed the impact of improv activities during a university leadership course using pre- and post-course surveys.

### Speaker

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### Moderator

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Sim Hui Wen, Vera

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### Date

15<sup>th</sup> September  
2025

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Some limitations present for the second study included participants not being randomly assigned into treatment (improv) and control group, and the control group not going through any comparable intervention (just going on with life as usual). The last study was limited in not having a control group, and it was acknowledged that the controlled environment of the university may influence the results.

A fruitful discussion was made on various external factors contributing to the level of benefits individuals gain from improv. Attendees discussed their expectations on the difficulty to rewire perceived structures in life, specifically for students who would need to undo years of conditioning gained from their educational experience. A stark contrast may be observed between the outside world and a school-controlled environment where students may not feel as comfortable with failure.

On a cultural level, the attendees shared a consensus that global versus local contexts may be strong contributors to the result of improv as well. For a conservative society such as Singapore, individuals may take longer to warm up and adapt as they are conditioned to be less spontaneous, compared to Western societies.

The forum ended on an encouraging note that growing relevance of improv especially in the education sector could be observed in the near future. This paves the way for further research that explores impacts of improv in the contemporary society.

#### Co-Creating Collective Memories

During her presentation, A/P Wang invited audience members to take turns using the prompt "Remember when we..." and adding a playful memory behind it, continuing on to the next person. This activity allowed everyone to be creative and stay connected, building a story together as a group. This effectively demonstrated how the improv process co-creates collective memories.

