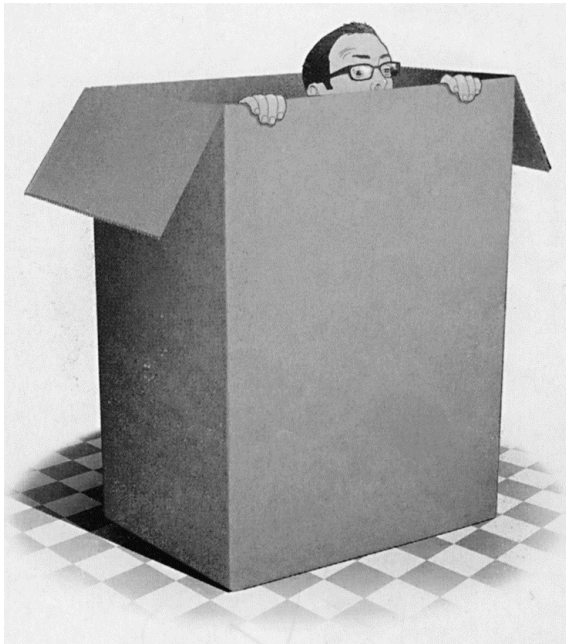


### What's the Big Idea?



based on an article by Rob Cromwell

- 1 If you were asked to name a business that encourages creativity in its staff, the likes of Apple, Google or Pixar might be near the top. But what is it that makes them hotbeds of revolutionary ideas and novel inventions? Is it the indoor beach shacks and hidden rooms (complete with fully-stocked bars) that Pixar staffers can enjoy? Or perhaps the Lego room and two-storey slide that Google employees use?
- 2 "Businesses like to put themselves in boxes, it simplifies things, but if the box is too rigid – or it's the wrong box – the company suffers. It won't be 11 enough to deal with changing conditions," says Luc de Brabandere, co-author of *Thinking in New Boxes*. "This is where creative thinking comes in, as organisations look at constructing 'new' boxes for themselves. There is no universal recipe for success."
- 3 History is awash with firms who have jumped on the creative bandwagon with both verve and a bundle of cash, but without a suitable business plan in support. And simply paying lip service to creativity can be terminal. Kodak invested heavily in creativity, and the people they employed delivered expertly: its R&D department invented a digital camera in 1975. However, the management insisted film remained the future and Kodak lost out to electronics companies more willing to adapt. The company filed for bankruptcy in 2012.
- 4 David Burkus, author of *The Myths of Creativity* says: "We're in a knowledge-based economy, so it's beneficial to be perceived as creative. People are naturally biased against innovations. The key to overcoming

this is delaying judgment — it's what consumers do, and it means that good ideas can overcome that bias in the end." Burkus adds: "You can learn something from every test that doesn't work. The best companies are those that reward both success and failure, because both are getting you closer to something new. Only 13 should be punished."

5 Which brings us back to Google, the simple search engine that brought us the most detailed map of the world, the most popular smartphone operating system, and an office with a slide in it. At Google, staying still has never been an option and Eze Vidra of that company tells its employees: "Think big, start small. When you first start out, the biggest barriers are in your mind, so just remove them." However, Vidra is also at pains to make clear that there need to be clear pathways for new ideas to move up: "Creativity is a tool and must be used as such — if creativity becomes your goal then your business will fail."

6 But how many Googlers are actually creative thinkers? According to Vidra, it is a little bit in all of them, when you look at how they spend their working week: "70% of the time you do the job you are paid to do, 20% is for personal projects to do with the brand, and the remaining 10%? That is for the crazy stuff." It is of course easier for an organisation worth \$200 billion to free up such time for its staff, but perhaps every organisation can spare a few of its resources for the crazy stuff.

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