

The Walt Disney Creativity strategy

Walt Disney is a name in popular entertainment that needs no introduction. As a creative innovator in the cartoon industry he stands head and shoulders above subsequent figures.

Apart from his boundless energy, there were specific elements in the way he organised his creative work force that tended to guarantee creative outcomes. When working on the early full length cartoons that made his name - Snow White, Pinocchio, Bambi and Fantasia, he used a revolutionary approach to keeping his staff co-ordinated in their thinking on a particular project.

He moved the ideas round three rooms, each room had a different function:

Room 1 The place where dreams were dreamed, ideas were spun out, no restrictions, no limits - just every sort of outrageous creative hunch or idea was freely developed

Room 2 Here the dreams from Room 1 were co-ordinated and the story board created as events and characters fitted into sequence. (The idea of the story board - now ubiquitous - was a Disney invention)

Room 3 The "sweat box" - a small room under the stairs where the whole crew would critically review the project to date with no holds barred. The process was safe because it was the project not a particular individual that was being criticised.

Then the idea would return to Room 1 to allow for the work on the project to continue. The cycle always involved the three rooms. The outcome was that either an idea did not survive Room 3 and was abandoned, or it met with silence in Room 3, which indicated it was ready for production.

Robert Dilts studied Disney and distilled from his creativity this version of the Disney Strategy, which is a useful tool for practical creativity, either for individuals or groups.

The Disney Strategy

This involves three distinct states :

- Dreamer - the person for whom all things are possible
- Realist - the person who sorts things out
- Critic - the person who picks up on the bits that don't fit

The participant activates all three roles, in the indicated sequence.

The three stages require distinct approaches:

Dreamer “*Want to*”

- Why are you doing this?
- What is the purpose?
- What are the payoffs?
- How will you know you have them?
- Where do you want to be in the future?
- Who do you want to be or be like?
- What range of topics do you want to consider?
- What elements of those topics do you want to explore?

Realist “*How to*”

Establish time frames and milestones for progress with evidence and test procedures

- What will I be doing?
- How specifically will the idea be implemented?
- How will I know if the goal has been achieved?
- Who besides me is involved (time constraints)?
- When will each phase be implemented?
- When will the overall goal be completed?
- Where will each phase be carried out?

Critic “*Chance to*”

- How do all the elements fit together?
- What elements appear unbalanced?
- What parts do not fit with the overall objective of the project?
- What parts of the project are underdeveloped?
- How possible is this within the time frame?
- Why is each step necessary?

Guidelines for personal orientation for the Disney Strategy

	<i>Dreamer</i>	<i>Realist</i>	<i>Critic</i>
Dominant question	What?	How?	Why?
Representational preference	Vision	Action	Logic
Approach	Toward	Toward	Away
Time frame	Long term	Short term	Long / Short
Time orientation	Future	Present	Past / Future
Reference	Internal - Self	External - Env.	External - Others
Comparison	Match	Match	Mismatch

Physiology for the Disney Strategy

Dreamer Head and eyes – looking up
 Posture – symmetrical and relaxed

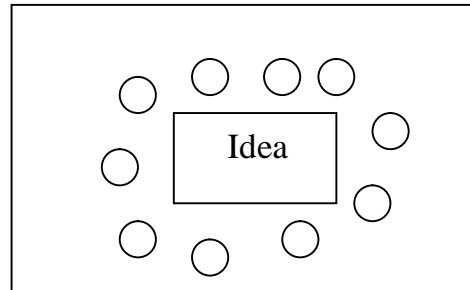
Realist Head and eyes – straight ahead or slightly forward
 Posture – symmetrical and centred

Critic Eyes - down
 Head - down and tilted
 Posture - angular

Disney Strategy for groups

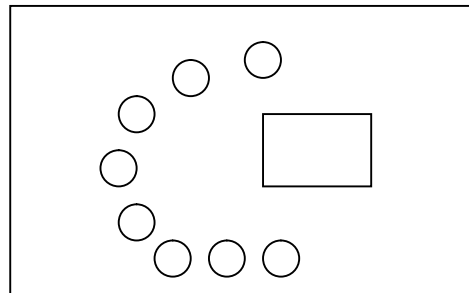
The arrangement of the space you work in reflects the stage of the process you are engaged in.

Dreamer



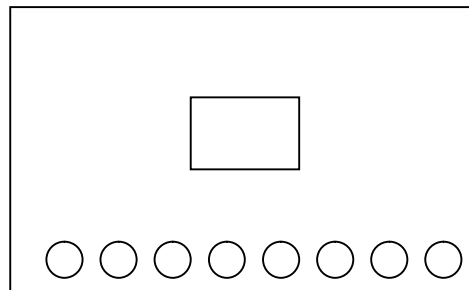
The group sits in a circle with the idea "in the middle"

Realist



Realist - group sits in a semi - circle

Critic



Critic - the group sits in a row, facing the idea / project - to keep the focus on the idea / project rather than the individuals involved.

Developing the Disney strategy for personal use

- G - the guide
E - explorer following the Strategy

Steps

- 1 G asks E to identify a series of locations for the following:
 - Dreamer - a visionary space
 - Realist - a practical place
 - Critic - a place that gets you space from the other two
 - Meta - a neutral place (independent of the other three)

- 2 G asks E to stand in each of the spaces and remember experiences they have had when they engaged in or saw someone else engage in the required activity
 - Dreamer "a time when you could dream or fantasise freely"
 - Realist "a time when you could plan realistically, put ideas into action"
 - Critic "a time when you could constructively criticise, as well as notice problems"
 - Meta "when you had a sense of detachment from – like an observer"

- 3 G asks E to select an issue / problem / work area that they would like to explore. When E has identified an appropriate topic – they tell G they have done so. G can then invite E to start the process.

- 4 G asks E to stand in the Dreamer space, start to imagine the outcomes you would like – as if you were a character in a movie. G to check that E is "going for it" – allowing themselves to think in an open and uninhibited way. G to make notes if so requested by E. When E has spent sufficient time doing this, G invites E to move to the next space.

- 5 G asks E to stand in the Realist space and take the dream from Step 4 and story board it into a sequence of activities, noticing the logic of the arrangement. When E is happy they have done all the possible sequencing, G invites E to move to the next space.

- 6 G asks E to stand in the Critic space and take the story board from Step 5 to find out what is missing or needed. Then turn the criticisms into "how" questions.
 - G to make sure E criticises the plan not the Realist
 - G to get E to acknowledge the satisfactory elements so far.
 - When sufficient information gathered G invites E to move to either Meta or back to Dreamer – with a clear idea what Dreamer is to consider.
 - (If Step 6 has been a bit tough – then a quick visit to "meta" to return a sense of balance before returning to Dreamer).

- 7 Repeat Steps 4 to 6 as appropriate.

- 8 E concludes by reviewing with B both progress and process

Materials

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Andre Deutsch, 1994.
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- Walt Disney *Fantasia*, 1940
- Walt Disney *Snow White and the seven dwarfs*, 1937