21 Lessons from Pixar: Innovation Leadership and Culture

- Leader provides → Unifying vision → ALSO turns visions into clear directions
  - "Give the implementers all the information to do their job without telling them how to do their job."
- No mixed signals in the organization → two different quality standard products is NOT OK.
- Management’s job is NOT to prevent risk but to build capacity to recover from experimentation failure.
- Resist natural tendency to avoid or minimize risk.
- It is OK to hire someone smarter than you 😊... in fact that is what you should strive for.
- THE EXPERIMENTAL MINDSET: “Take a (small) chance” → that is how you come up with the unexpected.
- Build organizations that constantly challenge all assumptions.
- Innovation is a “team game” → a creatively diverse team is the building block → build in diversity into teams (different thinking mindsets, different expertise).
- Ideas are everyone’s job → not just the managers’.
- If we are not always a little scared, we are not doing an innovative job.
- Foster ambiguity tolerance → accept uncertainty/discomfort → Essence of creative tension.
- Ensure that talented people work well together → “everyone feels that they are part of the extraordinary”.
- Good idea + bad team = FAIL ☹️ → Mediocre idea + Great team = SUCCESS... or MOVE ON.
- Small “incubation teams” → stew on ideas... AVOID GROUP THINK 😑
  - Judge their dynamics → don’t judge their ideas... early!
- “Creative brain trust” → advisory team → provide consulting support to idea people.
- Build Transparent Organizations → OK to show work in progress (WIP) → elicit critique (not criticism)
  - Learn and fix it before it is too late (show dailies → constant feedback → “everyone encouraged to comment”)
  - Once you get comfortable showing your WIP → you get more creative
    o Develop the ability to SELL YOUR IDEA to everyone.
    o People learn from each other and inspire each other (one’s WIP is the creative spark for another).
    o No surprises in the end.
- SAFE for everyone to offer ideas.
- Avoid “proper channels syndrome” → everyone able to communicate with everyone.
- Give new hires confidence to speak up
  - Even the leaders are willing to show their warts and scars.
- “OPEN” → disseminate your ideas externally → PAY FORWARD.
- INNOVATIVE organizations are the most INTROSPECTIVE ones.
  - Post mortems of success as well as failures.
    o Uncovering problems when you are successful is the hardest.
    o “Lessons learned” & “Things you would do differently”
    o Data driven critique (Objective post mortem).