

# DISNEY

The *Disney* strategy utilises three modes of thinking: the dreamer, the realist and the critic. Disney made extensive use of this approach in his creative work.

Robert Dilts (1994/5), one of the founders of NLP, quotes a remark about Walt Disney, the famous cartoon film-maker, '... there were actually three different Walts: the dreamer, the realist, and the spoiler'. Dilts discusses these three different modes of thinking that people – not just Disney – can adopt when working creatively.

- *The Dreamer* 'feels every expression, every reaction' – i.e. has a subjective orientation. When a Dreamer says 'That's a great idea!' they are sharing enthusiasm, not making a practical judgement!
- *The Realist* takes a detailed, pragmatic, stance, developing an action plan, getting the mechanics to work, etc. If a Realist says, 'That looks good!', they mean that it has been well planned.
- *The Critic* challenges and tests out. Hopefully, the criticism will be constructive and positive as well as identifying what could go wrong. If a Critic says 'Hmm – not bad!' that is major praise!

All three modes are useful and complementary for a project. The Disney organisation had different rooms for each, with their own clear culture. This distinction has echoes in that of other authors. Berne (1970), originator of Transactional Analysis, distinguished three sub-personalities he called Parent (cf. Critic), Adult (cf. Realist) and Child (cf. Dreamer). Different ways of thinking could be seen as movement between 'sub-personalities'.

You can use this approach to help you clarify your thinking. It is a kind of 'role-play' exercise, except that the 'roles' are different parts of you. Set up different physical locations for each internal 'role'. The method works best with other people because, by making your thoughts public, you can get feedback from others. You can also use it privately.

One way of running this is as follows:

- Make four large labels captioned 'Dreamer', 'Realist', 'Critic' and 'Neutral' (or 'Chairperson', 'Home base', 'Wise observer', etc.). Place them either on the floor or on chairs, so that they are all a metre or two apart (facing one another, if using chairs). It might be good if at least the Neutral position was a chair (symbolising its role and so it can be a relaxed, thoughtful place to return to).

## FUNCTION

Exploring  
Defining  
Gathering  
Generating  
Grouping  
Screening  
Prioritising  
Planning

## Full process

## RESOURCES

**1(-2) people**  
Large group  
Brief  
Extended  
Facilitation skills  
Special setting  
Computing

## PROBLEM

Personal  
Multiple issues  
Stakeholders  
**New product**  
**Futures/plans**

## ANALYTIC MODE

Categorising  
Causality  
Checklist/table  
Combinatorial  
Mapping  
Numerical  
Questioning  
**Reframing**  
Scanning  
Scenarios/views  
Surveys, etc  
Uses experts  
Voting

## INTUITIVE MODE

Analogy  
Distortion  
Excursion  
Hitch-hiking  
Imagery  
Kinaesthetic  
Listening  
Pictures  
Relaxation  
**Role-play/empathy**  
Subconscious  
Values  
Verbal  
**Wishing**

## SOCIAL MODE

*Ad hoc/cover*  
Anything goes!  
Debate/dialogue  
Game  
Interactive events  
Moving about  
Networking  
Nominal  
Starter's kit

- Be at the Neutral or Wise observer position. Take a few moments to get a general sense of the issues that you need to understand about this project or challenge. When you are ready, take a look at the Dreamer, Realist and Critic positions facing you, and try to see them as three parts of you that are very different but can all help.
- Now go to the Dreamer position, and get into your Dreamer state of mind (the Child with dreams and wishes about this situation). What is it that you would like about this challenge you face, at the dreamy, wish-fulfilment level? It is usually best to say this aloud (e.g. ‘What I’d really like is ...’). If you feel too uncomfortable to say it aloud, say it to yourself – but really listen to yourself.
- Now move back to the Neutral position, and centre yourself again. Then move on to the Realist position and get into your Realist state of mind. The Realist is Adult – very practical, task-oriented (not very emotional), good at working out practicalities, checking possibilities, marshalling evidence, etc.: ‘I need to find out about ...’; ‘It should be feasible to ...’; ‘My calculations suggest ...’.
- Now move back for a moment to the Neutral position, and centre yourself. Then move on to the Critic position and get into your Critic state of mind. The Critic is sceptical and will say things like: ‘You haven’t thought through the risks’; ‘It’s not fair to do something like that’; ‘How do you think X will react to Y?’.
- Finally, move back to the Neutral position. Sit there quietly and look in turn at each of the other three positions, reviewing what they said and how. Try giving them each a little feedback – but remember that they are all parts of yourself, so make the feedback constructive! For instance: ‘Dreamer, I found it helpful that you did ...’; ‘Critic, I got a bit lost in all the details – it would be really helpful if you could put it more simply next time’, and so on.
- You can go for another round or stop there. Some people find they can do without the Neutral position, moving directly between Dreamer, Realist and Critic. The Neutral position stands for your core ability to integrate the three sub-personalities and is independent of them. Like addressing remarks through a meeting’s chairperson, it can maintain ‘clean’ communication. As you become more skilled, you will be able to internalise the process, with each of the four roles clearly separate in your mind.

Berne, E. (1970) *Games People Play*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books

Dilts, R.L. (1994/5) *Strategies of Genius*, Vol. 13, Capitola, Meta Publications