

# How Pixar fosters *collective* creativity

Harvard Business Review  
Sep 2008, Vol. 86 Issue 9, p64-72

YH Chong  
AM Journal Club, Nov 2009

## *BACKGROUND*



One simple question  
Is it more difficult to find good  
people or good ideas?



## The 'myth' about creativity

- Solo vs many people
- Not just a snapshot but a long, arduous process that typically takes four or five years
- Creativity  $\neq$  Innovation?



## An unparalleled track record



## The archaeological dig ...

- To constantly challenge our own assumptions
- The ultimate test → see if they are transferable (after combination with Disney Animation Studio)

## Challenges

- Resist the natural tendency to avoid risks
  - Management is there to troubleshoot and revive the organization ...
- Getting talented people to work effectively together
  - Takes trust and respect (and time) ...

## *THE CASE*

The defining moment for Pixar ...



## A dangerous gap

- “A” creative team occupied with ‘A Bug’s Life’
- “Toy Story 2” originally intended to be a direct-to-video film
- Technical people left to develop “Toy Story 2”
- 8 months were left to finish a 18-month plus job

## How they made it

## Lesson # 1



Give great ideas to a mediocre team



Give not so great ideas to a great team

## Lesson # 2



## Turning a new page ...

- Old mission: come up with new (and great) ideas
- New mission: assemble small incubation teams to help directors refine their ideas
- At this stage do not judge the teams by their work, judge on the dynamics and the pace of progress



## Trick #1: Brain Trust



## Trick #1: Brain Trust (cont'd)

- The group is convened whenever needed to go through the work so far, followed by a candid discussion
- The beauty of segregating decision making and communication
  - Evidence: did not work out in technical team until the two were segregated

## Trick #2: Dailies



**OVERCOMING INHIBITIONS**  
Showing unfinished work each day liberates people to take risks and try new things because it doesn't have to be perfect the first time.

## Trick #2: Dailies (Cont'd)

- Stands for “daily reviews”
- Constant feedback on a larger scale
- Benefits
  - More creative when people get over the embarrassment
  - Communicate with the entire crew
  - Cross learning and inspiration
  - Minimize work wasted for ‘wrong’ direction



### Pixar's Operating Principles

- 1** Everyone must have the freedom to communicate with anyone.
- 2** It must be safe for everyone to offer ideas.
- 3** We must stay close to innovations happening in the academic community.

## How to stand the test of time

- Postmortem
  - Do it differently every time
  - Top 5 do's and don'ts
- Fresh blood
  - Welcome surprises
  - How to orientate new comers (share with them past mistakes)

## To reflect ...

- Where to source for good ideas?
- How to work on those good (or not so good ideas)?
- How to maintain creativity in every step of work?
- How applicable to our setting?

Thank you