Walt Disney
Chapter 3

Walt Disney
The Dreamer, The Realist
And The Critic

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Walt Disney and the Three Phases of Creativity

Walt Disney's ability to connect his innovative creativity with successful business strategy and popular appeal allowed him to establish an empire in the field of entertainment that has survived decades after his death. Disney (1901 - 1966) embodies the ability to make a successful organization based on creativity. He represents the process of turning fantasies into concrete and tangible expressions. In a way, Disney's chosen medium of expression, the animated film, characterizes the fundamental process of all creative genius; the ability to take something that exists only in the imagination and forge it into a physical existence that directly influences the experience of others in a positive way. This was something Disney was able to do prolifically and in a number of different mediums.

In his lifetime, apart from Disneyland and the initial stages of Walt Disney World, he produced, directly or as executive producer, and stored in the company's library 497 short subjects, 21 animated features, 56 live-action motion pictures, 7 "True-Life Adventure" features, 330 hours of the Mickey Mouse Club, 78 half-hour Zorro shows, and 330 hours of other TV shows.

The simple yet worldwide appeal of Disney's characters, animated films, live action features and amusement parks demonstrate a unique ability to grasp, synthesize and simplify very basic, yet quite sophisticated principles. Disney was also responsible for a number of important technical and organizational innovations in the fields of animation and film-making in general.

The tools and distinctions of NLP make it possible to create explicit maps of the successful thinking strategies of people with special talents like Walt Disney. NLP explores the way people sequence and use fundamental mental abilities such as sight, hearing and feeling in order to organize and perform in the world around them. One of the major elements of Disney's unique genius was his ability to explore something from a number of different perceptual positions. An important insight into this key part of Disney's strategy comes from the comment made by one of his animators that, "...there were actually three different Walt: the dreamer, the realist, and the spoiler. You never knew which one was coming into your meeting."

This is not only an insight into Disney but also into the structure of creativity. Creativity as a total process involves the coordination of these three subprocesses; dreamer, realist and critic. A dreamer without a realist cannot turn ideas into tangible expressions. A critic and a dreamer without a realist just become stuck in a perpetual conflict. A dreamer and a realist might create things, but they might not achieve a high degree of quality without a critic. The critic helps to evaluate and refine the products of creativity. There is a humorous example of a boss who prided himself on his innovative thinking abilities but lacked some of the Realist and Critic perspective. The people who worked in the company used to say, "He has an idea a minute... and some of them are good."

The point is that creativity itself involves the synthesis of different processes or phases. The Dreamer is necessary for creativity in order to form new ideas and goals. The Realist is necessary for creativity as a means to transform ideas into concrete expressions. The Critic is necessary for creativity as a filter and as a stimulus for refinement.

Certainly, each one of these phases represents a whole thinking strategy of its own—strategies that more often tend to conflict with each other rather than support each other. Of course, the specifics of how Disney used and coordinated his imagination (the Dreamer), methodically translated those fantasies into a tangible form (the Realist) and applied his critical judgment (the Critic/Spoiler) are something that we need to explore in more depth.
Micro Analysis of Disney the Dreamer

In the words of Disney the ‘Dreamer’, "My business has been a thrilling adventure, an unending voyage of discovery and exploration in the realms of color, sound and motion." As a Dreamer, Disney took an intense and passionate interest in the process of creativity.

The descriptions of Disney’s physiology at the time he was thinking creatively present a classic portrait of the micro behaviors or ‘accessing cues’ associated with deep visual fantasizing. For example, one of his associates reports:

“When Walt was deep in thought he would lower one brow, squint his eyes, let his jaw drop, and stare fixedly at some point in space, often holding the attitude for several moments... No words could break the spell...”

This description could easily be of a hypnotic subject having a positive hallucination. The trance-like quality attributed to Disney’s behavior while ‘dreaming’ in the description above indicates just how fully he committed his entire neurology and attention to the creative process. This same kind of ‘hypnotic’ quality, reminiscent of Watson’s descriptions of Sherlock Holmes “staring at the ceiling with dreamy, lack-lustre eyes,” has been observed in many other creative geniuses throughout history.

The following caricature of Disney’s “most typical expression”, from Thomas and Johnson (1983), adds further confirmation to the observation cited above. Examining the picture as if we were Sherlock Holmes trying to read Disney’s “innermost thoughts,” we see that the picture shows Disney looking up and to the right. According to the model of NLP this indicates that he is fantasizing, or constructing internal visual images (V⁵). As a ‘rule of thumb’, eye position gen-

ally indicates the ‘lead’ system or input system implying that visual fantasy is Disney’s primary focus. Disney is also depicted leaning forward on his elbows in what would be considered a feeling oriented (or 'kinesthetic') posture (K¹). The fact that the picture also illustrates him as touching his left hand to his face is significant as well. In NLP this gesture is known as the ‘telephone position’ and accompanies internal verbalization (A₄), indicating that Disney is using at least three sensory representational systems simultaneously.

Animator’s Caricature of Disney’s “Most Typical Expression”

This brings up an important key in modeling Disney’s impressive creativity: the linking process known as synesthesia—literally ‘a synthesizing of the senses.’ A synesthesia occurs when someone overlaps two or more of the senses.
together, as when one feels what one sees, or sees images of sounds that one hears, etc. This process of linking the senses was a common one in Disney’s creative thought process and was most likely at the basis of many of his creative inspirations. In describing the film Fantasia, for instance, Disney wrote:

“*We take music and visualize the stories and pictures which that music suggests to our imaginations. It is like seeing a concert.*”

“When I heard the music it made pictures in my head... here are the pictures.”

From an NLP standpoint, Disney is describing a strategy sequence in which:
1. The external auditory input (A*) of music directly causes
2. constructed internal imagery (V*) through the process of synesthesia.  
   *Disney would then*
3. transform these fantasies into external images (V*) via the process of animation.

Disney reveals the involvement of another representational system when he claims:

“There are things in that music (Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D Minor) that the general public will not understand until they see things on the screen representing that music. Then they will *feel* the depth in the music.”

Here, Disney is indicating that to ‘see’ something is to ‘understand’ it, again confirming that his primary representational strategy is visually oriented. He is also indicating that seeing something allows one to ‘feel’ its depth. This would tend to indicate that Disney also had strong links between seeing and feeling.

According to Aristotle, Disney’s abilities to overlap the senses were a result of ‘common sensibles’ - perceptual qualities that were shared by all of the senses. Common sensibles allow information to be transferred between the different sensory representational systems. They include features such as movement, intensity, location, number, etc. which can be perceived by more than one sensory modality.

The structure and impact of one’s imagination and creativity is often determined by the establishment of links between the senses. For example, the history of visual art can be viewed at a very general level as the history of expressing internal feeling states through a synesthesia with the various visual characteristics or ‘submodalities’ (i.e., color, shape, focus, etc.). In the renaissance, depth was the critical submodality; for Rembrandt it was direction and brightness of light, for the impressionists such as Van Gogh it was color and texture, for modern artists distortion of shapes, etc. While Disney claimed, “We could do many things with color no other medium could do,” the key element in his creative process was movement.

By choosing movement, Disney was working with a common sensible as well as a visual submodality. This allowed him to reach even greater depth of expression. We need only compare the results of his studio with others to see how his use of movement as a ‘common sensible’ made such a big difference. Consider the following comment he made to his animators:

“I would suggest that you concentrate more on caricature, with action; not merely the drawing of a
character to look like something, but giving your character the movements and actions of the person you are trying to put over. Remember, every action should be based on what that character represents." 7

Here, Disney is clearly stating that the purpose in animation is not to copy something we can already see externally, but rather to express something internal through the quality of movement. What put Disney at the top of his field, made his animated pictures timeless classics and made him an international success was his ability to extract the essence of something through its movement and translate it into visual imagery - as opposed to just making his animated pictures "look like something."

Perhaps Disney’s focus on the quality of movement was also a metaphor for his own creative personality - the “Dreamer” in himself. As he claimed:

"[I]t is stress and challenge and necessity that make an artist grow and outdo himself." 8

"I can never stand still. I must explore and experiment. I am never satisfied with my work. I resent the limitations of my own imagination." 9

And, even though he certainly achieved great financial success, Disney’s dreams were not motivated by this type of outward monetary reinforcement. As he maintained:

"You know, the only way I’ve found to make these pictures is with animators - you can’t seem to do it with accountants or bookkeepers." 10

Money - or rather the lack of it to carry out my ideas - may worry me, but it does not excite me. Ideas excite me.” 11

In summary, Disney’s major representational system as a Dreamer was his vision. But it was not necessarily directed only toward specific pictures of things. He used the quality of movement as a ‘common sensible’ to overlap other senses onto imagery and to see underlying forms and patterns. As he maintained in response to a question about the future:

“What I see way off is too nebulous to describe. But it looks big and glittering.

“That’s what I like about this business, the certainty that there is always something bigger and more exciting just around the bend; and the uncertainty of everything else.” 12

Disney the Dreamer was visionary, saw the big picture and believed in what was possible. Consider the prophetic statement he made about the future of his art and industry in a 1941 article:

“For the near future, I can practically promise a third-dimensional effect in our moving characters. The full inspiration and vitality in our animators’ pencil drawings will be brought to the screen in a few years through the elimination of the inking process. Then, too, our medium is peculiarly adaptable to television, and I understand that is already possible to televise in color. Quite an exciting prospect, I should say! And, since Fantasia, we have good reason to hope that great composers will write directly for our medium just as they now write for ballet and opera.

“This is the promise of the next few years. Beyond that is the future which we cannot see, today. We, the last of the pioneers and the first of the moderns, will not live to see this future realized. We are happy in the job of building its foundations.” 13
Micro Analysis of Disney the Realist

As important as his ability to dream, was Disney’s expertise at forging those dreams into reality. The fact that Disney involved all of his senses during his creative process no doubt made the products of his creativity quite robust and compelling. As one of his associates commented, “Snow White existed in Disney’s head as a very real thing and...he was determined it should reach the screen just as he conceived it.”

Like Leonardo da Vinci, Disney seemed to have an intense commitment to visually understand the deepest nature of whatever he was exploring, claiming, “Animation can explain whatever the mind of man can conceive.” And, as with Leonardo, Disney seems to have been as committed to being a ‘realist’ as he was to being a ‘dreamer:’

“Our work must have a foundation of fact in order to have sincerity.”

“I definitely feel that we cannot do the fantastic things based on the real, unless we first know the real.”

“When we consider a new project, we really study it...not just the surface idea, but everything about it.”

Clearly, Disney, like Leonardo, felt that to be truly inventive one needed to have a feedback loop between the ‘dreamer’ and the ‘realist.’

“In animation it’s what to draw, not just the ability to draw. It isn’t just drawing the darn thing, it’s thinking about it and giving it personality. I was into technique before I should have been. I needed more life. You’ve got to learn to draw.

“In the studio we have had an art school; we put all the arts together...I had four instructors, in composition, life, anatomy, and locomotion — the study of action and reaction. It was needed for this medium. The trouble is [the animators] all wanted to draw beautiful pictures. I went for locomotion, not static. It’s like putting your hand across your eyes: the fingers elongate. And when something stops — a woman stops - the skirt goes on. When a mouse stops, his tail goes around. I used to put in my entire time with the artists until they got better.”

Making something tangible and real involves tools and technical developments. Disney always kept up to date on the technical progress of his time, claiming:

“Our business has grown with technical achievements. Should this technical progress ever come to a full stop, prepare the funeral oration for our medium. That is how dependent we artists have become on the new tools and refinements which technicians give us...There is no knowing how far steady growth will take the medium, if only the technicians continue to give us new and better tools.”

Disney’s primary strategy, and his major strength, as a realist was the ability to chunk and sequence his dreams into pieces of a manageable size. In fact, Disney was the innovator of the process of story-boarding (a process now used by all major film developers). In the story room (the ‘Dreamer’ room) Disney had set aside a wall where anyone could tack up an idea or suggestion. One day, after he had just had the wall repainted, he came in and a group of animators had tacked pictures all over newly painted wall. After recovering from his initial shock, Disney noticed that he could easily follow the flow of the story just by looking at the sequence of
pictures. So he put up cork board all over the walls of the room and established ‘storyboarding’ as his primary form of idea development.

![Storyboard Diagram]

Figure 2 Story-Boarding/Animation Process

A story-board is like a visual table of contents—it is a set of still drawings that represent the sequence of critical events to take place in the storyline of a film. Storyboarding is essentially an extension of the process of animation to a larger scale. Animation takes place through a process that involves starting with the drawing of still pictures representing the critical events of a particular movement. These drawings are typically done by the chief animator. Once the critical chunks have been defined, the individual drawings connecting these pictorial “milestones” are filled in by the secondary animation team. Disney simply extended this process of chunking and sequencing to a larger level—becoming a kind of “meta” animator.

The “story-boarding” process, which is a very powerful way of organizing and planning, can be applied to any level of the film-making procedure. It may be applied at chunk sizes ranging from the smallest details of actually animating a particular movement of a particular character (at 32 individual pictures per second), to a particular action or event in a scene, to a scene itself, or to the sequencing of the entire film.

I have done some animating myself, and it is quite a unique way to experience the world - breaking each second down into 32 separate images. One’s awareness and appreciation of movement increases dramatically. When watching a butterfly or bird flap its wings and fly through the air, one gets a sense for what Leonardo must have experienced as he strove to unlock the secrets of flight by observing the flight of birds.

From the point of view of strategy, the story-boarding process of chunking and sequencing the critical pieces required to achieve a particular result is not limited to film making but can be used for any kind of planning. It can be used to chart and organize a business project, a training seminar, a book, a counseling session, a computer program and so on.

Disney, of course, is primarily famous for his creation and portrayal of characters and stories. This is something quite different from technical competence and involves a different type of strategy. As Disney pointed out:

“*We had our technic well in hand. We had learned how to make our characters act convincingly. We had learned a lot about staging and camera angles. We knew something about timing and tempo. But a good*
story idea, in our business, is an imponderable thing. It seems to be largely made up of luck and inspiration. It must be exceedingly simple to be told in seven or eight hundred feet. It must, above all, have that elusive quality called charm. It must be unsophisticated, universal in its appeal and a lot of other things you can’t nail down in words but can only feel intuitively.”19

The special quality and appeal of Disney animation comes from a strategy by which characters were developed, and illustrates a second important aspect of Disney’s creativity strategy. Disney was able to associate into his characters, take on their persona and view the world from their perspective. In the language of NLP, this would be called the ability to take ‘second position’ (DeLozier and Grinder, 1987). ‘First position’ involves seeing, hearing and feeling a particular event from one’s own perspective. ‘Second position’ involves seeing, hearing and feeling an event from someone else’s perceptual position, including their values, beliefs and emotions. For example, imagine you are standing on a street corner watching a person ride by on a bicycle. If you remain in your own ‘first position’ as an observer viewing the character riding the bicycle, you would be seeing it through your own eyes as a bystander. Being in ‘second position’ would involve looking from the perspective of the rider, being on the bicycle seat, looking down at your hands on the handlebars, etc. A ‘third position’ perspective would one in which you would actually be seeing yourself as a bystander watching the bicycle rider from a more distant disassociated vantage point (as a camera might record the situation).

Disney seemed to have had a unique ability to assume ‘second position’. As one of his animators recalls:

“Mickey’s voice was always done by Walt, and he felt the lines and the situation so completely that he could not keep from acting out the gestures and even the body attitudes as he said the dialogue.”20

By associating himself into his characters’ perceptual positions, Disney experienced his imaginary characters’ motives and behavior more intimately. It probably also enhanced his creativity by allowing him to spontaneously discover how the character might act in a particular situation, rather than having to figure it out analytically.

In fact, both Disney’s processes of going to second position and synesthesia stimulate a more spontaneous form of creativity in which new ideas are generated one upon the other (as in the example of Genesis discussed at the beginning of this book). In the words of one of Disney’s animators:

“He did not dream a big, overall dream; he made it up as he went along. Each thing he did suggested something else, something new, something that had never been tried, something an audience might want to see.”21

In addition to being a major part of his creativity strategy, this process of physically associating into characters also seems to have played an important role in Disney’s abilities as a ‘realist.’ If you can act something out or role-play it you have begun to make it tangible and real and it is easier for others to concretely experience the dream.

In summary, Disney the Realist was more feeling and action oriented than vision oriented. The Realist is future focused but operates in a more short term perspective than the Dreamer, acting ‘as if’ the long term vision is reachable and using successive approximations to ‘chunk down’ the dream into reality. As Disney put it:

“[Animation is] a medium whose potential limits are still far off in the future... As for the past, the only important conclusions that I can draw from it are that the public will pay for quality, and the unseen future will take care of itself if one just keeps growing up a little every day...
“[Our success] was built by hard work and enthusiasm, integrity of purpose, a devotion to our medium, confidence in its future, and, above all, by a steady day-by-day growth in which we all simply studied our trade and learned.”

It is the combination of dreamer and realist that allows one to truly impact the world. Disney believed he was doing something more than simply making cartoons. During work on his ambitious and innovative animated feature Fantasia (a film that is still as popular today as it was when it was released over fifty years ago), Disney stated to the animators:

“This is not ‘the cartoon medium.’ We have worlds to conquer here.”

In fact, the great English political satirist and fellow cartoonist, David Low, paid Disney a remarkable compliment when he said:

“I do not know whether he draws a line himself. I hear that at his studios he employs hundreds of artists to do the work. But I assume that his is the direction, the constant aiming after improvement in the new expression, the tackling of its problems in an ascending scale and seemingly with aspirations over and above mere commercial success. It is the direction of a real artist. It makes Disney, not as a draftsman but as an artist who uses his brains, the most significant figure in graphic art since Leonardo.”

Micro Analysis of Disney the Critic

Because of Disney’s intense commitment to his work, his critical judgment about it was also intense. In fact, Disney’s critical evaluations were so formidable that his animators nicknamed the screening room in which their work was first viewed the “sweatbox.”

“The animators saw Walt at the story meetings where he acted out everything as it should be, and then again in the ‘sweatbox,’ when they showed him the scenes as they had animated it.”

While Disney the dreamer was excited and stimulated by ideas, Disney the critic had different criteria.

“He expected everyone to work as hard as he did, and to be as interested and excited about what we were doing. He never spared feelings, because his interest was in the product and not in who had the best idea or who made a poor suggestion or expected applause. We were all in it together and the fellow who went off on his own, developing an idea that Walt had not approved, was asking for trouble, and received it.”

The ‘spoiler’ critically evaluated the fruit of the realist’s labor. The focus of the Critic shifted from the spontaneous creativity of the Dreamer and the organization and exploration of the Realist to the qualities of the end result. In the ‘sweatbox’ new ideas and innovative explorations were not highly valued, as they were to the Dreamer and the Realist, but rather the “product.”

In fact, Disney’s was the first studio to spend the time and money to film the initial black and white drawings of his
animators and evaluate them before they went into final production. As Disney commented:

“I think it is astounding that we were the first group of animators, so far as I can learn, who ever had the chance to study their own work and correct its errors before it reached the screen...every foot of rough animation was projected on the screen for analysis, and every foot was drawn and redrawn until we could say, “This is the best we can do.” We had become perfectionists, and as nothing is ever perfect in this business, we were continually dissatisfied.”

Apparently, Disney learned the importance of being a critic through experience - most notably the initial financial failure of his dream project Fantasia. According to his brother Roy:

“After Snow White, [Walt] wanted to make two animated features a year. We couldn’t sustain it. We grew like a mushroom and operated uneconomically. The war, plus the overloading, and a failure to study the market, put us down. Every creative fellow is so concentrated, he doesn’t like to think through the market, Walt was that kind of guy until he learned his lesson. Afterward he got very conscious of market studies. He learned fast.”

As Disney himself put it:

“I’m happier when what we do pleases a lot of people. The public is our customer. The respect we’ve built up with the public is something we’ve established and embedded in the organization. You build a story. Any writer who wants to crawl off in a hole somewhere is stupid. He has no sounding board, no new ideas. I don’t crawl off in any hole. I talk, bounce it, I change my mind.”

There is an interesting anecdote about Disney that illustrates some key elements of the cognitive strategy of his ‘critic.’ Just prior to the opening of the ride, Pirates of the Caribbean, at Disneyland, Disney was making a last minute inspection of the scenes along the ride. He was dissatisfied with the one depicting New Orleans. He felt something important was missing that would make the ride more authentic but could not put his finger on what it was. Much effort had gone into every detail of the scene and his designers were exasperated. It seemed that the ‘spoiler’ was out and about.

Finally, Disney gathered around him as many people as he could locate, including the maintenance and food service employees. He asked everyone to effectively go to ‘second position’—that is, imagine they were one of the characters in the scene, participating in what was taking place. Disney then systematically took everyone through each of the sensory representational systems. He asked, “Does it look right?” He had spent a lot of time and money on authentic costumes and foliage and had modeled his buildings from New Orleans’ French Quarter down to the wrought iron decorations. “Does it sound right?” he queried. He had installed the most modern audio technology with multiple sound tracks, each timed and positioned perfectly to provide the sounds of music, voices, boats and even animals. He then asked, “Does it feel right?” He had controlled and adjusted the temperature and humidity to exactly match that of a sultry New Orleans night. He next asked, “Does it smell right?” He had created an elaborate setup by which he could infuse and intermingle smells of spicy Cajun food with the smells of gunpowder, moss and brine. Everything checked out, but he still felt something was missing. “What is it?” he asked. Finally, a young man who had been sweeping one of the
In fact, Disney was one of the first to institute and administrate an incentive system purely for creativity - as opposed to external productivity.

"Disney had introduced a bonus system whereby anyone suggesting a gag that was used in a picture received five dollars and anyone providing an idea that formed the basis for an entire cartoon received a hundred dollars."³

Considering that these are depression era dollars this represents a considerable incentive. Incidentally, this bonus system was not limited to his writers and animators. It was extended to everyone at his studio, including the gardening and maintenance people. Since his business was creativity, Disney wanted to make creativity a business.

In fact, what is truly remarkable is that Disney had successfully instituted the principles of ‘total quality’ and the ‘learning organization’ almost 50 years before they became popular. The movement towards total quality and the learning organization have emerged as accelerating advances in management, technology and business methods have made it clear that the ability to learn, on both an individual and organizational level, is an ongoing necessity if organizations are to survive and succeed. Companies and other social systems have begun to realize that effective learning must be an incremental, goal-oriented process that requires organization and constant effort to maintain. An effective learning organization is one that supports the process of learning in all areas - one that encourages learning to learn. This requires a basic valuing and understanding of the learning process. An effective learning organization needs to support not only learners and teachers but anyone who is involved in learning contexts within an organization.

"Walt felt that every idea had been thought of, every gag and even every story - the key was how you used the material to express your own work. So he was never concerned about where ideas came from."³²
According to Peter Senge (1990), there are five ‘disciplines’ which need to be practiced by everyone in an organization in order for it to truly become a ‘learning organization’:

1. Awareness and examination of mental maps and assumptions.
2. Attaining and encouraging personal mastery.
3. Developing vision and creating the future.
4. Encouraging team learning.
5. Developing the ability for systemic thinking.

It seems that Disney intuitively sought to develop and support all of these disciplines through his strategy of balancing Dreamer, Realist and Critic. In Disney's words:

“*We poured the money back into the business in a long-range expansion program pointing at feature-length production and the protection of our new prestige through constantly increasing quality.*

“*Pinocchio might have lacked Snow White’s heart appeal, but technically and artistically it was superior. It indicated that we had grown considerably as craftsmen as well as having grown big in plant and numbers, a growth that is only important in proportion to the quality it adds to our product in the long run.*

“*In fact, our studio had become more like a school than a business. We were growing as craftsmen, through study, self-criticism, and experiment. In this way the inherent possibilities in our medium were dug into and brought to light. Each year we could handle a wider range of story material, attempt things we would not have dreamed of tackling the year before. I claim that this is not genius or even remarkable. It is the way men build a sound business of any kind - sweat, intelligence, and love of the job.*
Summary of Disney’s Creativity Strategy

Perhaps the most comprehensive description of how Disney’s ‘Dreamer,’ ‘Realist,’ and ‘Critic’ operated in conjunction with each other is encapsulated in Disney’s statement that:

“The story man must see clearly in his own mind how every piece of business in a story will be put. He should feel every expression, every reaction. He should get far enough away from his story to take a second look at it... to see whether there is any dead phase... to see whether the personalities are going to be interesting and appealing to the audience. He should also try to see that the things that his characters are doing are of an interesting nature.”

The first part of the description focuses on the interaction between the dreamer and the realist. It is clear that the “second look” is the domain of the ‘spoiler’ or critic.

Certainly, the statement defines three distinct perspectives.

1. The ‘Dreamer’—Vision, first position, whole story:
   “The story man must see clearly in his own mind how every piece of business in a story will be put.”

2. The ‘Realist’—feeling and action, second position, associated, moving:
   “He should feel every expression, every reaction.”

3. The ‘Spoiler’—third position, distant:
   “He should get far enough away from his story to take a second look at it.
   a. Whole story:
      “To see whether there is any dead phase.”
   b. Individual characters:

   “To see whether the personalities are going to be interesting and appealing to the audience.”

   c. Specific behaviors of characters:
      “He should also try to see the things that his characters are doing are of an interesting nature.”

Disney’s “Second look” provides what is called a double description of the event. This ‘double description’ gives us important information that may be left out of any one perspective. Just as the differences in point of view between our two eyes gives us a double description of the world around us that allows us to perceive depth, Disney’s double description of his own creations served to give them an added element of depth.

Of particular interest in NLP is that the “second look” involves a specific reference to being ‘far enough away.’ If it was too close it could be overly influenced by the other perceptual positions. Similarly, it could also overly influence them. If the critic is too close to the dreamer, it may inhibit those dreams.

In summary, Disney’s process of creative dreaming primarily took place through visual imagination but also involved the overlapping and synthesizing of the senses. The Dreamer focuses on the ‘big picture’ with the attitude that anything is possible.

Disney’s process of ‘realizing’ his dreams took place through Disney’s physical association into the characters of the dream and through the ‘storyboarding’ process of chunking the dream into pieces. The Realist acts “as if” the dream is possible and focuses on the formulation of a series of successive approximations of actions required to actually reach the dream.

Disney’s process of critical evaluation involved the separating of himself from the project and taking a more distant ‘second look’ from the point of view of his audience or customers. The Critic seeks to avoid problems and ensure quality by logically applying different levels of criteria and checking how the idea or plan holds up under various “what if” scenarios.
Meta Program Patterns

On a macro level the types of cognitive processes associated with Disney’s Dreamer, Realist and Critic are related to what are known as ‘meta program’ patterns in NLP. Meta program patterns are descriptions of the different ways in which a ‘problem space’, or elements of a problem space, may be approached.

As with the other NLP distinctions, a person can apply the same meta program pattern regardless of content and context. Also, they are not “all or nothing” distinctions and may occur together in varying proportions.

For instance, in approaching a problem one can emphasize moving toward something or away from something, or some ratio of both. Thus, a problem may be approached in varying degrees of ‘proactivity’ and ‘reactivity.’

Chunk-size relates to the level of specificity or generality with which a person or group is analyzing a problem or problem space. Situations may be analyzed in terms varying degrees of detail (micro chunks of information) and generalities (macro chunks of information).

Problem situations may be examined with reference to long term, medium term or short term time frames; and within the context of the past, present or future. The timeframe within which a problem or outcome is considered can greatly influence the way in which it is interpreted and approached. There might be both long term and short term solutions.

Some people tend to look at history for solutions more so than the future. A good example is the difference between former Soviet leader Michail Gorbachev and the people who attempted to overthrow him before the break up of the Soviet Union. One was trying to prepare for the future, the others were trying to preserve the past.

Problems and outcomes may be considered in relation to the achievement of the task, or in relation to issues involving relationship, such as ‘power’ and ‘affiliation.’ The question of balance of focus with respect to task and relationship is obviously a key one with respect to problem solving for managers. In the achievement of the task, either goals, procedures or choices may be emphasized. Issues involving relationship may be approached with an emphasis on the point of view of oneself, others or the context (‘the company,’ ‘the market,’ etc.) to varying degrees.

A problem may be examined by comparing similarities (matching) or differences (mismatching) of problem elements. At the level of a group this relates to whether they are trying to reach consensus or encourage diversity.

Strategies for approaching problems may emphasize various combinations of vision, action, logic or emotion. Micro cognitive patterns on an individual level may be expressed in terms of a general thinking style on the macro level or group level. Vision, action, logic and emotion are more general expressions of visualization, movement, verbalization and feeling.

Different problem solving styles and approaches are characterized by different clusters and sequences of meta program patterns in various ratios. One person’s approach might involve an 80% focus on relationship and 20% focus on task, and 70% emphasis on long-term versus 30% short-term considerations. Someone else may emphasize the task as 90% of the focus and think mostly in terms of short term considerations.

The different clusters of meta program patterns clearly cover different areas of problem space. In this respect, there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ meta programs. Rather, their effectiveness in connection with problem solving relates to the ability to apply them to cover the space necessary to adequately deal with a problem.

On the level of macro strategy, the different phases of Disney’s strategy may be characterized by particular clusters of meta program patterns in addition to their micro level cognitive structure.
In general, the Dreamer phase tends to be oriented towards the longer term future. It involves thinking in terms of the bigger picture and the larger chunks in order to generate new alternatives and choices. Its primary level of focus is on generating the content or the ‘what’ of the plan or idea. In Aristotle’s terms, the Dreamer addresses ‘final causes’.

The Realist phase is more action oriented in moving towards the future, operating with respect to a shorter term time frame than the Dreamer. The Realist is often more focused on procedures or operations. Its primary level of focus is on ‘how’ to implement the plan or idea. The Realist addresses the ‘formal’ and ‘precipitating’ causes.

The Critic phase involves the logical analysis of the path in order to find out what could go wrong and what should be avoided. The Critic phase needs to consider both long and short-term issues, searching for potential sources of problems in both the past and the future. Its primary level of focus is on the ‘why’ of the plan. The Critic must address the ‘constraining’ causes.

The table below summarizes the key meta program patterns associated with Disney’s creative strategy.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dreamer</th>
<th>Realist</th>
<th>Critic</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Representational</strong></td>
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<td>Preference</td>
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<td><strong>Reference</strong></td>
<td>Internal - Self</td>
<td>External - Environment</td>
<td>External - Others</td>
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<td><strong>Mode of Comparison</strong></td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>Mismatch</td>
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**Physiology And Disney’s Creative Cycle**

As with other cognitive processes, physiology is an important influence on creativity and the ability to plan effectively. There are micro and macro level behavioral cues that accompany the Dreamer, Realist and Critic states that can help to more effectively enter the ‘state of mind’ necessary to create a powerful plan or idea.

For instance, think of what it is like when you are ‘dreaming’ or in the early stages of planning or creating when there are many options and choices. What kinds of behavioral cues do you think are the most significant for your ‘dreaming’ process? What is your posture like? Do you move around? How do you orient your head and eyes?

Think of what it is like when you are ‘realizing’ an idea or ‘dream’. What kinds of behavioral cues do you think are the most significant for your ‘realizing’ process?

Think of what it is like when you are thinking ‘critically’ and evaluating your plan. What kinds of behavioral cues do you think are the most significant for your ‘critical’ thinking process?

Which of the three types of thinking styles - Dreamer, Realist or Critic - seems to be the most natural for you?

Based on the descriptions of Disney’s behavior and the modeling of a number of different people who are effective in reaching these states, the following generalizations may be drawn about key patterns of physiology associated with each of the thinking styles making up Disney’s creative cycle:

**Dreamer:** Head and eyes up. Posture symmetrical and relaxed.

**Realist:** Head and eyes straight ahead or slightly forward. Posture symmetrical and slightly forward.

**Critic:** Eyes down. Head down and tilted. Posture angular.
Applications of Disney’s Creativity Strategy

The tools and distinctions of NLP can be used to model the specific cognitive patterns used by exceptional people such as Walt Disney in such a way that they may be transferred to others. One of the goals of NLP is to make an explicit and operational map of the inner strategies of successful people like Walt Disney. Using NLP we can synthesize our information about Disney’s creative thinking strategies into techniques that may be used by anybody desiring to employ some of the creative processes that contributed to Disney’s genius.

Everybody already has the Dreamer, Realist, Critic inside them. Unfortunately, what usually happens is that the Dreamer and the Critic get into a fight. If you take a typical business meeting, you can have a Dreamer, a Realist and a Critic in this meeting. Rather than functioning in some organized strategy, the Dreamer says something, the Critic argues against it, then the Dreamer has a polarity reaction to the Critic. The Dreamer and critic go in conflicting directions until, finally, the Realist says, “We’re out of time.” And you get this mass of chaos as opposed to a process in which these strategies support each other.

One of the biggest problems is that the Critic doesn’t just criticize the dream. The Critic criticizes the Dreamer. It is different to say, “That idea is stupid,” than to say, “You are stupid for having that idea.” Part of why Disney could function so effectively is that he didn’t criticize his team or himself; he criticized the plan to accomplish the dream. I think that what keeps the Critic and the Dreamer from being stuck in a polarity reaction is the Realist.

It is important to structure the relationship between these stages of creativity so it creates a harmonious process. The key is to acknowledge that there will be multiple perspectives of the same thing—double or triple descriptions. You need to see a plan from the critic’s point of view as well as from the Realist’s point of view and the dreamer’s point of view.
Example of Installing Disney’s Creative Cycle

In this Section we are going to explore the process of installation. Once you have identified an effective strategy the next question is, “How do you install it so it functions naturally on its own?”

Dreamer
First, we know from Disney that we have a ‘vision space’ for the Dreamer. We know some of the micro-aspects of the Dreamer. He is trying to visualize the gestalt. And, from basic NLP principles, we know that vision is going to be associated with a particular physiology—remember the caricature that the animator drew of Walt Disney; he was looking up to the right.

Realist
Then we want to establish the Realist. And as we know, the micro-strategy of the Realist involves:

1. Identifying with the characters in the dream.
   and
2. Chunking the dream into a set of steps or ‘storyboard’.

Critic
Lastly there is the Critic. The Critic is going to need to be distant enough from the dream and the plan to get a good ‘second look’ at the dream. Not only will distance help the Critic can see the whole picture, but if the Critic was too close he might interfere.

The following set of steps describes a technique for enhancing personal creativity that uses the key elements of Disney’s creative strategy:

1. Establish a neutral location or ‘Meta Position’ and select three physical locations and label them:
   (1) Dreamer
   (2) Realist
   (3) Critic

![Figure 3 Disney’s Creative Cycle]

2. Anchor the appropriate strategy to each physical location. Use Meta Position to make sure the physiological state associated with each state stays ‘pure.’
   a. Think of a time you were able to creatively dream up or fantasize new ideas without any inhibitions; step into location (1) and relive that experience.
   b. Identify a time you were able to think very realistically and devise a specific plan to put an idea effectively into action; step into position (2) and relive that experience.
   c. Think of a time you were able to constructively
Transcript of Demonstration

R.D.: We know some of the steps of Disney’s strategy. We also want to draw out of you some of your own natural strategies. Installation is both pacing and leading. Who would like to volunteer as the demonstration subject?
(Person X comes up)

Here is the first step. Find a location for your dreamer.

Put aside any content for now. We want to set up the states without content. We want to first focus on only the process. So, here I would like you to think of the time when you were really able to dream freely, when your mind could cover an incredible amount of space, and it didn’t matter if it was real. In fact, what was really great about it, was that it was a kind of escape to a fantasy world, away from the real world. It was your own world that you could make up.

Then step into this location—experience that state.
(X steps into the location, body erect but relaxed, eyes straight ahead)

And maybe to enhance it even a little more, put your head and eyes up just a little bit. So your vision can reach a little farther.
When you really feel that you have been able to get to it you can step back out.
(X smiles and hesitates before he steps back from location)

R.D.: (To audience) Sometimes people don’t want to leave that space!
(To X) Somewhere about here, a little bit behind that dreamer location, I would like you to think of a time you were planning, you were making something concrete as much as you could. You are a realist when you are thinking, “What has to be done to make this happen?” “What steps will reach that goal”?

It is important that you use this micro-strategy to identify the realist because some people confuse the realist with the critic. And believe me critics are not realistic. They can be just as out there as a dreamer. “This could go wrong, that could go wrong.”

When you are the realist you are future pacing yourself through the steps to the dream and creating an action plan for the steps.
(To X) Get into that state of mind and step into the realist location.
(X steps into the realist space, body tilted slightly forward, eyes pointing ahead but slightly down)

And when you have a good sense of it there you can step back out.
(To audience) Since I do computer programming, I know this state very well. You start planning this thing and getting into it. The next thing you know is that it is five o’clock in the morning!
(To X) Now, over here I want to find a location some distance from both your dreamer and your realist. Here is where we are going to put your critic. And to me the physical distance is important. Disney said, “I have to get far enough away and take a second look... so that I am looking at it as my audience would.” You want to think about judging something as if it is not your own idea.

The critic is generally highly auditory and rules oriented. If you are really good at criticizing other people’s ideas, then, you can use that for yourself.

You might also want to think about it from the point of view of your own worst critic. If you are working on a particular project, let’s say designing a training program, I would suggest that you put yourself into the perspective of the person who is most likely to be resistant. Find your worst critic because, if that person
can't find any problem with it, then it is going to be a fairly solid plan.
That is what I would like you to do; have a cold and piercing examination of something at the time when you were really critical. I don't mean just negative. And then step into the critic location.
(X steps into critic location, leaning to side, head is cocked, hand on his chin)
Alright, now step away from that space and come back here to meta position.

Now we have our three locations. By the way, you can always use additional strategies to enhance the locations. For instance, if you are in the dreamer position you can use a metaphor, an image of somebody else who was successful and model them, you can even pretend that you are Walt Disney himself.

"How would Walt Disney respond to this problem?"
"How would Leonardo da Vinci approach it?"

You might also choose to just dream about the first step of something instead of the whole thing. But I suggest you keep a broad view. Usually the problem that we have in pursuing an idea isn't because we don't think about it precisely enough, it is because we don't have a broad enough vision.
(To X) Now I want you to think of the content of that idea or problem you were working on. Is it possible to say the general area? Is it personal?

X: It is a lot about my metaphor of how things happen.
R.D.: In other words, it is a sort of inner personal issue. So what is your goal?
X: To find another process that I would fancy more which would include more tolerance.
R.D.: OK. Here is the starting point. First start here in the dreamer location and dream up a miraculous world where there would be all these things that were so seductive to you that they could draw you into them. As if you waved a magic wand and you could have a world that you would like.

(To audience) Now I see something that might be significant already. This physiology wasn't there the first time (X has his hand on his chin). I saw this physiology when you were in the critic spot.

(Laughter)
This is where NLP can be very useful. Step back out and acknowledge the critic, but let him know he will have his say later. Now step in and just be the dreamer for a moment.

(X steps in with dreamer physiology this time)
So, here there is just this space. See the whole thing, what does it look like?

You have that sort of seductive tolerance.
Maybe you can have a metaphor or even a fantasy, some kind of vision.

This is not about how to solve a problem, this is about how to have a vision. So you don't have to check if the vision is going to work, just have it.

OK, have you got something?

(X nods)
Good. Take this vision, step into the realist location and ask yourself, "OK. What would happen if that was the case?" What are the steps it would take to manifest this vision? Who are the characters that are involved? For instance, if there are parts of you, how would these parts interact with each other? Would it be like Mickey Mouse and Goofy? Maybe it would be more like Indiana Jones?
(Some laughter in the room) But it doesn't have to be a metaphor.
criticize a plan—that is, to offer positive and constructive criticism as well as to find problems. Make sure the location is far enough away from the others that it doesn’t interfere. Step into location (3) and relive that experience.

3. Pick an outcome you want to achieve and step into the dreamer location. Visualize yourself accomplishing this goal as if you were a character in a movie. Allow yourself to think about it in a free and uninhibited manner.

4. Step into the realist location, associate into the “dream” and feel yourself in the positions of all of the relevant characters. Then, see the process as if it were a ‘storyboard’ (a sequence of images).

5. Step into the critic position and find out if anything is missing or needed. Then, turn the criticisms into ‘how’ questions for the dreamer.
   a. Remember, the critic is to criticize the plan, not the realist or the dreamer.
   b. It is often helpful to have the critic initially acknowledge which elements of the plan are satisfactory before asking questions.

6. Step back into the dreamer position to creatively come up with solutions, alternatives and additions to address the questions posed by the critic. If the critic’s questions seem too harsh or it is difficult to think of the questions without accessing the critic state, go through Meta Position before returning to the dreamer location. You may even wish to rephrase the critic’s questions from Meta Position.

7. After you have repeated this cycle several times, consciously think of something else that you really enjoy and are good at but continue to walk through the dreamer, realist and critic locations. This will promote lateral thinking and unconscious gestation.

8. Continue to cycle through steps 4, 5 and 6 until your plan congruently fits each position.
You don't have to get the whole movie. This is like the first cut. You just go, "How am I going to make this work?"

(X's hand begins to move toward his chin. Robert grabs the hand) You will have your chance critic!

(Laughter from the participants)

At least let him get some good stuff you can tear in to.

(X returns to realist physiology)

You can get a few of the steps that might be necessary to carry out that dream....

Good. Now we can let the critic out. Come way over here to the critic location.

(X steps into critic location in critic's physiology)

So what do you think of those steps? What is missing? Is it going to work or is it simple still?

You don't have to find the solution, all you have to do is find what is wrong?

This is the person who does problem finding, not problem solving. The problem finding is as an important part as problem solving.

X: I don't know for instance how I can know that I have reached the first step.

R.D.: OK. So, this is one question that this critic has.

X: And it can't work if I can't check anything.

R.D.: Great. These are very important issues relating to evidence procedure. Now, take those concerns and walk up over there to the dreamer location and the dreamer is going to dream up a way that you are going to know how it got to the first step. The dreamer might say, "Oh, yes, the first step, I know how!" "What a neat challenge!"

You can make a metaphor. It could be crazy. It's just a dream.

(X's physiology changes. He breaks into a broad smile)

WALT DISNEY

X: Mm... (Laughter in the crowd.)

R.D.: Einstein used to try to visualize what it would look like to ride a light beam. This is a little crazy, isn't it? Of course, it upset our concept of the universe.

Now, take that enriched vision and step over here to the realist location.

(X moves to realist location. His physiology shifts to that of the realist state)

How are you going to implement that? Say to yourself, "Alright, I've got to do this, I've got to do that!" "What are the steps?" "How am I going to know it?" "Maybe come up with some clever way of figuring that out!"

Put yourself into it. You are at the first step and you know that you are at the first step. What pieces are there?

Do you have something?

X: Ah-hum...

R.D.: Alright. Now over to the critic again.

(X moves into critic location and physiology)

Well, what do you think?

(X hesitates, then starts to smile.)

(Bursts of laughter from audience)

It is getting hard to be staying so critical, eh?

Let us go to the next part for a moment. Without thinking about anything in particular consciously, I want you to walk to the dreamer location, pause for a moment, then walk to the realist location, and then return again to the critic spot. And do that three times without anything in particular in mind.

X: Am I supposed to see the vision?

R.D.: You can or you may let your mind wander to something else for a moment.
(X. walks through the locations according to R.D.'s instructions)

(To audience) Have you ever seen people pacing up and down when they are trying to solve a problem? We do that kind of thing all the time.

(X finishes the three loops)

R.D.: (To X) Now, come to meta-position and consciously think for a moment about the vision. Right now. Has it changed at all since you last checked in on it?

X: Yes, it did. Each step has a complementary function. Other options came out. It has become more congruent and stronger.

(To Audience) In other words, all he was supposedly doing was walking, but the strategy continued to run because it was anchored to the locations.

He is starting to put the pieces together in a more balanced way. The states are anchored to physical spaces and they don't care about what your conscious mind is thinking at that moment. These states are going to have an effect on what is happening even if you were thinking about what you had for dinner last night.

Again, you keep taking three perspectives. You will align them to a common vision. When you are aligning all the functions literally and physically in the same direction, you get yourself out of the way. When I step out of the realist location, all that is left there to criticize is the plan, not me. I am not in that plan. There is no person there, it is the steps of the plan.

Then you have set up an aligned strategy that is going to create a positively reinforcing feedback loop. It uses all of your neurology in coordination.

These physiological states are literally accessing a few billion brain cells at a time. You could visualize the activity as lights which go through the body, so that you hear this brilliant, bright light coming down and it is very focused. You kind of watch the nervous system, twinkling as all different parts light up and you get that system working on something. As Mozart said, "It eventually becomes a pleasant lively dream that magically produces something concrete."

(To X) May Walt Disney be with you!

(To audience) By the way, notice the importance of setting the first couple of loops through the locations. If I get the critic physiology in the dreamer's location, I contaminate this space. This is probably going to happen 90% of the time when people try to solve a problem. They start off immediately by contaminating the space—whether it is a single person or a group of people.

If you can sequence it and chunk it then you are going to have something that works smoothly. So your first couple of loops are really important. After that it becomes desirable for the physiology to start to integrate together because eventually you might find that all of those three functions form one larger macro-strategy that happens at the same time—remember the caricature of Disney. But it is important to the installation to start very cleanly.

I always find it amazing that people don't have any places for creativity in their homes, or in their companies. I find sometimes when I am working on a problem, if I really want to dream it, it is as if my dreamer lives out in the woods near my house. So I go out into this forest full of gnomes and fairies.

Then my office is sort of my realist place. I get there and I work away on my computers. Then I have to leave it and go down to my kitchen or living room and I've got to think about that idea that I had from the critic position. Is it really going to work?
Sometimes the more you can initially separate these when you first start solving the problem and get the circuit going, the more trouble and confusion it saves you later on.

Are there any questions?

Q 1: Is it important that it begins with vision in the dreamer and auditory in the critic?

R.D.: This has to do with the degree to which it is your own versus Disney's strategy that you want to install. My answer is:

Having a choice is always better than not having it. If you start up with something that’s auditory you might want to add vision just to see how it would enhance the process. So I would keep the choice at least.

Q 2: Can we use it for something we want to achieve in the future?

R.D.: Yes. What you work on doesn't have to be a problem you are trying to solve. I suggest you all just start with some vision you have. If the circuit works you may surprise yourself.

After the Exercise

Q 1: It was very powerful. Can you do it with more than one person at a time?

R.D.: You can take a whole group through it. You can cover a much broader space that way.

I use this process in my own computer company. We have actually different rooms where we can go to think different ways: one to brainstorm, another to plan and another to evaluate. When we brainstorm we most often sit in a circle. But when we start planning we all sit next to each other and look at the plan on a board. And when we are evaluating we sit around a table with the plan in the center and ask: “Is this really going to work?” So you can also set up the environment to support a multi-person circuit as well.

Q 2: Where is the decision point then?

R.D.: It is at the critical evaluation.

Q 3: Could we consider that at the evaluation time there is one person in charge of the decision process?

R.D.: In some companies where you have a hierarchical structure, yes. But what they call “buy in” management is based on group consensus rather than on hierarchy. It all depends on the kind of evidence procedure you are using.

Q 4: I was surprised that it changed my whole relationship with time. I have a project due three years from now that I am going to start tomorrow night, and after this, there is no limit in time because now I dreamed that I could always dream and realize what I dream!

R.D.: Sometimes people start with a dream that literally is very distant in their minds, maybe in terms of years from now. And after going through the Disney strategy it is right here and not in the distance anymore.

Q 5: In the critic state, I was often quite negative and sad; but now, knowing that I can go afterwards to the dream state, I feel much better.

R.D.: The whole dynamic of the circuit shifts if the critic knows that I will go to him for advice, and that he can seek help from the other functions as well. Then it is not like being so lost or alone.

Sometimes the magic that happens here is that it really starts to become constructive criticism. The critic begins to give positive feedback as opposed to negative. And when your own worst critic says, “Go for it!” you know nothing can stop you.
Q 6: I noticed that the critic part actually gave a feeling of security.

Q 7: We felt after finishing the three part round that we needed to bring in a fourth part—which was the "will" part that the subject felt like putting in front of the dreamer's part.

R.D.: At some stage you want to take the dream and connect it to your mission. I think this is what you are talking about with the "will." So once I attached the vision, the dream, to the mission then it becomes a commitment. This is a nice next step.

I want to say one thing about potential problems with this process.

The thing that we have to realize with any strategy is that the chain is no stronger than the weakest link. In other words, if some part of the strategy is weak it can throw the whole thing out of balance. Sometimes a person says, "I can't visualize, I can't do the dreamer's step." And clearly the ability to be creative is going to be relative to your ability to develop and utilize your senses. Some people are much more comfortable as the critic, they spend 90% of their lives in that position. This is where developing flexibility with micro-strategies is so crucial.

The locational sorting of the different processes helps to organize and coordinate them and avoid interferences or 'contamination' between the states.

Turning a criticism into a question helps to avoid the 'negative' effects of the critic and stimulate the Dreamer.

Once a creative cycle is robustly 'installed' it can be enriched by processes which stimulate lateral thinking and unconscious gestation.

Team Learning Process: 'Storyboarding' Multiple Perspectives of Idea and Problem Spaces

The creative cycle of a group or team often involves the movement between large chunks (the big picture or 'vision') and small chunks (the establishment of micro objectives to reach the larger goal). A key part of managing a group's creativity involves the ability to break down the general roles of group or team members into the specific cognitive and interactive processes required to implement or fulfill that role. For example, goals that stimulate creativity are usually set towards something in the future. In the Dreamer phase, they are more long term. At the Realist phase, they are more short term.

In the processes of evolving, encouraging and drawing out the creativity of others it is important to be able to identify and adapt to both physical and psychological constraints. Managing the creative cycle of a group involves establishing physical and psychological constraints which direct the group's process in relation to the phase of the creative cycle they are in.

Different stages of the creative cycle involve constraints relating to different types of evidences. An evidence for dreaming might be the number of ideas generated. But, for the critic, having a lot of ideas is perceived as a problem.

Meta program patterns often relate to one another in natural clusters (e.g., shortening a time frame for a project tends to focus people on the task instead of the relationship). As we pointed out earlier, there are clusters of meta program patterns that can be associated with the Dreamer, Realist and Critic. Knowing about these clusters can allow you to recognize them in people or, to draw them out of people intentionally. The flexibility of a group can even be enhanced by assigning or encouraging different clusters of meta program patterns to individual group members.
For effective group creativity it is important to incorporate:

1. All three of the stages of the creative cycle (Dreamer, Realist, Critic)

and

2. To incorporate the different points of view of the group members in all three stages.

One of the problems that can often happen during a meeting is that the Dreamer says something that is perceived as outrageous to which the Critic responds negatively. In reaction to the Critic, the Dreamer polarizes and starts defending the dream even more. The Critic complains and they go around and around in a vicious circle. Finally the Realist says, “We are running out of time. Let’s get down to work.” But it ends up as a chaotic mix of polarities. The cycle doesn’t progress because the Dreamer is constantly being interrupted by the critic and so on.

In an effective group, each would support or complement each other’s strengths by having the dreamer output a number of ideas to a realist who outputs a prototype to the critic, who evaluates the specific prototype, etc.

An important criterion for stimulating creativity in a group is to maintain balance. On the one hand, it is important to draw out as full a range of potential as possible in group members. On the other hand, it is also important to draw out and utilize individual strengths.

Disney’s strategy acknowledges that there are different kinds of potentials within people. Some people have strengths as a Dreamer or Realist or Critic. One way to stimulate creativity is to try to develop the flexibility of everybody to cover the different phases. Another strategy is to identify and then utilize the particular strengths of certain individuals, but avoiding categorizing them in a way that ‘pigeon holes’ them.

Different processes are effective to stimulate creativity at the different stages of the creative cycle. Disney, as you recall, had different rooms for the Dreamer, Realist and Critic. He had one room that was a dreamer room which had pictures and inspirational drawings and sayings all over the walls. Everything was chaotic and colorful in this room, and criticisms were not allowed—only dreams! For their Realist space, the animators had their own drawing tables, stocked with all kinds of modern equipment, tools and instruments that they would need to manifest the dreams. The tables were arranged in a large room in which all of the animators could see and talk to other animators. For the Critic, Disney had a little room that was underneath the stairs where they would look at the prototype pencil sketches and evaluate them. The room always seemed cramped and hot, so they called it the ‘sweatbox.’

One powerful form of team learning and creativity arises out of the fact that people have different maps of the world. The way that somebody else represents a particular individual’s problem or idea can automatically provide a way of enriching and clarifying the idea or problem.

The next process is designed to apply Disney’s strategies in a way that takes advantage of this natural process of team learning and co-creation. It is called “inter-vision.” In “supervision” there is an implied hierarchical relationship between people; the supervisor provides the ‘right map’ to the other person. In “inter-vision” it is assumed that people are peers and that there is no one right map. There is also an important implication in the term “vision.” One of the goals of the exercise is to apply visual and symbolic thinking strategies in a group context.

The exercise has to do with the influence that different ways of representing and conceptualizing the ‘problem space’ of a plan or idea have on our ability to find potential solution space. It is best done in a group of four in order to get enough range of diversity.

The exercise is organized into three phases: 1) a Dreamer, 2) a Realist and 3) a Critic stage.
In the Dreamer phase, one of the group members, the ‘explorer,’ is to describe a plan or idea to the other group members. The content of the idea or plan is not restricted. Depending on the relationship of the group members, it could range from a business project to a plan for addressing the problems of a client to a family vacation.

As they are listening, the team members should make sure they are assuming the appropriate strategy and physiology associated with the Dreamer perspective. For instance, rather than judge or critically evaluate the idea or its feasibility, the goal of each group member at this stage is to “see clearly in his own mind how every piece of business in a story will be put.” As they attempt to see the ‘big picture,’ group members will want to listen with their head and eyes up in a posture that is symmetrical and relaxed.

“Why do you want to do it?” “What is the purpose?”
“What are the payoffs?” “How will you know that you have them?” “When can you expect to get them?”
“Where do you want the idea to get you in the future?”
“Who do you want to be or be like in relationship to the idea?”

The focus of the Dreamer stage of the intervention process is on representing and widening the perception of the problem space of a particular plan or idea. These questions can help both the explorer and the other group members to widen, enrich and clarify their mental picture of the problem space of the idea or plan.

In the next phase of the exercise, each group member (including the explorer) is to make a simple ‘storyboard’ of the plan or idea. This ‘first approximation’ should be very general and synthetic, encapsulating the whole plan or idea. It can be any kind of a diagram or a sketch. It may be best to make a symbolic or metaphorical picture of the plan or idea. For example, somebody might draw a kind of landscape; another person may just draw a group of symbols like rectangles, circles and stars and connect them with lines and arrows.

Each person is to make his or her own representational map individually without looking at the other drawings. So, each draws his or her own individual picture of what this problem space is, including the explorer, making a total of four pictorial maps of the problem space. Then group members share their pictures and discuss the assumptions and criteria behind the various drawings and interpretations. Contrasting different peoples’ maps and assumptions about a problem space is a way to enrich perceptions about that space.

“Intervisors” are to explain their drawings without giving any specific suggestions or solutions. They are simply explaining their representation and what assumptions they
made. That is, interviewers don’t try to tell the explorer how to manifest the idea or plan; they simply show and explain their “storyboard” of that plan or idea.

Group members may then explore the following ‘Realist’ questions.

“How specifically will the idea be implemented? How will you know if the goal is achieved? How will the performance criteria be tested?”

“Who will do it?” (Assign responsibility and secure commitment from the people who will be carrying out the plan.)

“When will each phase be implemented?” “When will the overall goal be completed?”

“Where will each phase be carried out?”

“Why is each step necessary?”

During the discussion, group members should be sure they are assuming the strategy and physiology of the Realist. As they are discussing, individual group members may want to sit with their head and eyes straight ahead or slightly forward with a posture that is symmetrical and slightly forward. Their cognitive focus should be to act ‘as if’ the dream is achievable and consider how the idea or plan can be implemented; emphasizing specific actions and defining short term steps. Group members may want to put themselves into ‘second position’ with the people involved in the plan and perceive it from several points of view.

Realist State Physiology

In the Critic stage of this ‘intervision’ process, the separate ‘storyboards’ are to be synthesized together into a common storyboard. Typically this is done by the explorer who is to give feedback to the group in terms of how his or her own map of the problem space has been enriched by each member. The explorer restates the plan or idea and makes a ‘next approximation’ by creating a new or combined storyboard.

The group is then to take “a second look” at this ‘storyboard’. As Disney advised, the group should get “far enough away” to be able to take this second look effectively. This may involve the group physically changing location or moving the representation of the storyboard somewhere else. Group members may then consider the following ‘Critic’ questions:

“Does this plan match the criteria and purpose for which it was intended?”

“Why might someone object to this new idea?”

“Who will this new idea effect and who will make or break the effectiveness of the idea and what are their needs and payoffs?”

“What positive things are derived from the current way(s) of doing things?”
"How can those things be kept when you implement the new plan or idea?"

"When and where would you not want to implement this new idea?"

As Disney did, the group may want to consider several different perspectives and criteria as they evaluate the storyboard - 1) the whole plan, 2) the characters or individuals involved in implementing the plan or who will be affected by the plan and 3) the specific actions of those individuals.

While taking the second look, group members will want to employ the appropriate strategy and physiology related to the 'Critic'. Their purpose is to help avoid problems by taking different perspectives and finding missing links by logically considering 'what would happen if' problems occur. This may be facilitated by assuming an angular posture in which the eyes and head are down and slightly tilted.

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When the questions have been collected, the group may switch to another 'explorer' or may keep cycling through the phases to make successive approximations of the plan.

To summarize the steps of the process:

1. The explorer describes (in 5 minutes or less) a plan or idea. Group members assume Dreamer strategy and physiology.

2. Group members explore Dreamer questions to clarify and enrich their perception of the 'problem space' of the plan or idea.

3. Each person, including the explorer, draws a simple 'storyboard' or visual map of the problem space (to be done in 5 minutes or less).

4. Group members compare the pictures, explain them and discuss the criteria and assumptions behind them. The discussion should also be kept within a time limit of approximately 5 minutes per person.

5. Group members then explore the Realist questions, assuming the strategy and physiology of the Realist, in order to clarify specific steps and actions.

6. The separate 'storyboards' are synthesized together by the 'explorer' and the Critic questions are considered employing an appropriately 'distant' strategy and physiology.

7. The group may keep cycling through the phases to make successive approximations of the plan.

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In order to be 'constructive' as critics, group members will want to first acknowledge which criteria have been met, and formulate their 'criticisms' as questions as much as possible.
Conclusion

Disney's strategy of cycling between Dreamer, Realist and Critic provides a powerful basis for almost any creative or productive endeavor.

Disney's process of creative dreaming primarily took place through visual imagination but also involved the overlapping and synthesizing of the senses. The 'Dreamer' focused on the 'big picture' with the attitude that anything is possible. The Dreamer phase tends to be oriented towards the longer term future. It involves thinking in terms of the bigger picture and the larger chunks in order to generate new alternatives and choices. Its primary level of focus is on generating the content or the 'what' of the plan or idea - the 'final causes'.

Disney's process of 'realizing' his dreams took place through the physical association into the characters of the dream and through the 'storyboarding' process of chunking the dream into pieces. The Realist acts "as if" the dream is possible and focuses on the formulation of a series of successive approximations of actions required to actually reach the dream. The Realist phase is more action with respect to the future, operating within a shorter term time frame than the Dreamer. The Realist is often more focused on procedures or operations. Its primary level of focus is on 'how' to implement the plan or idea - the 'formal' and 'precipitating' causes.

Disney's process of critical evaluation involved separating himself from the project and taking a more distant 'second look' from the point of view of his audience or customers. Its primary level of focus is on the 'why' of the plan. The Critic seeks to avoid problems and ensure quality by logically applying different levels of criteria and checking how the idea or plan holds up under various "what if" scenarios. The Critic phase involves the analysis of the plan in order to find out what could go wrong and what should be avoided. The Critic phase needs to consider both long and short-term issues, searching for potential sources of problems in both the past and the future - the 'constraining' causes.

Footnotes to Chapter 3

2. Disney, W., Growing Pains (1941), reprinted in SMPTE Journal, July 1991, pp. 547-550
6. ibid, p. 36
10. ibid, p. 159
11. ibid, p. 186
13. ibid

15. *ibid*, p. 71

16. *ibid*, p. 47


19. *ibid*


21. *ibid*, p. 186


26. *ibid*, p. 86


29. *ibid*

30. *ibid*


32. *ibid*, p. 153

