Improvising: A Grounded Theory Investigation of Psychology Students' Level of Anxiety, Coping, Communicative Skills, Imagination, and Spontaneity

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Improvising: A Grounded Theory Investigation of Psychology Students' Level of Anxiety, Coping, Communicative Skills, Imagination, and Spontaneity

Abstract
The aim of this study was to gain insight into the phenomenon of improvisation, how it is manifested in communication, and to conceptualize the process of improvisation in general. I aimed to construct a model for use in teaching and further analysis of training programs that target and develop improvisation skills in communication. The ability to communicate is part and parcel of psychologists' work. I develop and supervise interactive classes and training programs to promote improvisation and communication skills, using the grounded theory of improvisation in communication under conditions of high uncertainty. The improvisation sessions were videotaped, transcribed, and analyzed. Applying the qualitative method and working with grounded theory methodology, I studied five sessions. Here I report on the major categories that condition the improvisational process: Level of Anxiety, Coping, Communicative Skills, Imagination, and Spontaneity. I also outline the markers of spontaneous behavior: strange combinations (oxymorons), humor, and rapid topic switching.

Keywords
improvisation, spontaneity, communication, grounded theory methodology, training

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The aim of this study was to gain insight into the phenomenon of improvisation, how it is manifested in communication, and to conceptualize the process of improvisation in general. I aimed to construct a model for use in teaching and further analysis of training programs that target and develop improvisation skills in communication. The ability to communicate is part and parcel of psychologists’ work. I develop and supervise interactive classes and training programs to promote improvisation and communication skills, using the grounded theory of improvisation in communication under conditions of high uncertainty. The improvisation sessions were videotaped, transcribed, and analyzed. Applying the qualitative method and working with grounded theory methodology, I studied five sessions. Here I report on the major categories that condition the improvisational process: Level of Anxiety, Coping, Communicative Skills, Imagination, and Spontaneity. I also outline the markers of spontaneous behavior: strange combinations (oxymorons), humor, and rapid topic switching.

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Introduction

Think “improvisation” and an image of a skilled musician or an accomplished actor will come to mind. It is generally recognized that improvisation is a highly complicated activity difficult to perform. A simple definition of this term is the following: “Improvisation is the activity of making or doing something not planned beforehand, using whatever can be found” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Indeed, improvisation does not require any specific or scripted preparation. It is important in various spheres of life, but most noticeably in art and entertainment, where it is the essence of these processes.

Less obvious is improvisation in cooking (Leone, 2020), presenting a speech (Casteleyn, 2019), psychotherapy (Foubert et al., 2017), and educational management (Scaglione et al., 2019). This activity is of crucial importance in these seemingly pattern-based areas. The ability to think outside the box, to expand and adjust recurrent practices, probably made human beings so exceptionally adaptable to the ever-changing external environment and social agenda (Cunha et al., 2015). Hence, improvisation has received due attention in the last couple of decades (Ponzio et al., 2018; Sawyer, 2011). The skills of improvisation can apply to many different domains, across all artistic, (Belden et al., 2020) scientific (Bernstein, 2014), physical, cognitive (Biasutti, 2015), academic (Boesen et al., 2009), and non-academic disciplines (Beaty et al., 2020). However, the ability to improvise
manifests itself differently in various areas, which merits a thorough investigation (Felsman et al., 2020; Zorzi & Santi, 2020).

In my work, I scrutinize various manifestations of improvisation in communication during a special situation—a training session for students of psychology (Moscow, Russia) designed for both teaching and research purposes.

The major objective of my work is to identify the features of the improvisational process and highlight those criteria that are characteristic of spontaneous communicative behavior, using a qualitative research method.

Theoretical Background

Studying improvisation is particularly difficult, as each act of improvisation calls for a complex set of skills, all working together inseparably, in a collaborative fashion (Montuori, 2003; Sawyer, 2000). There are various definitions of improvisation in different approaches (Ratten & Hodge, 2016), yet they all have an element of spontaneity or the lack of the plan highlighted. Improvisation is most naturally revealed in communication processes, thus indicating a close link between the two. A close correlation between communicative skills development and improvisation skills was demonstrated in previous research (Farley, 2017; Mæland & Espeland, 2017). They both contribute to increasing adaptation in a situation of uncertainty (Drinko, 2020; Felsman et al., 2020; Sollitto et al., 2018); and entail a higher stress resistance in a crisis (Tint et al., 2015).

Communicative skills development is a fundamentally creative process, inevitably entailing the ability to improvise. Like improvisation, having good communication skills means knowing how to respond to your interlocutor on-the-fly. You need to pay attention to how the person reacts to you and adapt to changes. The basic idea is that you must accept all the incoming data and elaborate from it—in other words, to create a coherent personal story out of a set of words, ideas, concepts, or situations. This has been recognized within linguistics, in investigating speech acts that were shown to require

A good deal of improvisation because the mind is addressing its own thought and creating its unrehearsed delivery in words, sounds and gestures, forming unpredictable statements that feed back into the thought process (the performer as listener), creating an enriched process that is not unlike instantaneous composition with a given set or repertoire of elements. (Denes & Pinson, 1993)

Thus, these processes could even rely on some common psychological mechanisms that trigger and drive them.

There are two conceptual models of communicative spontaneity: the binary model and the continuum model (Carter & Hotchkis, 2002). The binary model is characterized by a dichotomy in which the learner is either spontaneous (and initiates communication) or reactive (and fails to do so). Typically, a single antecedent or a small number of possible antecedents are examined. When these antecedents are present, communication is viewed as reactive, and conversely, when they are absent, communication is regarded as spontaneous or initiated. An alternative to the binary theory is the continuum model. In this case, instead of spontaneous and non-spontaneous communicative acts, there is a degree of spontaneity for each communicative attempt based on the intrusiveness of the antecedent stimuli (Carter & Hotchkis, 2002; Kaczmarek, 1990). In the field of cognitive psychology, several recently published articles have begun to shed light on the question of how the brain produces creative thinking. There are several lines of evidence revealing strikingly similar patterns of brain
activity across a range of creative tasks and domains, particularly connected with improvisation and spontaneous tasks (Beaty et al., 2016; Kimmel, 2019; Lopata et al., 2017; Saggar et al., 2016).

The rationale for the present study is based on indirect evidence that improvisation seems to be related to highly advanced communicative skills.

In psychology, we are mainly interested in how improvisation manifests itself in communication, as that lies at the heart of a psychologist’s work (Lowe, 2000). From a professional point of view, we are also interested in how improvisation affects interpersonal interactions, as well as the behavioral patterns allowing the communication to proceed efficiently.

Psychologists have been using a viable method in their work with improvisation, one inherently embedded in its structure (Holdnus et al., 2016). This is a training session that creates a comfortable atmosphere where students can improvise. In most cases, they are prepared to do this activity by a series of preliminary tasks.

Recent research has shown that during improvisation, an unexpected situation may serve as a stimulus (Rossing & Hoffmann-Longtin, 2016). Thus, to trigger an improvisation and even to develop improvisation skills during a training session, we need to consider this factor. The communicative situation should be unexpected enough to stimulate the creative process, and at the same time should not violate students’ personal boundaries in a way that impedes this creativity. The level of anxiety should be appropriate to the aims of the training program and the audience, as we have discussed elsewhere. This aspect was so important, that a separate article was written on this topic (Temezhnikova & Bazarov, 2020).

**Training Session and Pilot Research**

As a teacher of psychology, in particular the psychology of communication, as well as a teacher of a foreign language, I am engaged in developing in my students the ability to communicate. I firmly believe that communication is the key to acquiring spontaneity and further even improvisation. Naturally, I organize the course by presenting the theoretical research background and communication theories yet involving students in the appropriate activity is the best way to teach communication, especially to those whose tool of trade is efficient communication I use existing exercises and create my own. As a result, I have gathered material for description and analysis. Moreover, for several years, I have been conducting a series of communication/improvisation training programs. I designed a series of classes in which students are put into a situation where they must improvise in telling stories. These materials comprise the data that I analyze further. To start researching the characteristics of improvisation in communication, I conducted a pilot quantitative study.

The training session lasted for two lessons and included a preparatory, a main, and a final stage.

The preparatory stage included introducing the details of the next class plan, and the participants’ independent preparation for it. The phenomena of improvisation were discussed in the classes from different points of view. To illustrate improvisation, we watched together the short film “Emilia Muller” (Marciano, 1992), in which improvisation is the main focus. In the film, an actress is improvising at a rehearsal; she was asked to speak about objects in her handbag (Actually, she was talking about objects not in her own handbag, but in one belonging to a studio worker; however, this fact is revealed only at the end of the video). We were planning to role-play a similar story, so we had asked the participants to prepare their bags beforehand, including only objects the participants were willing to show to everyone. The participants gave written consent to be videotaped during the next lesson.
The Main Stage – Execution

As a warm-up exercise before the main stage, we carried out scaling, asking the participants to rate themselves in a three-dimensional system of coordinates: stress resistance, communicative skills, and spontaneity. The coordinates of stress resistance and communicative skills were placed on the floor at a right angle with a different color of tape. The vertical coordinate of spontaneity was rated at 5 points, and we asked the participants to sit on the floor if they considered themselves to be not spontaneous at all (minimal level), or sit on a chair, stand on the floor, stand on a chair, or stand on the table (maximum level). In this way, we divided the participants into four groups: Group 1 – participants with low anxiety and a high level of communication and spontaneity skills; Group 2 – participants with low anxiety and a medium level of communication and spontaneity skills; Group 3 – participants high anxiety and a medium level of communication and spontaneity skills; Group 4 – participants with a medium level of anxiety and communication and spontaneity skills.

The participants gave their bags to us to attach a number to each of them; they then chose one improviser within each group, while the others played the role of expert analysts. Each group improvised in the aforementioned order.

The improvisers got their bags by lot, started taking objects from it and speaking about them as if they belonged to him/her. Representatives of all groups played the role of an improviser. The program ended up with the participants demonstrating their personal skills and their emotional involvement in this creative process. The improvisations were videotaped, which allowed the students then to analyze them in detail and to provide an “expert” estimation of the improvisers’ communicative skills, level of anxiety, and spontaneity.

The exercise concluded with a feedback session in which the participants shared their impressions, thoughts, feelings, and comments. The unexpected situation created by us was experienced by the participants as an optimal one for work. The expert analysts, upon having watched the videos, were asked to estimate the stress resistance, communicative skills, and spontaneity of an improviser and the general effect with a 5-point expert estimation method. We discussed the results with the participants.

The Pilot Quantitative Study

For several years, I have been conducting communication training at the Psychology Department of the Academy of Public Administration (Moscow, Russia) during a course on the psychology of communication, and at the Department of Psychology of Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia) in a course on “The Social Psychology of Negotiation.” I designed a series of classes. Gradually I assembled material from 19 videos of such improvisational work. For quantitative analysis, I chose four fragments of improvisation by students of the Department of Psychology of Lomonosov Moscow State University and invited students from the Psychology Department of the Academy of Public Administration to evaluate them. Seventy people participated in the study. Participants \((n = 70, \text{ ages } 19–22)\) analyzed four video clips of their colleagues’ improvisational work. This evaluation made it possible to outline the most important correlations between spontaneity, anxiety, and communication (Table 1).

Our preliminary data showed a significant correlation between a high level of communicative skills and improvisation evaluated as good/effective. We found that an unexpected situation brings about anxiety and hinders improvisation. Higher communication skills and spontaneity were demonstrated to significantly elevate the general effect.
Table 1

| Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient | General effect | Anxiety | Communicative skills |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------|----------------------|
|                                       |                | .501**  | -.380**              |
| Sig (2-tailed)                        | .000           | .000    | .000                 |
| N                                     | 275            | 275     | 275                  |

*Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

These results, although quite preliminary, not uncontroversial given the small sample, and subject to apparent limitations, still revealed that improvisation as such eluded codification and numerical expression. It was still present in all successful performances, and was clearly tied to communications skills, yet it was next to impossible to capture quantitatively.

The educationally efficient training exercise still raised the following questions, making us return to the videotaped materials and analyze them in greater detail.

1. How does an improviser cope with anxiety arising from an unexpected communication situation?
   As already shown in the pilot study, an improviser’s anxiety reduces the overall assessment of their work. Any good public speaking has elements of improvisation, but it is only good if the speaker manages his or her emotional state well and is prepared to express varied emotions.

2. How are communication skills manifested?
   Here it is important to identify how communication skills are expressed.

3. What are the characteristics of spontaneous behavior? Can we identify some markers of improvisation?
   This is the last question on the list, but not the least significant. This point is very important, both for what it says about the phenomenon of improvisation, and for teaching improvisation in communication.
   These questions are clearly beyond the domain of quantitative methodologies, since to quantify anything, we need to outline categories for further large-scale analysis.

**Methods**

It was necessary to choose a method that would be based on the data and would answer the questions posed in the study. I used the grounded theory method (GT). GT is not simply a research method. Several approaches work within a GT framework; the differences among these approaches are more prominent in their philosophical perspectives and less with respect to the process itself (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

The general principles include the use of open interviews as well as data from other sources, and data analysis at three levels—the initial level, the focused level, and the theoretical level—using the method of continuous comparison.
This method requires immersion in the data; the researcher works actively with the material, and interacts with the participants (Charmaz, 2014), which was in my case in the context of the training program. The researcher interprets the data, and the result is a construction of how the phenomenon is experienced by the researcher.

**Research Design**

The GT methodology allowed me to answer these questions, because it also implies a methodology—that is, assembling the research process and the result (Walsh et al., 2015). As a result, I used a model, the elements of which, in my opinion, are necessary for improvisational communication.

I chose GT because it allowed me to explore in more depth the materials, I had assembled during the training program than I could do with quantitative research. My theory
depends on the context; it is a process of active instruction, of training that has a certain structure, and it was important for me to be able to approach the data flexibly. By use of the data analysis principles of GT, I was able to lift the raw data to an abstract level, which allowed conceptualization, an aspect that also would not have been possible with the other qualitative methodologies.

Data Collection

Five video fragments were selected for qualitative analysis. Four of these had been evaluated by the quantitative method; I added to these another fragment, one of the largest and, in my opinion, most interesting. I have already described in detail the training procedure for teaching improvisation in communication, which I conducted with students of various courses at the Psychology Department of the Academy of Public Administration (Moscow) and the Department of Psychology of Lomonosov Moscow State University. The participants in my training programs are students from 19 to 22 years of age who voluntarily participated in these practical exercises, all Russian citizens whose native language is Russian. Conducting practical classes is part of the curriculum and was approved by the ethics committee. Informed consent was given in writing for the video shooting.

The work of the improvisers was recorded, subtitles were written for the video, and we analyzed the resulting text. All fragments were recorded and transcribed in Russian, the native language of the students and lecturers. We started by asking the improviser to show what is in “his/her bag and to talk about it. Sometimes I, as a facilitator, asked the improviser questions, and sometimes the other participants did. The improviser’s work was semi-structured and open-ended. As the semi-structured format implies, the answers often suggested further, more specific follow-up questions, adding greater depth to each case. As an example, the video can be viewed at the link https://youtu.be/KlxnDBvEeHg, with English subtitles.

Data Analysis

Initial Coding

The conditions for the exercise were the same for all participants; the improvisational process itself varied from participant to participant. I started the analysis with the first fragment of the improvisational session. Initially, the sessions were coded based on a description of what the improvisers were saying, using the Charmaz approach to data analysis (Charmaz, 2014)

I started by analyzing the data to give it a higher level of abstraction. After a quantitative study and consideration of the phenomenon of improvisation in communication, I had a certain idea of what points I need to focus on, but the process of initial coding itself made it possible to expand my understanding of improvisation in communication. I started the analysis from the first video clip and found that improvisers are most revealing when they pay more attention to the story of a concrete object. I then supported this process by asking questions. In the initial coding, I tried to interpret everything the participants said as much as possible, to highlight the meaning. After analyzing all five fragments, I ended up with 41 categories. Table 1 shows how I tagged the data at the initial coding level using the example of the transcription of the first fragment. That fragment is presented in the video, with English subtitles.
### Table 2

**Example of Initial Coding**

| First Improvisation                                                                 | Initial Coding                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q: You have such a beautiful bag!                                                   | - emotional connection.                                                                           |
| Thank you, this is indeed mine, yet opening it is unusual for me, because I don’t do so often. Still, there are many things that are very close to me, for example, this root vegetable, the pomegranate, because you can do a lot of interesting things with a pomegranate. You can eat it or give it to someone. And then there are the seeds. I also have … another bag in my bag, because as a child I was fond of nesting dolls. | factual mistake (Strictly speaking, a pomegranate is not a root vegetable but a berry) - attract attention - comic effect: |
| Q: It matches the color beautifully.                                                 | avoidance                                                                                         |
| Yes! I probably won’t open it.                                                       | non-existent objectown phraseological unit, like “Never use a cannon to kill a fly”               |
| Q: You know, we are still interested, please show us what is in this mysterious little bag. | monitoring in Russian this sentence rhymes - visualization pomegranate like globe, earth globe, inner world |
| There is a very interesting thing called a bananatriofruit. In short changes the taste of the pomegranate if I get tired of eating it. I can mix them and produce very interesting taste mixes. There is also a comb here, a small one, because, you know, they tell you that it is stupid to kill a fly with a bazooka so if your hair is not growing vigorously, buying a large brush is not reasonable. So, I bought a small one, to reach where I hadn’t reached before. Also, there are many other interesting things in my bag, for example, a mouse. | non-existent objectown phraseological unit, like “Never use a cannon to kill a fly”               |
| Q: Is it alive?                                                                     | irony: - physical condition monitoring in Russian this sentence rhymes - visualization pomegranate like globe, earth globe, inner world |
| No, of course not! It’s a computer mouse.                                            | contradiction: - nonsense way of reading expression of feelings                                    |
| My hands are shaking because I’m studying psychology. Therefore, in order not to be so scared—I am supposed to be a stress-resistant person, and therefore, to develop the skills of stress resistance, I hold a pomegranate in one hand, and the mouse in my right hand (my hands are busy) and there is peace and solemnity in my soul. When I’m sitting like this, I can imagine that I’m in full control of the whole situation. It’s like a globe here, and it’s I who can control everything that comes from me. This is, in short, an exercise aimed at stress resistance. I advise everyone to try it. Also, I have this in my bag. I believe that this is some kind of electronic medium to store important information; in this case, do not forget that you have it. The main thing is to know that you have information, but not to know what it is, because it is useless information. And I can place the mouse on it. I also have a textbook about the mythology of dogs. The book is very interesting, so captivating that I mark all uninteresting passages with a sticker so that I don’t read them later if I want to re-read the book again. As you can see, there are |
not so many of them for such a large book, so I read it much faster, because there are hints about where dogs are not interesting, things about which I don’t want to know anything. I leaf through, and the rest of the book is entirely interesting, because I love dogs.

Q: Is there anything else in the bag?

Certainly. I also have a notepad in my bag. (Laughing). It seems to me that this is some kind of wine list. The bars worth visiting are marked here. For example, “Pine and Linden,” “All Your Friends”—I will probably remember these names. I will need them. I also have a tea bag in my bag, in case I want to have some tea with my friends, whom I love very much. There are not many of them, so I have just one tea bag. I think we can end here because there is nothing worthwhile left in the bag. I hope you enjoyed it.

Q: Do you have any questions for Timur?

Q: Yes, Timur! Yes, Timur! On what grounds do you determine what is worthwhile in your bag and what is not?

It’s just, you know, some things have already become boring to me, for example, there is a wire that I played with very often, so I lost interest in it, but other thing are much more attractive to me.

Q: There wasn’t even one of your personalized things, so you don’t carry documents with you in your bag?

No, everyone knows who I am. And if the bag is stolen? It would be very unpleasant if the documents were there. Okay, pomegranate and banana, but no documents. Any questions?

Focused Coding

The next level of analysis is focused coding; I looked at the original categories extracted from the five improvisational fragments and grouped them into 13 categories based on their similarity, as described by Charmaz (2014), Chun-Tie et al. (2019), and Kalpokaite and Radivojevic (2019). I also considered the audience’s reaction to the improviser, and the willingness of the improviser to establish emotional contact with the audience. I did this gradually, going from one fragment to another, comparing the data obtained. Table 3 shows an example of focused coding based on the first improvisational fragment.

Table 3
Example of Focused Coding

| First Improvisation | Initial Coding | Focused Coding |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Q: You have such a beautiful bag! | Thank you, this is indeed mine, yet opening it is unusual for me, because I don’t do so often. Still, there are many things that | - emotional connection; factual mistake (strictly speaking a | close distance/low anxiety inexactness |
very close to me, for example, this root vegetable, the pomegranate, because you can do a lot of interesting things with a pomegranate. You can eat it or give it to someone. And then there are the seeds. I also have ... another bag in my bag, because as a child I was fond of nesting dolls.

Q: It matches the color beautifully.

Yes! I probably won’t open it.

Q: You know, we are still interested, please show us what is in this mysterious little bag.

There is a very interesting thing called a bananatriofruit. In short, changes the taste of the pomegranate if I get tired of eating it. I can mix them and produce very interesting taste mixes. There is also a comb here, a small one, because, you know, they tell you that it is stupid to kill a fly with a bazooka so if your hair is not growing vigorously, buying a large brush is not reasonable. So, I bought a small one, to reach where I hadn’t reached before. Also, there are many other interesting things in my bag, for example, a mouse.

Q: Is it alive?

No, of course not! It’s a computer mouse. My hands are shaking because I’m studying psychology. Therefore, in order not to be so scared—I am supposed to be a stress-resistant person, and therefore, to develop the skills of stress resistance, I hold a pomegranate in one hand, and the mouse in my right hand (my hands are busy) and there is peace and solemnity in my soul. When I’m sitting like this, I can imagine that I’m in full control of the whole situation. It’s like a globe here, and it’s I who can control everything that comes from me. This is, in short, an exercise aimed at stress resistance. I advise everyone to try it. Also, I have this in my bag. I believe that this is some kind of electronic medium to store important information; in this case, do not forget that you have it. The main thing is to know that you have information, but not to know what it is, because it is useless information. And I can place the mouse on it. I also have a
textbook about the mythology of dogs. The book is very interesting, so captivating that I mark all uninteresting passages with a sticker so that I don’t read them later if I want to re-read the book again. As you can see, there are not so many of them for such a large book, so I read it much faster, because there are hints about where dogs are not interesting, things about which I don’t want to know anything. I leaf through, and the rest of the book is entirely interesting, because I love dogs.

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No, everyone knows who I am. And if the bag is stolen? It would be very unpleasant if the documents were there. Okay, pomegranate and banana, but no documents. Any questions?

Theoretical Coding

This is the last stage of data analysis, when I considered that the data was sufficient for theoretical conceptualization of the results. At this level, I found that along with the
categories of anxiety, communicative skills, and spontaneity already encountered in the study, such categories as imagination and coping can also be identified.

Table 4 shows, using an example of the first fragment, how I identified the main categories.

**Table 4**

**Example of Core Coding**

| First Improvisation                        | Initial Coding | Focused Coding                  | Core Categories       |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| **Q: You have such a beautiful bag!**      |                |                                 | Anxiety               |
| Thank you, this is indeed mine, yet opening it is unusual for me, because I don’t do so often. Still, there are many things that are very close to me, for example, this root vegetable, the pomegranate, because you can do a lot of interesting things with a pomegranate. You can eat it or give it to someone. And then there are the seeds. I also have … another bag in my bag, because as a child I was fond of nesting dolls. | - emotional connection; factual mistake | close distance/low anxiety inaccuracy | Spontaneity |
| **Q: It matches the color beautifully.**    |                |                                 |                       |
| Yes! I probably won’t open it.              | avoidance      | preventive measures             | Coping                |
| **Q: You know, we are still interested, please show us what is in this mysterious little bag.** |                |                                 |                       |
| There is a very interesting thing called a bananatriofruit. In short changes the taste of the pomegranate if I get tired of eating it. I can mix them and produce very interesting taste mixes. | non-existent object | strange combinations | Spontaneity |
| There is also a comb here, a small one, because, you know, they tell you that it is stupid to kill a fly with a bazooka, so if your hair is not growing vigorously, buying a large brush is not reasonable. So, I bought a small one, to reach where I hadn’t reached before. Also, there are many other interesting things in my bag, for example, a mouse. | own phraseological unit like | expressiveness of speech | Communicative skills |
| **Q: Is it alive?**                         |                |                                 |                       |
| No, of course not! It’s a computer mouse.   |                |                                 |                       |
| My hands are shaking because I’m studying psychology. Therefore, in order not to be so scared, I am to be the stress-resistant person, and therefore, to develop the skills of stress resistance, I hold a pomegranate in one hand, and the mouse in my right hand (hands are busy) and there is peace and solemnity in my soul. And you know, | - irony: humor (audience laughs) |                       | Spontaneity |
|                                           | - physical condition monitoring |                        | Coping                |
|                                           | in Russian this expressiveness |                        | Communicative skills |
I’m sitting like this, I can imagine as if I’m in full control of the whole situation. It’s like a globe here, and it’s I who can control everything that comes from me. This is, in short, an exercise aimed at stress resistance. I advise everyone to try it. Also, I have this in my bag.

_Q: Timur, what is it?
_

I believe that this is some kind of electronic medium to store important information; in this case, do not forget that you have it. The main thing is to know that you have information, but not to know what it is, because it is useless information. And I can place the mouse on it. I also have a textbook about the mythology of dogs.

_Q: What is the book about?
_

The book is very interesting, so captivating that I mark all uninteresting passages with a sticker so that I don’t read them later if I want to re-read the book again. As you can see, there are not so many of them for such a large book, so I read it much faster, because there are hints about where dogs are not interesting, things about which I don’t want to know anything. I leaf through, and the rest of the book is entirely interesting, because I love dogs.

_Q: Is there anything else in the bag?
_

Certainly. I also have a notepad in my bag

_Q: Read what is written there.
_

(Laughing). It seems to me that this is some kind of wine list. The bars worth visiting are marked here. For example, “Pine and Linden,” “All Your Friends”— I will probably remember these names. I will need them. I also have a tea bag in my bag, in case I want to have some tea with my friends, whom I love very much. There are not many of them, so I have just one tea bag. I think we can end here because there is nothing worthwhile left in the bag. I hope you enjoyed it.
Q: Do you have any questions for Timur?

Q: Yes, Timur! Yes, Timur! On what grounds do you determine what is worthwhile in your bag and what is not?

It’s just, you know, some things have already become boring to me, for example, there is a wire that I played with very often, so I lost interest in it, but other thing are much more attractive to me.

Q: There wasn’t even one of your personalized things, so you don’t carry documents with you in your bag?

No, everyone knows who I am. And if the bag is stolen? It would be very unpleasant if the documents were there. Okay, pomegranate and banana, but no documents. Any questions?

Therefore, the emergent theoretical framework shows five main core categories, which differentiate among the patterns of improvisation demonstrated during the exercise. These categories are Anxiety, Coping, Communicative Skills, Imagination, and Spontaneity. In presenting the results, I first want to clarify how I derived these core categories from the data. This helps explain the coding. The evidence shows that there is always a basic criterion for defining the utterance in the improvisation process itself, revealing systematic and general guidelines even in less structured processes. The resulting data structure (Table 4) illustrates the coding process that allowed us to identify the initial categories, focused categories, and core categories. Here I have combined the data of all five improvised texts.

Table 4
Data Structure

| Initial Coding | Focused Coding | Core Categories |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 denial: “These are not my things” | long distance/high anxiety | Anxiety |
| 2 “This is my sister’s sheet music; I don’t play anything.” | | |
| 3 - negative attitude “This bag is a black hole—everything that gets into it disappears.” | | |
| 4 Mistake | | |
| 5 - necessity: “ Necessary things” “What I need is always with me.” | optimal distance/average anxiety | |
| 6 - convenience: “The backpack is stylish and roomy...” | | |
| 7 - suitable: “Unisex bag, | | |
presented by a young man"

|   | Content                                                                 | Category               | Score |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| 8 | - one’s own: “These are my things.”                                      | close distance/low anxiety | 3     |
| 9 | - emotional connection; “This is my bag; it contains many things that are close to me.” |                         |       |
| 10| - personal interest; “I’ve been so connected with this bag for a long time; it contains many interesting things.” |                         |       |
| 11| - family relationships: “My parents bought this bag.”                    |                         |       |
| 12| - physical condition monitoring “To develop the skills of stress resistance, I hold a pomegranate in one hand, and the mouse in my right hand (hands are busy) and there is peace and solemnity in my soul.” | control emotional state | 4     |
|   |                                                                         | Coping                 | 2     |
| 13| - visualization: “I can imagine that I am in control of the whole situation. The pomegranate is a globe.” (The improviser holds a pomegranate.) |                         |       |
| 14| - self-reflection: “Well, this is a feeling of confidence while driving; without it I don’t go anywhere.” |                         |       |
| 15| - approach to preventing theft: “For personal security, I do not put such documents in my backpack.” | preventive measures     | 5     |
| 16| - approach to preventing conflict: “Communication strengthens relationships.” |                         |       |
| 17| - warming and soothing effect: “This warming patch helps with abdominal pain.” | category of life hacks  | 6     |
| 18| - avoidance of unpleasantness: “I don’t wear glasses yet; sometimes it’s good when you see the world as a little blurry.” |                         |       |
| 19| - inspiration: “She just chooses people who inspire…” | communication of emotions | 7     |
|   |                                                                         | Communicative skills   | 3     |
20 - satisfaction: “My favorite chopsticks, in my favorite store.”

21 - empathy: “I was named Alexandra after the heroine of the famous film ‘Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears.’ I watched the film and cried at the final song.” (an appeal to the heroine)

22 - frustration “In Korea, I felt uncomfortable with unemotional people.”
“I get agitated when I see someone looking into my eyes. I blush, get embarrassed. Excessive attention is uncomfortable for me.”

23 - skills: “She [the wife] explains how to communicate with people; this is her, well, the main topic.” training 8

24 - internal motivation: “I study Korean for a change of pace.”

25 - external motivation: “Interesting startup course”

26 stories: “A special laptop” storytelling 9

27 “A ticket to Korea”

28 “I still love the Beatles”

29 “A discount card to the computer game store”

30 “Bali glasses”

31 The story of a lighter found by a grandmother fire of conflict: “My grandmother lives in Ukraine.” fire as a reminder (eternal flame): “And when she came to visit us, she brought this lighter…” “For me, this is a memorable and significant thing.” the fire is still inside: “And it [the lighter] worked….” exciting imagination metaphors 10 Imagination 4
32  pomegranate like globe, earth globe, inner world

33  - contradiction: “The main thing is to know that you have some information, but not to know what it is about, because it is useless information.”

34  - nonsense: “This book is about the mythology of dogs.”

35  - incompatible concepts: “A young man! He is already an adult, he is 65 years old.”

36  - comic effect: “In my bag there is … another bag.”

37  - irony: “My hands are shaking because I am studying in the psychology department.”

38  - joke: “When you brew a tea bag, you realize that you have no friend better than boiling water.”

39  - generalization: “Some say one thing, others say another. The same about everything. Some say milk is harmful; others say milk is good.”

40  - accentuation: “Cafe Shokoladnitsa is OK, but what I like most is the people who work there.”

41  - appeal to authorities: “Do you know Guberman?” (Russian poet and prose writer, known for his aphoristic and satirical quatrains)

Integration of the Categories

As a result of the work, the key categories were sorted and integrated, which are the starting point (basis) of the grounded theory (GT).
I deliberately created a training situation that included an element of surprise. Participants received their bags by lot and did not know what was in them; additional elements that increased their anxiety were public speaking and video filming. Having received a bag, a person was supposed to talk about what is in it, as if this bag belonged to him/her. I coded the level of anxiety depending on the distance that the improvisers build between the objects and themselves.

**Long Distance/High Anxiety**

In a situation where a person foresees difficulties in talking about the objects, feels insecure, improvisers may say that another person left them the bag, thus increasing the distance between themselves and the objects: “This is my wife’s bag, she loves to travel.” (Student #5)

Or they may say that the things in it do not belong to them: “This is my sister’s sheet music; I don’t play anything.” (Student #3)

Or the improviser endows the bag with mystical features: “This bag is a black hole—everything that gets into it disappears.” (Student #3)

**Optimal Distance/Average Anxiety**

Improvisers may demonstrate greater confidence at the beginning of the exercise, or confidence may develop during the exercise, when they receive feedback from the audience, and so adapt to the situation. The distance between the objects and the improviser is thus reduced, as the things are described as necessary: “This item is necessary.... I always have what I need with me.” (Student #3)

One improviser described the bag as comfortable: “The backpack is stylish and roomy....” (Student #2)

And a very good decision of a young woman improviser who received a man’s bag by lot: “This is a unisex bag, presented by a young man.” (Student #4)
Olga B. Temezhnikova

Close Distance/Low Anxiety

Improvisers immediately join the process, freely accepts the rules of the game, making fun of themselves, thereby reducing the distance: “This is my bag; it contains many things that are important to me.” (#1) The improviser intrigues the audience and keeps them interested: “I’ve been so connected to this bag for a long time; it contains many interesting things.” (#1) The improviser shares personal information: “My parents bought me this bag.” (#2)

Figure 2
Core Category Coping

| Coping | Control emotional state | Preventive measures | Category of life hacks |
|--------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
|        | Physical condition monitoring | Visualization | Self-reflection | Approach to preventing theft | Approach to preventing conflict | Warming and soothing effect | Avoidance of unpleasantness |

Coping

Modern social reality makes difficult situations important elements of human interaction with the outside world. In studies of coping behavior (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988), it has been established that the factors influencing the style and strategy of coping behavior are both the characteristics of the situation and perceived control over it, as well as personality characteristics. During the training program, I observed various strategies for coping with an unexpected situation.

Control of One’s Emotional State

Taking out a pomegranate and a computer mouse from the bag, the improviser suggests using them to control their emotional state by switching attention: “To develop the skills of resistance to stress, I hold a pomegranate in one hand, and the mouse in my right hand (the hands are busy) and there is peace and solemnity in my soul.” (#1) The improviser uses additional visualization to control the situation: “I can imagine that I am in control of the whole situation. The pomegranate is a globe” (the improviser holds a pomegranate; #1).

One bag contained driving school teaching materials. The improviser was asked what is important when driving a car. The response conveyed conscious control of the emotional state:

“Well, it’s important to have a feeling of confidence while driving; without it I don’t go anywhere....” (#5)
**Preventive Measures**

The improviser was finishing her session and she was asked why there are no documents, no student ID, in her backpack. The answer demonstrated a strategy for avoiding an unpleasant situation, a common approach to preventing the theft of documents: “For personal security, I do not put such documents in my backpack.” (#3)

Another improviser told how he resolves conflicts with his “wife,” a common approach to improve family relationships: “Communication strengthens relationships.” (#5)

**The Category of Life Hacks**

Personal ways of coping with an uncomfortable situation fell into the category of life hacks. For instance, warming plaster in the improviser’s bag eliminates pain by its warming and soothing effect: “This warming patch helps with abdominal pain.” (#3)

Another improviser explained the lack of glasses in the eyeglass case with a practical interpretation, avoidance of the unpleasant: “I don’t wear glasses yet; sometimes it’s good when you see the world as a little blurry.” (#4)

**Figure 3**

*Core Category Communicative Skills*

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**Communicative Skills**

Communication skills are an integral concept that includes various components depending on one’s goals. The goal of my training exercise was improvisation. In the process of improvisation, it is important to keep the listener’s attention and quickly respond to the mood of the audience—in other words, to manage emotions. The communication of a wide range of emotions gives the work of the improviser liveliness, immediacy, and attracts attention.

**Communication of Emotions**

The improviser found chopsticks for Asian food in his bag and expressed his satisfaction: “Oh! Here are my favorite chopsticks, from my favorite store.” (#3)

In Moscow everyone carries their official documents with them, and these can be found in almost every bag, but the documents have very different covers. The improviser saw
the cover of a passport with the title of the famous film “Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears.” In 1981 it was awarded the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film.

The improviser’s story about this aroused the empathy of the audience: “I was named Alexandra, after the heroine in the film ‘Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears.’ I watched the film again this year and cried when they sang the final song” (an appeal to the heroine).” (#2)

Another improviser talked about the objects in his “wife’s” bag and about her “idols.” After a question from the audience about what the idols have in common, the improviser first joked, and then replied that the idols are people whose lives inspire her: “She just chooses people who inspire….” (#5)

A negative emotional state, frustration, was caused by an incomprehensible situation, a new, alien atmosphere, when a ticket to Korea was found in a bag and the improviser therefore talked about a trip to Korea: “In Korea, I felt uncomfortable with unemotional people.” (#3)

Frustration was also caused by unwanted attention, violation of boundaries. An improviser took out “her” glasses, saying she has a little myopia, but she does not wear glasses, as this allows her not to see when people look into her eyes: “I get agitated when I see someone looking into my eyes. I blush, I get embarrassed. Excessive attention makes me uncomfortable.” (#4)

Training

Communicative improvisational skills develop in the very process of improvisation; the more people improvise, the more skillful they become. Learning is very interactive and is the basis of communication skills. Each of the improvisers addressed the overall training topic, adding their own motivational components to the unifying topics. (1) Personal interest: “This is a textbook; I mark interesting places with stickers so that I can return to them later, and so as not to read what is uninteresting” (#1); “She [the wife] is explaining how to communicate with people; this is her, well, the main topic” (#5); (2) Cooperation: “This is a flash drive, I brought it to my classmate in order to print out the forms, in order to have time to hand them over and not miss the deadline” (#2); (3) Internal motivation: “I study Korean for a change of pace” (#3); (4) External motivation: “An interesting startup course” (#4).

Storytelling

A special place in the work of an improviser in our class is storytelling related to certain objects; these stories attracted the greatest attention from the audience. All of them are united by the ability of improvisers to create vivid images and things are transformed before our eyes; they acquire a certain symbolic meaning and are remembered. Good imagination combined with storytelling logic are facets of communicative skills.

Stories: “A special laptop,” “A ticket to Korea,” “I still love the Beatles,” “A lighter found in Odessa,” “Bali glasses.” Let me discuss “Bali glasses” as an example of storytelling. Here the author specially identifies that it is a story. The glasses were outstanding and very original:

Here are the glasses.

Try them on!

Good.
The improviser tells a story while wearing sunglasses and immediately stands out for the audience:

There is a very funny story behind these glasses. Seven years ago, I was in Bali with my family and with my godmother’s family. My godmother’s friends live there; she flies to Bali almost every summer. And a year before our arrival, she [the godmother] bought exactly the same glasses. I’ve always liked them! And she took me to a special store in the town to buy them. That’s all.

He takes off his glasses; there is a big pause.

In this example, we can see all the elements of a good story: It draws attention well; it evokes an emotional response; it is well remembered, and it is structured, with a beginning and an end.

Figure 4
Core Category Imagination

Imagination

Exciting imagination metaphors

Grandmother’s lighter
Pomegranate
Bali glasses
Ticket to Korea
Special laptop

Imagination

A basic training program for imagination fosters the ability to listen and tell stories (narratives). This is fundamentally a process directed at both the speaker and the listener. And the vividness of the images created by the improviser also depends on the audience. One example:

I have a Zippo lighter here.

Do you smoke?

Yes, sometimes.

Right now, it has stopped working, so there is no way to show you the flame. By the way, it is a very memorable thing for me. I’ll tell you now—I just remembered the story. My grandmother lives in Ukraine. And when this whole conflict with our countries [Russia-Ukraine] began, she was negatively disposed, skeptical, she was a supporter of another movement. This is a
difficult story, difficult times. There was a misunderstanding within the family. It’s hard for me to tell this. But gradually the relationship was restored. And when she came to visit us, she brought this lighter. It happened just recently. She found it where the conflict in Odessa broke out and brought it to me. For me, this is a memorable and significant thing, loaded with suffering. And the lighter used to work; it’s very strange that it does not light up now…. (#4)

Rationally, I and the audience understand that this is not actually the improviser’s bag, that this is not her lighter, and that most likely she does not smoke at all. But her imagination makes these things compelling, and they get an emotional response. This is due to a very interesting and creative use of a highly complex metaphor. The image of fire may have so many different interpretations: a physical fire, the fire that burnt down the building in Odessa, the fire of war, the family conflict. Metaphors of fire arise, a flame that burned some time ago and gradually dies down but can flare up again if you light a spark, because everything is at hand (the lighter). This simple detail amounts to an emotional trigger and even a symbol. We do not know what image or images appeared in the minds of the listeners, but it seems they were all greatly impressed.

This category is so complex and manifested in so many ways that discussing each one in minute detail would require another paper. This small sample would still be insufficient, and this category seems to be much more important in improvisation than it was previously thought. It requires further and more profound investigation, with a potentially modified structure and organization of classes and with a significantly decreased level of anxiety. However, this is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Figure 5
Core Category Spontaneity

Spontaneity

Spontaneity is associated with the ability to improvise in new situations, with creativity and play. It may be equally considered as a manifestation of a person’s individuality. A specially prepared training exercise must trigger that spontaneity. Spontaneous communicative behavior is an important indicator of improvisation in communication. I was looking for the unexpected moments in the improvised fragments, something that attracted
the audience’s attention and created a receptive mood. I classified these using three main second-order themes: strange combinations (oxymorons), humor, and rapid topic switching.

**Strange Combinations (Oxymorons)**

If we consider any oxymoron in isolation, it usually seems to be just an absurdity. But in the context of a specific topic, in our case the improvisers needed to react quickly to a new and unknown object; this combination makes it possible to create more vivid images and more interesting stories. Decoding, interpreting the oxymoron, gives intellectual pleasure. The improviser takes an incomprehensible object from the bag, looks at it, suggests its purpose, then talks about it while using this strange combination of ideas. He gives the object a double purpose, assigning to it some contradictory meaning. Almost everyone in the audience has electronic devices, and this answer resonates with them. In the following example, the person plays with the common functions and the real functionality:

This is an electronic device containing flash memory for storing important data, and in any case, you have one. The main thing is to know that you have some information, but not to know what it is about, because it is useless information. (#1)

The improviser takes Roland Barthes’ Mythologies book from his bag. He is not familiar with this book; he sees a gargoyle on the cover of the Russian edition of the book and connects the title and the picture. The connection turns out to be meaningless:

I also have a tutorial on dog mythology. (#1)

Another improviser, a student 19–20 years of age, says that her boyfriend gave her the bag. When she was asked about the young man [Russian for “boyfriend”], she elaborates in the following way:

A young man! He is already an adult; he is 65 years old. (#4)

**Humor (Audience Laughs)**

Humor is an intellectual ability to notice the comical sides of phenomena; a good sense of humor is associated with good social adaptation, since a good joke always makes a favorable impression. The atmosphere in which we practiced was friendly and fun, but comic effects triggered the greatest response from the audience.

For example, one improviser talking about “his wife’s bag” created suspense and modeled the potential continuation of the story, and then spun it out as follows: “She has three idols: Leonardo da Vinci, Messi, and Pablo Picasso.” When was asked what unites them, he answered: “Nothing!” (#5).

A similar germ of humor was used by another improviser. Looking for something in the bag for some time, while everyone was waiting for something new to appear, he then says: “In my bag there is … another bag!” (#1).

I conducted our training exercise among psychology students. There are stereotypes about all professions: Psychologists are perceived as people who know how to control themselves. In the following example, the improviser disparages himself and uses irony: “My hands are shaking because I am studying in the Psychology Department” (#1).
One of the most popular drinks in Russia is tea. Tea drinking in Russia is a special and beloved ritual, and its main component is communication. The improviser took a sealed tea bag out of “his” bag and joked: “When you brew a tea bag, you realize that you have no friend better than boiling water” (#1).

Rapid Switching to Another Topic

If a person reacts quickly to a new topic that arises spontaneously, he can quickly remove the communication barrier. In the process of improvisation, teachers or other students may note moral dilemmas or plot inaccuracies that prompt them to ask uncomfortable questions. In this case, the improvisers often changed the subject, switched their attention, which seemed natural and appropriate within the training context.

There were glasses in one student’s bag; the improviser described them as protection from computer radiation, which evoked surprise and doubt in the audience. The improviser shifted our attention to topics for which there is no definite answer: “some say one thing, others say another. The same about everything. Some say milk is harmful; others say milk is good” (#4).

Showing a cumulative cafe card, the improviser was not prepared to discuss the very widespread network of cafes in Moscow, so she simply pointed out what she found good about them. “Cafe Shokoladnitsa is OK, but what I like most is the people who work there” (#4).

The discount card for a computer game store led to a conversation about attitudes towards the computer game GTA (Grand Theft Auto); the improviser switches the direction of the discussion by referring to the Russian poet and author Guberman, who shows that there are different facets to everything: “Do you know Guberman?” (#4).

Findings

With the help of the qualitative research method, namely GT (Ch), I expanded my understanding of the previously identified categories: anxiety, communicative skills, and spontaneity. These categories had been identified in the quantitative study.

I set out upon the investigation by asking questions about coping with anxiety, ways of manifesting communication skills, and the characteristics of spontaneous behavior. Let us address each question separately, though I am quite aware that all the questions and categories interact, making it a highly complex matter to distinguish them as separate categories.

Answering the first question of my research, on how the improviser copes with an unexpected situation and the coping strategies used in each case: All in all, based on my limited sample, I was still able to outline five strategies, three of them with a control function: control of emotional state; visualization to control the situation; and conscious control of one’s emotional state. I also highlighted the categories of life hacks and preventive measures.

Addressing the second question of my study, about the manifestation of communication skills, I obtained the following data: Communication requires the exchange of emotions, an ongoing training process that includes personal interest, cooperation, internal and external motivation, and the ability to keep the audience’s attention by telling a story.

The third question concerned the actual markers of improvisation. I identified the following categories of spontaneous communicative behavior: humor, strange combinations, and rapid switching to another topic. The category of imagination can be distinguished as a special, integrated category in which communicative and improvisational skills are also
manifest. The improviser’s imagination creates unexpected images for the audience, and these become part of the story.

It goes without saying that the categories I have outlined are closely interconnected, allowing me to consider the following ideas. The level of anxiety tends to correlate with possible choices made by an individual, as summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Overall Schema of Categories of Improvisation

| Core Categories          | Key Categories                                                                 | Improvisation |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|                         |                                                                               | #1 | #2 | #3 | #4 | #5 |
| Anxiety                 | long distance/high anxiety                                                    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | optimal distance/average anxiety                                              |    |    | +  | +  |
|                         | close distance/low anxiety                                                    |    | +  |    |    |
| Coping                  | control of one’s emotional state - switching attention                        | +  |    |    |    |
|                         | visualization to control the situation                                         |    | +  |    |    |
|                         | conscious control of one’s emotional state                                    |    |    |    | +  |
|                         | preventive measures                                                           |    | +  | +  |    |
|                         | life hacks                                                                     |    | +  | +  |    |
| Communicative skills    | communication of emotions                                                     | +  | +  | +  | +  |
|                         | training                                                                       |    |    |    |    |
|                         | personal interest                                                             |    | +  |    |    |
|                         | cooperation                                                                    |    |    |    |    |
|                         | internal motivation                                                            |    |    |    | +  |
|                         | external motivation                                                            |    |    |    |    |
| Spontaneity             | oxymorons                                                                      | 2  | 1  |    |    |
|                         | humor                                                                          | 3  |    | 1  |    |
|                         | switching                                                                       |    |    |    | 3  |

Low anxiety (#1) are the close distance and coping strategies: visualization and control of emotions. The improviser switches attention: emotions are communicated through humor, at the beginning of the improvisation; personal interest is fostered by training the highest level of spontaneity among the participants.

Two participants have an average level of anxiety—the optimal distance: One of the participants (#2) does not have a coping strategy; it can be assumed that he does not feel this situation to be unexpected. He tells a lot of stories, conveys emotions, is inclined to cooperate, but does not demonstrate spontaneity. Another participant (#4) with an average level of anxiety suggests his coping strategies, conveys emotions, is motivated by the situation, and demonstrates good spontaneity.

Two participants have high anxiety. One of them (#3) has two coping strategies: preventive measures and her own strategy (life hack category) for communicating emotion, has internal motivation for the training program, and does not demonstrate spontaneity. Her colleague (#5) consciously controls his emotional state and uses preventive measures, transfers emotion, and may use humor to cope with an unexpected situation.

According to my data, participants with low and medium levels of anxiety who use coping strategies showed more spontaneous behavior, and were involved in the training process, showing personal interest. Those with high anxiety used different coping strategies and felt more uncomfortable with the training situation, exhibiting less spontaneity.

My analysis also highlighted key categories: storytelling in the core categories of “communication skills” and “imagination.” I have given only a few examples of these categories.
They are interrelated and require more detailed research. Audience reports of how each story awakened the imagination of viewers.

By revealing three different patterns of improvisation in communication—Spontaneity, Communicative Skills, and Anxiety—this study expands the conversation on the role of improvisation in studying communications skills. These patterns of improvisation revealed two dimensions that emerge from the grounded analysis: Imagination and Coping. The ways in which these dimensions vary and combine creates the elaborated patterns.

**Figure 6**
*Model Improvisation in Communication*

**Discussion**

This paper has explored how improvisation unfolds and the key dimensions that characterize potentially different improvisation processes, through an inductive research method conducted within the framework of communication training for psychologists. Improvisation is crucial for communicative skills, as it is the seed of their development (Fauzan, 2014; Sawyer, 2011). As the literature review highlights, existing contributions on the topic have focused on improvisation as one of the characteristics of the creative process. There is room to investigate more thoroughly through qualitative approaches how improvisation unfolds as a process.

Although scholars have shown interest in the fact that improvisation processes develop through non-sequential patterns, recent investigations of the way in which improvisation emerges and unfolds through systematic schemas has seemed insufficient, calling for more fine-grained inquiries. Adopting an interpretive approach, this paper therefore offers multiple contributions to the existing literature on both studying and teaching improvisation.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study offers two main contributions to the existing literature. First, the findings shed new light on the current debate on improvisation training for various target groups (Fessell et al., 2020; Seppänen et al., 2020; Tint et al., 2015). The existing literature includes relatively few systematic inquiries into the extent to which improvisation, in practice, unfolds in different ways and contexts. By contrast, this paper argues that it is possible to base improvisation on structured patterns.

The second main theoretical implication is related to the expansion of the categories observed in the process of improvisation. By studying improvisation in communication, we
have identified so far: Spontaneity, Communication Skills, and Level of Anxiety. Using the qualitative GT method, we were able to identify two additional categories, Imagination and Coping, which are related to Storytelling and Anxiety, but add additional characteristics, making the concept of improvisation more stable and elaborated. Our results may show how spontaneity and communication skills are manifested in different ways and how a respondent may regulate and cope with anxiety.

The data suggest that the interaction of all the selected categories also plays a role in the improvisation process, providing sources of inspiration and additional knowledge to build upon.

This study has some potentially useful practical implications for the teaching of improvisation.

First, the paper suggests categories for analyzing the improvisation process that teachers should be able to identify. These improvisation patterns are highly varied, implying that there cannot and should not be a single standardized pattern to strive for. Teachers will have to embrace the overall process and adapt it to the global teaching purpose, rather than aspiring to achieve a uniform ideal. Teachers can learn how to identify different processes and to appreciate the capabilities of individuals with different orientations towards improvisation.

Second, this research aims to encourage teachers/mentors to include programs aimed at developing improvisational skills in their communication training, as these skills can help their students to cope with unexpected communication situations and more fluid contexts.

Third, by distinguishing different elements of the improvisation process, the paper suggests that students should dedicate efforts to understand the single elements or phases of the processes to build successful strategies. The findings highlight the role of individual abilities (characteristics): how a person copes with an unexpected situation, the strengths, and weaknesses of individual students, what coping strategies are used. These findings can represent a huge source of teaching inspiration, learning about the basic processes, and understanding how improvisation works, as well as embracing its huge potential.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study does have some limitations that might suggest directions for further research. Creating an unexpected communicative situation in a training process undoubtedly places limitations on the study of improvisation. To capture the dynamics of ongoing improvisation processes, it would have been useful to spend more time observing professional improvisers at work.

This study also has a methodological limitation since the data are mainly derived only from five transcribed videos. Only the text was used in the analysis, excluding analysis of the videos themselves by this GT method, although such a research process has been actively discussed (Mey & Dietrich, 2016).

Keeping in mind these limitations, this study offers potentially important areas for future research. In addition, it will be important to explore which individual, team, and organizational factors influence the adoption of a specific pattern of improvisation. The multiple processes that have emerged in this research are not comprehensive; future studies should investigate different emerging processes, as well as the conditions that allow one process to become more prominent than another.

The creative patterns that emerge could work simultaneously; the current research does not show how they are linked within more complex creative processes. In addition, the single creative patterns that have emerged in this research are complex concepts, which should be separately analyzed. Particularly the categories of Imagination and Storytelling
need to be addressed in detail. Future research should include additional inquiries in these areas.

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