Collective Creativity Within The Animation Industry in Malaysia

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Abstract. *Creativity is often credited to the brilliant mind of a single person who is perceived to champion unique and new ideas all by him or herself. However ideas can often take new and improve forms should people collaborated with one another. In the animation industry, creative ideas are crucial to the development of new stories, worlds and characters that once only exists in imagination into reality. The research will attempt to reveal if collective creativity efforts are being practiced in animation studios in Malaysia as well as to explore employees' beliefs in an attempt to explain the challenges faced by animation studios. This research was done in a form of a survey given to members of the public who are involved in the animation industry. According to the results, animations studios in Malaysia are on the right track; showing positive results towards collective creativity though the process is not explicitly coordinated. And in a perceived reserved society, culture seems to be the number 1 barrier when it comes to collective creativity.*

Keywords. *Animation; Organizational Creativity; Innovation; Knowledge Management; Malaysia.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Creativity and innovation are simply thought of little importance to the success of organizations due to the traditional view that skills can be hired to run any business. It is a stereotype that remains with us today. The difference in the animation industry however is that it deals with stories which are usually timeless and do not expire. This is therefore crucial that animation companies create a good story and memorable characters to remain attractive and entertaining to audiences.

The first animation series created in Malaysia called ―Hikayat Sang Kancil‖ was successfully aired in the country in 1983(Hassan Abd. Muthalib,2012). But even after more than three decades, this industry has yet to become cost effective for most animation studios to continue producing animation series or movies. Despite numerous grants, government aids, and an increasing number of institutions that provides training in the art of animation, most studios find it hard to sustain a profitable business in this industry.

Creativity and innovation are the driving force for new ideas and creation. By thinking and then producing, individuals and organizations are able to perceive things differently from before, finding hidden patterns or connections between things that might not even be relevant or obvious to each other which could result in unexpected solutions or creations.

In Malaysia, creativity and innovation are perceived to be often neglected in animations studios with the belief that investors often are unable to see any potential or understand the purpose of investing in creativity when many are barely able to sustain daily work operations (Hassan Abdul Muthal, 2004). It is believed that many business owners still believe that skills can be hired to run an animation business and there for do not invest much time or effort in training the mindset of their people to collaborate creatively. The danger of this situation for the animation organizations is that if the film isn't entertaining, informative or relevant, the public will give it a bad review which will ruin the film's chance of success whilst also ruining the company's reputation.

The animation industry in Malaysia needs to spend more time and resources to facilitate a sound preproduction to inject more creativity/novelty into the content that is developed. There is limited research done to establish if animation organisations in Malaysia are utilizing

pre-existing techniques or concepts to maximize creativity and to highlight the possible opportunities and challenges of creative collaboration in the animation industry.

The Objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify if existing creative strategies or known factors that facilitates collective creative are used/considered to enhance collective creativity.
2. To highlight challenges, attitudes and beliefs of creative collaboration in the animation industry.

This paper will attempt to look at the aspects of creativity, innovation and collaboration within the organisation in an attempt to study how coordinated collective creativity and knowledge management can be utilized to guide the many departments in the animation industry in Malaysia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Animation industry in Malaysia

Animation in Malaysia was first established in the early 1980's and began commercially in the 1990's (Hassan Abd. Muthalib,2012). The government formed FINAS (National Film Development Corporation Malaysia) in 1981 to assist the development of the film industry as a formal and a recognized national industry (Ahmad, 2000).

Between 1990's and 2015, many new local studios have emerged; some producing local content while others providing animation services to other nations. Noted local animations would include Kampong Boy (1997), Mustang Mama (2005); Upin & Ipin (2007), Saladin (2009), Puteri Limau (2015) and many more. It is noted that with new technology, many animation studios in Malaysia are now favoring 3D animations, with only a small number of local studios still producing 2D animation.

Analyzing gross profit made by the international animation studios, cinemas or TV stations proves that animation can be a highly lucrative business. In Malaysia however, many animation studios are still struggling to reach their full potential. On a whole, the animation industry in Malaysia plays a small role to the growth of the Malaysian economy. Herwina Rosnan, et al.,(2010) believes that to breach this gap, the Malaysia film industry has to first be successful in its own country before it can plan to make any mark on the international market. Herwina Rosnan, et al.,(2010) also emphasizes the importance of support. They believe that local studios would first have to rally the support of their own countrymen to improve the chances of being successful on a global level.

B. Collective Creativity in Organizations.

In 2012, Adobe conducted a survey on the perception of creativity in the US, UK, Germany, France and Japan. While results vary from country to country, it is prominent that majority of the participants believes that creativity enables individuals to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others and that it is valuable to society. (Adobe state of create study, 2012).

Creativity is defined as the production of high quality, original, and elegant solutions to problems (Besemer & O'Quin, 1999; Christaans, 2002; Ghiselin, 1963; Mumford & Gustafson, 1988). First, creativity is a form of performance— something the individual or group does. Second, creative work, as an outcome of problem-solving is, ultimately, a product of human cognition (Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992; Marcy & Mumford, 2007).

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), successful companies are those that consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it widely throughout the organization, and rapidly include it in new products. This is true for creative organizations such as animation studios, for the ideas and insights of their employees are of crucial importance for the

content that is developed. Most people at least have practice individual creativity as Adobe (2012) reported a 40 percent of the general public perceived themselves preferring to be doing it in private. However, as a creative industry, this industry must focus on the collective aspect of creativity in the organization.

Paul B. Paulus, Mary Dzindolet, and Nicholas W. Kohn (2012) emphasizes that collective or team creativity is much more than the accumulated sum of the creative output of its individual group members. Group members are able to influence their coworker's potential to be creative by affecting cognitive and motivational processes. Hearing an idea shared by a colleague has the potential to motivate and individual to be creative while hearing a group member complains has the potential to lower one's motivation to work hard on the task. Basically, this means that each individual group member's creativity and actions affects and is affected by the other members of the group.

C. Factors Influencing Collective Creativity

Runco (2007) describes facilitators to collective creativity as these being positive peer-group, resources, challenges, autonomy, cohesion, intellectual stimulation, and flexibility and risk-taking while inhibitors were described as intransigency and authoritarian attitudes, protectionism and paternalism, lack of integration between sectors, lack of support for new ideas, and lack of encouragement.

Paul B. Paulus, Mary Dzindolet, and Nicholas W. Kohn (2012) writes that there are several factors influencing effectively creative which are:

- Psychological Safety — when members of an organization or a team feel that the organization or team is receptive to and supportive of the expression of new ideas that might be suggested because without psychological safety, individuals will not risk the potential ridicule or negative reactions that may come with new ideas, especially radical ones.
- Leadership — important in providing both the task and the relational context for the work environment of teams (Burke, Stagl, Klein, Goodwin, Salas, & Halpin, 2006).Leaders can enhance creativity involve initiating structure, setting clear deadlines, and close performance monitoring while being socially supportive.
- Conflict — important to exchange conflicting perspectives in order to stimulate innovation. Tjosvold (1991) championed constructive controversy as a means of stimulating innovation in organizations, and according to Nemeth (2003) exposure to conflicting perspectives can in fact increase one's creative or divergent thinking.
- Cohesion — the extent to which group members has a strong social bonds or sense of attraction (Forsyth, 2006). Teams that have strong interpersonal bonds, a strong shared commitment to the task, and pride in their group would be expected to be more motivated than teams without such features. Given the importance of motivation in creativity, team cohesion should be a strong predictor of innovation.
- Trust — the extent to which team members have confidence that their fellow group members will act in accordance with accepted standards of conduct and fairness. This means that team members expect their fellow group members to be honest, supportive, and to reciprocate positive exchanges and to avoid negative exchanges.
- Task Focus — degree of coordination within the group to accomplish goals. It is important to note that not everyone may be going at the same pace, and group members may have to shift their focus from their own task to helping other group members (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). They have to attend to each other's contributions and build on them when they have an opportunity.

- Communication — It appears to be important for team members to be in fairly close physical proximity to facilitate the frequent personal interactions necessary to develop enhanced shared understanding (Cummings & Kiesler, 2005). It is important for team members to communicate frequently and to develop strong interpersonal bonds when having to collaborate (Cross & Cummings, 2004; Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2001).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a case study methodology as well as a survey as a research instrument. Case studying organisations such as Lockheed Martin's SKUNKWORKS Project, Disney Animation Studios and Lescopaque Animation Studios will provide an opportunity for exploration that may reveal aspects of the organization's actual practices. These organisations are chosen because they have been successful in facilitating collective creativity and innovation in their field and can contribute to the key indicators whilst creating the survey.

The survey method was chosen as another research method to access the opinions, trends and perceptions amongst individuals working in the animation industry. An online survey will allow a large number of individuals to participate in the research. The statistical data gained from the survey could then be analysed and compare with the literature review as well as case studies to provide a better insight

The survey consisted of 25 questions which were given to individuals who are engage in the animation industry in Malaysia. This project achieves a target of 100 individuals working in the Animation industry in Malaysia; all from studios that focuses and produces full animation features or series. The survey was conducted online through www.typeform.com and disseminated to individuals and organisations through e-mail, forums and other social media platform.

The main objectives of the survey were to gather important data about the animation studios in Malaysia, if they are utilizing existing creative strategies to facilitate collective creativity in maximizing their creative output and to find out what these organizations feel are the barriers to the collective creativity process in Malaysia.

IV. CASE STUDIES

A. Lockheed Martin's SKUNKWORKS Project

Lockheed Martin is a global security and aerospace company that is mainly involve in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. It was formed in 1995 when Lockheed Corporation and Martin Marietta merged. The designation "SKUNKWORKS‖ is widely used to describe a small group within the organization who are given a high degree of autonomy and unhampered by bureaucracy, tasked with working on advanced or secret projects.

There are 14 rules to a successful SKUNKWORKS (Kelly's 14 Rules & Practices, n.d.) which are as follows:

1. The Skunk Works manager must be delegated practically complete control of his program in all aspects. He should report to a division president or higher.
2. Strong but small project offices must be provided both by the military and industry.
3. The number of people having any connection with the project must be restricted in an almost vicious manner. Use a small number of good people (10% to 25% compared to the so-called normal systems).
4. A very simple drawing and drawing release system with great flexibility for making changes must be provided.

5. There must be a minimum number of reports required, but important work must be recorded thoroughly.
6. There must be a monthly cost review covering not only what has been spent and committed but also projected costs to the conclusion of the program.
7. The contractor must be delegated and must assume more than normal responsibility to get good vendor bids for subcontract on the project. Commercial bid procedures are very often better than military ones.
8. The inspection system as currently used by the Skunk Works, which has been approved by both the Air Force and Navy, meets the intent of existing military requirements and should be used on new projects. Push more basic inspection responsibility back to subcontractors and vendors. Don't duplicate so much inspection.
9. The contractor must be delegated the authority to test his final product in flight. He can and must test it in the initial stages. If he doesn't, he rapidly loses his competency to design other vehicles.
10. The specifications applying to the hardware must be agreed to well in advance of contracting. The Skunk Works practice of having a specification section stating clearly which important military specification items will not knowingly be complied with and reasons therefore is highly recommended.
11. Funding a program must be timely so that the contractor doesn't have to keep running to the bank to support government projects.
12. There must be mutual trust between the military project organization and the contractor, the very close cooperation and liaison on a day-to-day basis. This cuts down misunderstanding and correspondence to an absolute minimum.
13. Access by outsiders to the project and its personnel must be strictly controlled by appropriate security measures.
14. Because only a few people will be used in engineering and most other areas, ways must be provided to reward good performance by pay not based on the number of personnel supervised.

B. Disney and Pixar Animation Studios

Walt Disney Animation Studios is a well-established animation studio in America in 1923. The studio has pioneered and developed many of the techniques, concepts and principles used in animation industry world-wide. The company's mascots, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, and Pluto are some of the most popular figures in the animation world.

Pixar is another American animation studio that produces CGI-animated feature films made with the famous RenderMan software. The Walt Disney Company bought Pixar in 2006 and the two companies currently have a successful relationship, leveraging of the success of each other's unique capabilities. Despite the merger, each studio was solely responsible for its own projects and would not be allowed to borrow personnel from or lend tasks out to the other to remain as a separate entity. According to C. Matt (2014): Disney realized that it was not the CG technology that made every one of Pixar's animated film a success; it was the talent and the creative process that accomplished that. Their culture of collective creativity, as discussed previously, was the differentiating factor between Pixar and other animation studios, and it gave them their competitive edge.

Over the years, Pixar developed a creative strategy called "Pixar Braintrust," It is a scheduled meeting that involves a variety of people from the studio to look at each other's projects on a regular basis and give each other very candid feedback; a casual peer to peer review of a ideas.

The Pixar Braintrust differs from other feedback groups in that it consist of people with a deep understanding of storytelling and, usually, people who have been through the process

themselves. Another key feature to the Braintrust is that is has no authority. The director does not have to follow ideas or suggestions given during the session and it is up to him or her how to address the feedback. Ed Catmul (2014) sums it up as to Put smart, passionate people in a room together, charge them with identifying and solving problems, and encourage them to be candid.

The Walt Disney Animation Studio has also included the Braintrust into their creative strategy since the merger with Pixar Animation Studios. Before that, the studio would allow employees to pitch their best ideas for a new film; an event that was held three times a year. While the collective creativity nature is present, it was conducted under a strong hierarchy where executives will give feedback to the ideas. Another one of their well-known strategies for creativity is called the ―Disney Method‖ (D. Robert, 1992). The creative process of this method is sorted into three functional stages: "Dreamer", Realist" and "Critic".

C. **Les Copaque Productions**.

Set up in 2005, Les Copaque Production Sdn. Bhd. is a Malaysian animation company made famous by their mascots Upin and Ipin who are the main characters of a children‗s show of the same title. They have also released full-length animated 3D film featuring the two characters as well in 2009. All animations produced from this organization have a core principle which is to contain positive values suitable for young children to learn from and that they contain sentiments of the diverse culture in Malaysia.

Les Copaque Productions however does not a structured method in facilitating their employees to work creatively together. H. Harris, K. Ab Aziz and M. Norhashim (2012) states that ―There was no formal system for generating and capturing ideas. Rather, LCP focused on promoting an environment of open communication and high morale to encourage sharing of ideas.‖ They continued that, ―LCP ensured continuity of ideas and product development was by instilling an organisational culture where staff was encouraged to have an attitude of constantly refreshing‗ and keeping to the deadlines. Sources of ideas stemmed from local inspirations such as superstitions and folklore. Current events were also used as a source of ideas. Employees work as a team and support each other.

Other efforts include an animation training center where skill base training was given for free to their employees, graduates or individuals who are interested in the Film & Animation Industry and sending their staff out of the office for training, conferences, expos, festivals, fairs, seminars, and workshops for their development(A. Ali, S. Suriawati and S. Salwa Isa, 2011).

V. SURVEY RESULTS

Descriptive statistic for segments of the survey consisting of Likert-type items are as follows:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D
Working with others is Key to unlocking creativity and innovation.	100	1	4	1.68	0.736
Would you consider yourself as a creative individual?	100	1	3	1.58	0.535
Are your team members supportive of new ideas or suggestions?	100	1	4	2.12	0.769
I am expected to be more productive rather than creative at work.	100	1	5	2.38	0.951
I am most creative when I work together with others.	100	1	4	2.41	0.911
I know my organization ‗s visions and its objectives.	100	1	5	2.27	0.802
I am allowed to talk freely to anyone without restrictions in my organization.	100	1	5	2.1	0.893
I am free to decide how to perform tasks that are assigned to me.	100	1	5	2.16	0.906
My organization treats all employees fairly.	100	1	5	2.52	0.947

There are sufficient resources in my organization‖ (Physical Environment, Facilities, Information)	100	1	4	2.66	0.890
My organization provides training with the purpose of developing creative potential and innovation.	100	1	5	2.63	0.970
Supervisors frequently provide feedback and encouragement.	100	1	5	2.35	0.957
Decisions that were made and tasks to be completed by individual group members are clearly identified.	100	1	5	2.26	0.746
My organization 's culture encourages employees to trust and respect each other.	100	1	5	2.17	0.943
My organization encourages employees collaborate with different departments/other organizations to gain more knowledge.	100	1	5	2.36	1.049
Creative talent is the most important asset to the animation industry in Malaysia.	100	1	5	1.85	0.914

The results from the survey indicate that the participants were predominately male which may suggest that there are a higher number of men working in the animation industry in Malaysia. Similarly, two thirds of respondents knew their organisation's visions and its objectives. Majority of the participants that joined the survey were animators.

More than three quarters of the of the sample agrees that working with others is Key to unlocking creativity and over half of the participants believe that they are most creative while working with others. Slightly less than half of the participants consider themselves as creative individuals. Despite those beliefs, a little more than half of the respondents prefer spending more time being creative outside of work instead of in the office with their teammates despite a large majority of the respondents acknowledge that their team members are supportive of new ideas/ suggestions from their teammates. Floyd Henry Allport, (1920) reported that while working in groups may increase the variety of inputs amongst team members as well as improving the speed of the process, work requiring imagination or more concentrated and original thought is best performed in seclusion.

Another finding of the survey reiterates the previous points when slightly more than half of the participants would rather form a group with their colleagues to brainstorm/discuss ideas rather than working alone as a strategy to come up with a new and creative idea for an animation pitch. A large number of participants feel that they are allowed to talk freely to anyone without restrictions as well as having the freedom to decide how to perform tasks that are assigned to them. A large portion of the participants also do acknowledge that decisions that were made and tasks to be completed by individual group members are clearly identified However, slightly less than half of the participants agree that their organisation treats all employees fairly; many are neutral regarding fair treatment at their workplace.

A little more than half of the respondents believe that deadlines encourage creativity. Professor Matt Christensen (2014) writes, Strict deadlines are also upheld, not to be stifling but rather to be encouraging and prevent overthinking. Although many of the respondents do feel as if they are expected to be more productive rather than creative at work, there are also a large number of participants who were neutral towards the statement. This may suggest that for the most parts, individuals in the animation industry do have a relatively balanced time being productive as well as creative.

Top three factors to being creative as a team are Teammates with 27% followed by Environment/ Facilities with 20% and the third being Time with 15%. Biggest barriers to being creative as a team on the other hand are Culture‖ 27 %. This is supported by the findings of Hulsheger, Anderson, & Salgado, (2009) that it is found that background diversity was negatively related to innovation. Money and Organisation's Rules and Policies‖ are the second and third biggest barrier to being creative as a team in the animation industry Malaysia. Many of the participants could not agree not disagree that there were sufficient

resources at their place of work. This may indicate that while there are resources available at the workplace, perhaps they are not of the best of quality to perform assigned tasks.

Slightly more than half of the sample size does acknowledge that their organisation provides training with the purpose of developing creative potential and innovation. Most of the participants also agree that supervisors would frequently provide feedback and encouragement. Many of the individuals that participated in the survey also that their organisation encourages to trust and respect each other as well as to collaborate with different departments or other organisations to gain more knowledge.

However, almost all participants report that their organisation does not fully utilise pre-existing creative strategies like the Disney Method, Pixar Braintrust or Skunkwork's One Step Ahead Approach. Majority of the sample size believe that their organisation referenced these strategies but has adapted them to fit their organisation's goals. Lastly, a large majority of the participants do agree that creative talent is the most important asset to the animation industry in Malaysia.

The findings of this research suggest that organisations do not fully take advantage of pre-existing creative strategies like the Disney Method, Pixar Braintrust or Skunkwork's One Step Ahead Approach. Majority of the participants do believe that their organisation uses pre-existing strategies as a reference, adapted to fit organisation goals but many others do not agree that their organisation even reference these established strategies.

This does not mean that collective creativity is not practiced in the animation industry; though perhaps the collective creativity process is somewhat uncoordinated. The data collected from this research reveals that many respondents are supportive of and are practicing many of the key principles of collaboration. For example, results from the survey shows that majority of the participants agree that collaboration is Key to unlocking creative and innovative potential and feel most creative when working with others. This indicates that they acknowledge that by themselves, they might not always be able to come up with creative solutions.

Culture is often linked to the behaviours, beliefs, values of a group of people that is passed down from one generation to another. This may indicate that, despite mostly being able to talk to anyone in the organization, background diversity might still be a challenge in the animation industry. When allowed to give their own answers, several participants hinted that there are too many limitations on what is allowed to be aired on television in Malaysia thus feel restricted these regulations. This may indicate that people in Malaysians, regardless working in the animation industry or not, are believed to be reserved, making it harder for new ideas to be accepted or developed in the country.

It is often perceived that creative people look for job satisfaction over monetary rewards but working in the animation industry in Malaysia proved to be difficult with the lack of funds. After all, being creative really means to be experimenting, discussing, learning and testing new ideas. Yet all creative acts are risky as studios might not be ready to accept the consequences should an idea fail.

Finally, being held back by organisation's rules and regulations hints that there may be too many unnecessary limitations and processes in the studio's workflow that it makes it difficult for employees to be spontaneous; a necessary aspect of being creative. Another indication of this could mean that employees might feel defensive when presenting a new idea to a higher ranking colleague and therefor held back by the hierarchy of the organisation.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This research was developed to examine the dynamics of collective creativity practiced in the animation industry as well as to highlight challenges, attitudes and beliefs of this

industry in Malaysia. Although 100 people responded to the survey, the probability of the research can be improved if lager sample size covering animation studios across Malaysia can be collected and studied.

The second limitation emerged when the results of the survey showed that many of the participants involved were animators and therefore is not a clear representation of the industry as a whole. A study including participants of other talent fields would be desirable to conduct further studies on.

It is also relevant to study how the ideas of the employees are implemented in their organization and how colleagues/peers engage with each other and if they would influence the initial idea. It would be interesting to study how frequent peers would meet face to face to discuss ideas and how much of their work time is dedicated to being creative. Another area would be to examine how hierarchy will influence the creative output of everyone.

Acknowledgment

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