

## Article: The success of Pixar

Pixar produced a string of highly successful computer-animated movies between 1995 and 2008: Toy Story (1995), A Bug's Life (1998), Toy Story 2 (1999), Monsters, Inc. (2001), Finding Nemo (2003), The Incredibles (2004), Cars (2006), Ratatouille (2007) and WALL-E (2008). In May 2006, Pixar became part of The Walt Disney Company, which it had previously partnered with in the production of computer-animated feature films. Apple co-founder and CEO Steve Jobs played a key role in Pixar's rise to prominence. Ed Catmull (co-founder and current president of Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Animation Studios) offers readers of Harvard Business Review a peak behind the scenes at an enduring creative organisation, i.e. Pixar.

Catmull claims Pixar's success is not down to luck, but rather to sticking to a number of principles and practices in the management of creative talent and the dealing with risks. Pixar maintains an unrelenting search for new, unusual ideas in order to always offer the public something new. 'This process is not risk-free, but if you want to be original, you will have to accept a certain level of uncertainty, no matter how irksome that may be; and you will have to possess the capability of recovery when the organisation bites off more than it can chew and fails', says Catmull.

Catmull believes in talented staff ('people are more important than ideas') and that team spirit can make all the difference. One of the points Catmull mentions as a driver of this community feeling in a group of employees is treating each other as equals; there is no hierarchy within a department or between departments. An example of this horizontal structure at Pixar are the 'Dailies', the daily reviews that involve team members giving positive feedback. Team members share any unfinished work with the entire animation team, and although the director has the final say, all team members are motivated by this opportunity to give their opinion. This has several advantages: there is more room for creativity because the presented material does not have to be the finished article yet (less pressure), employees learn from each other and inspire each other, and there are no surprises at the end of the process.

Catmull lists the following Pixar corporate principles:

- Everyone must have the freedom to communicate with everyone else: trust employees to solve any problems they encounter in their day-to-day activities together without having to ask for permission from an assigned person.

- Everyone has to be completely free to come up with ideas: work in progress is constantly shared and shown within Pixar, regardless of who is making it. Anyone is free to give feedback.
- Be alert to innovations from the academic community: employees are encouraged to publish research and take part in conferences. Although publication may mean giving ideas away, it will keep Pixar's bonds with the academic community strong.

Catmull wraps up by stating that they attach great value to constant analysis and optimization of the organisation in order to prevent Pixar from being exposed to major risks. And apart from that, strong leadership is required to enforce the values.

*Reference(s)*

Catmull, E. (2008), How Pixar fosters collective creativity. Harvard Business Review, vol.86, no.9, p.64-72. \*

\*: Available in the EURIB library.