Creativity, Inc.

Authors: **Ed Catmull with Amy Wallace**
Publishers: **Bantam Press, 2014**
Reviewed By: **Yasmeen Pathan |** *yasmeenpathan@hotmail.com*

The book "Creativity, Inc." is a documentation of the intellectual experiences of the author Ed Catmull over the four decades of his career in building Pixar Animation and Disney Animation who were on the forefront of knowledge era. What should have ended up as an autobiography has turned out to be a chronicle of the author's evolution into a creative explorer. The author's acute power of observation, intricate sense of analysis and style of narration has lifted the book from a mundane diary of an executive to a profound treatise on the alchemy of creating and sustaining knowledge organisations in a turbulent environment. As a result the book would command attention more from the inquisitive researchers and philosophers than just a student of animation.

The book is structured into four parts. The First Part, like the Book of Origin, describes Ed's journey through childhood, how he grew up watching Disney Stories, his sojourn at University of Utah from graduation in Physics and Computer Science to Ph.D. Ed fondly remembers how Professor Ivan Sutherland, one of the pioneers of interactive computer graphics, inspired and taught him a new way to animate, not with a pencil but with a Computer. Ed describes the baby steps he took in making his first short animated film, in 1972, a digitized model of his left hand. It is at this stage that Ed perceived Einstein and Disney as two extreme poles of creativity. Einstein explained what already existed, while Disney invented the new - both artistically and technologically. Ed says, Animation is not just *movement;* it is *movement* plus *emotions* with lot more emphasis on the latter.

Ed's first job (1974) was at New York Institute of Technology as Manager with Alex Schure as his boss. In 1979, George Lucas, writer-director of *Star Wars* reached out and hired Ed into Lucasfim because he wanted someone who loved film and knew computers. Soon John Lasseter from Disney also joined the team and together they founded *Pixar* within Lucasfim. Later, in 1986, when Lucasfilm was going through a rough patch, Steve Jobs came in with a deal to buy out Pixar from Lucasfim. Ed was made the president of the new company. Thus began Ed's interactions with Steve Jobs. He describes Steve as hard charging, assertive, dismissive, condescending, threatening, relentless and even bullying. Since Pixar was not doing well Steve Jobs kept trying to sell it off. In 1991, Pixar signed a contract with Disney to make three movies. This was the break that *Pixar* was waiting for. The Idea of *Toy Story* was born. *Toy Story* was released in 1995 and was an instant success. Immediately Pixar went public to record as the biggest IPO of 1995 raising $140 millions.

Each Pixar movies - Toy Story (1995), A Bug's Life (1998), Toy Story 2 (1999), Monsters Inc. (2001), Finding Nemo (2003), The Incredibles (2004), Ratatouille (2007), Walle E (2008), Up (2009), Toy Story 3 (2010), Brave (2012), Monsters University (2013) and Inside Out (2015) - was a synthesis of Art and Technology. Despite all the innovations the team did not let technology overwhelm their real purpose of making a great film. The team always gave more priority to "Storyline" over the urge to produce a film; indirectly it meant priority to creativity.

Ed states that story is made by ideas and ideas are generated by people. The key to success is getting the right people in place. This is the challenge all leaders and institution builders have been addressing all along. The difference between great leaders and leaders is that the former nurture and inspire their team to rise to the challenging tasks at hand. There is also a description of *Steve Jobs Building,* the structure that housed Pixar, as a model of self expression. Ed goes on to say the need to design the eco-system to encourage and inspire people to mingle, meet and communicate.

The Second Part is about creating new ideas. Ed describes this in five dimensions: The first of these is creating ideas – at Pixar this was primarily carried out through the Braintrust consisting of John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton, Pete Docter, Lee Unkrich and Joe Ranfit. They acted as mentors in nurturing and reviewing

new ideas. The second dimension is about managing Fear and Failure. While Pixar tried to allay fear of its members through trials and mentoring, the author argues that in creative pursuits one has to learn to live with some amount of failure. The third dimension is the result of institutionalization: When activities are institutionalized, the economics of operation demands certain level of volume for sustenance. This pressure leads to compromises on quality. The author compares the organisation in such a state to a 'hungry beast' and the resulting outputs to 'ugly children'. The process of creation is akin to metamorphosis through which the product has to be nurtured to its full potential. At Pixar, they always gave higher priority to values and ethics than to quantitative goals.

The fourth dimension is change and randomness. Ed argues that change is always desirable as it brings in a breath of fresh air. Change unsettles the existing paradigm and inertia of comforts; hence it is always dreaded. Steve and Ed had decided in 2006 to sell Pixar to Disney because they needed to bring in change and freshness. This brought in significant changes in focus and approach of Pixar; but the entire theme in all endeavors remained 'an experience of life'. Randomness brings in the element of uncertainty or unknown and addressing randomness triggers inspiration and originality. Ed also discusses the mathematical concepts that explains the randomness: the principle of linearity, the bell curve of normal distribution and the stochastic self-similarity.

The fifth is the 'Hidden' dimension. Many things remain hidden to us for one or more of the following reasons: (i) The position held by you – juniors may not like to share unpleasant things with you. (ii) Complexities of the situation create barriers to transparency in understanding. Openness is necessary to move forward and it can happen only in a culture that is ready to accept its own blind spots. One's past experience should help him open new doors and new paths; not scare him of the unknown. In our daily life we rarely see beyond 40 % and it is our past experience that conjures up the picture. We need to be aware of the risk that our perception may be far from reality. Ed argues that the movie that one plans to make is a bridge between the known and the unknown. One's experience, people and the processes are the known; the unknown is unseen and uncreated.

Part Three is about 'Building and Sustaining'. Ed cites four ideas in this direction. First, our perceptions are deceptive. Second, we do not see the difference between existing and the new

information coming from outside. We tend to treat them at par and draw conclusions. We make our own interpretations and remain inflexible. People working together create a shared world view. In a way this is good: people tend to be cohesive. But it has its own down side: such persons and groups develop 'frog-in-the-well' attitude. Hence the need for change and infusion of new talents. At Pixar, Ed and his team engaged a strategy to break this mental logjam. It consisted of solving problems together, integrating technology and art, carrying out short experiments, frequent non-threatening reviews and continuing to learn. Ed believed that copying or imitating was just craft without art; something which one is ought to know. Art is using craft to go beyond the known. Good creators, artists and managers do not dictate; they reach out, listen, wrangle, coax and cajole the team towards the goal.

Part Four is about Ed's personal experience of implementing whatever he knew or learned. The decision to merge Pixar animation with Disney Animation came as a shock to the team members of Pixar. This part describes how the transition was carried out smoothly. Ed started with the premise that the primary challenge of the merger was how to make a sustainable creative environment. Disney Animation was observed to be, according to Ed, a more mechanistic organisation. The description revolves around making it a humane and vibrant organisation.

Growth brought in a new range of challenges. Operating costs were rising. The style of working was undergoing subtle changes impacting the economies of operation in the opposite direction. External environment - market – was undergoing fast and tremendous changes triggered by technology and competition. Customer expectations – again triggered by technology and competition- were changing very fast. Ideas, the foundation on which Ed had built the organisation, could come from anywhere and anyone. So the challenge of managing a knowledge organisation is about organizing the nurturing of ideas from within as well as from outside the organization.

The book is an eloquent treatise on institution building in the knowledge era. Toffler predicted the era as the age of enlightenment. Porter called it the innovation-driven stage of economic development. In this stage the competitive asset of organisations and economies is invariably the capability to innovate. The capability to innovate can be nurtured in organisations only by building and sustaining creative eco - systems. Ed's experiments have been precisely in this

direction. The book is recommended for all those who are involved in building organisations, whether in the corporate sector or in the academic environment. With increasing focus on knowledge the difference between the two sectors is only bound to diminish.

OAKBROOK BUSINESS REVIEW
Journal of the New Generation Management Thinkers

OAKBROOK BUSINESS REVIEW (OBR) is a journal of the **Oakbrook Business School (OBS)**, dedicated to the emerging trends in management. OBS is a new generation B-School that believes in academic excellence. Its endeavor is to nurture excellence and leadership in academia and through this initiative. It intends to bring about a paradigm shift in the quality of leadership in all sectors of businesses around it. OBS has major focus on research and publications; it has also embarked on entrepreneurship and incubation for the student community and the SME segment around its ecosystem. In January 2015, OBS has entered into an MOU with Wollongong University, Sydney, Australia for academic collaboration.

OBR is created with the vision of emerging as the cradle of management thinkers and thought leaders. Its mission is to help nurture management thinking and research among the management professionals and academicians. It has spelt out the objectives of the journal as
· To offer a platform for research publications of the emerging management intellectuals
· To help and nurture research talent among management teachers and professionals.

OBR has constituted an editorial board consisting of distinguished academicians to steer the directions of the journal. The journal will focus on various aspects of the management domain. The journal would have about 4 papers (Conceptual, Empirical or Research) 2 case-studies and 2 book reviews. Each of the papers and case-studies would be subjected to two reviews to ensure quality of the journal. The maximum permissible length of a paper is 5000 words excluding an abstract of maximum 200 words. OBR is committed to communicate the editorial decision whether to publish or not in a time span of 4 weeks from the date of receipt of the manuscript. To facilitate this deadline, OBR would monitor the review process very closely.

As OBR is committed to nurture research talent among management teachers and professionals, special care is planned to be taken to mentor and guide the new authors/researchers to enable them to achieve certain threshold standards of quality.

Researchers/Authors are invited to send in their contributions to the editorial office through mail. OBR is also keen to enlarge its panel of reviewers; persons interested in being empanelled as reviewers may also send in their review with focus on publication track-record to the editorial office.

edit.obr@oakbrook.ac.in