

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 35

Balance the need to avoid risk with the need to innovate...

Balance Risk and Innovation...

"There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure."

Colin Powell ~ US politician...



"Come on, we're nearly at the summit"

Is your organisation successfully balancing its need to control risk with its need to innovate?

Today, I went to church to see my son give his first public reading, prior to lighting the first Advent candle. Andrew read very well and following his reading, the priest, Father Robert gave a sermon.

He spoke of people striving for perfection at Christmas and being mightily stressed by it. He reminded us that the pleasure comes not from the perfect turkey but from the social event of the meal.

This sparked off a train of thought that led me to Google, (think of a search engine in reverse). Recently, a client with a group of his executives, kindly invited me on a tour of Google's HQ near San Francisco.

For someone like me, seeking examples of how organisations drive fluent thinking in to organisations, this was a dream place to visit. The

Google trip showed many practical examples of how the organisation makes its environment one in which people are encouraged to relax, think and achieve.

One example (which the sermon probably triggered) is the free food and drink of all types served in the cafeteria, incentivising people to stay on campus and encouraging them to talk. Our guide told us most business ideas have arisen from discussion over lunch; one way to feed innovation.

Another interesting example was the pride in learning from failure. Our guide was proud of the fact that he, like others in management, had learned from bankrupting two companies (the commercial equivalent of burning the turkey?)

This learning spills out into the Google projects. Keep the project team very small, try things out, demonstrate ideas and build models to see if your peers like them. Don't seek perfection too soon, put a Beta test programme out to the public ([Google Wave](#) is an example) and use customer experience to hone the final product.

If something doesn't fly, learn from the experience and move on to the next, but keep the ideas flowing. Google tolerates failure, but its approach serves to reduce the risk of failure whilst inspiring people to keep trying.

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SO

Compare this approach to that in other organisations where failure is not tolerated, much resource is used to avoid risk and negative stress thrives. People cease to try and cynicism breeds.

True, the "Beta version" concept won't work in all organisations ("Welcome aboard this Boeing 787 Beta version" is not something I want to hear on my next trip) but the concept of failure tolerance is transferable.

What challenge does this pose for the creative leader? I think it is to identify where:

1. Peoples' values or style are causing them to seek perfection unnecessarily
2. You are requesting perfection prematurely. (Do you really need a 20 page analysis of an idea?)
3. A quick demonstration would be preferable to acres of research
4. Processes and procedures lead people to be unnecessarily risk averse

In essence, look for areas where your aversion to the risk of failure is outweighing the drive for innovation.

ACTION

- Think about how you might balance the dynamic tension of reducing risk with the need to encourage more innovation.
- What might you do to create a balance in your own department, even if the organisation does not tolerate failure?
- If you work on your own, how might you innovate with a level of risk that is acceptable to your client?

TO CLOSE

There was an air of excitement and anticipation in Google, such that I left feeling "Wow, I would love to work with these people." Do people say that about your organisation?

Finally, you may recall the "traffic light" metaphor I used in the last article. One reader wrote to me to say he had found a way to overcome one particularly difficult "red light" person. He made them redundant, or as he said in terms of the metaphor, "I took out their bulb." Thanks for that Steve, unfortunate for the person but a welcome extension of the metaphor.

Have a balanced week...

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