

The Script Savant Newsletter

#003

THE ART OF COLLABORATION

John Carmack

A strong team can take any crazy vision and turn it into reality

Collaboration

is when more than one person works together on a project.

How To Maximize Creative Collaboration

- Collaboration helps seed a greater range of creative ideas as long as no one in the group makes another member feel defensive.
- A group of people normally inhibits creativity, since creation is embarrassing. For every new good idea you have, there are thousands of foolish ones, which you naturally do not care to display. A collaboration of people may be desirable for reasons other than the act of creation itself. No two people exactly duplicate each other's mental information. One person may know information A and not B, another may know information B and not A, and by suddenly knowing A and B, one may get the original idea C.
- The information may not only be of individual information A and B but even of combinations such as A-B, which in themselves are not significant. However, if one person mentions the unusual combination of A-B and another the unusual combination A-C, it may well be that the combination A-B-C, which neither has thought of separately, may yield an answer.
- The purpose of collaboration is not to think up new ideas but to educate the participants in facts fact-combinations, and theories.
- For collaboration to work, there must be ease, relaxation, and a general sense of permissiveness. People should encourage each other to come up with silly ideas.
- The world, in general, disapproves of creativity, and to be openly creative brands you as slightly weird. Even to speculate openly is somewhat bothersome. Individuals in collaboration must have the feeling the other members approve of their crazy speculations.
- If a single collaborator is unsympathetic to playfulness, creative thoughts dry up. An apathetic individual may be a gold mine of information, but he/she destroys creativity.
- All people in collaboration must be willing to sound foolish and listen to others sound foolish.
- If a single individual present has a much higher reputation than the others, or is more articulate, or has a distinctly more commanding personality, he may well take over the group and reduce the rest to little more than passive obedience. The individual may himself be extremely useful, but he might as well be put to work solo, for he often neutralizes the rest. The optimum number of a collaborative group should be small. Probably no more than 2-4. A larger group might have a larger total supply of information, but there would be the tension of waiting to speak, which can be very frustrating. It would probably be better to have several meetings at which the people attending would vary, rather than one session, including everyone. This would involve a certain repetition, but even repetition is not in itself undesirable. It is not what people

say at these meetings, but what they inspire in each other later on.

- Maximum creativity mode has a feeling of informality, friendliness, joking, and playfulness.

Collaboration In Practice

I recently started a collaboration with [‘Jan Moran,’](#) a very talented novelist, to create a promotional screenplay for her latest book, [‘The Winemakers.’](#) She and a few of her actor friends hoped to use it to present to investors and producers to raise funds to create the entire movie. What follows is the steps we used to maximize our collaborative creativity.

- I carefully read the book.
Why: To evaluate if it was a project I was interested in participating in. And to assess the writing skills of my potential collaborator. I found the story exciting and original.
- I had discussions with the author and interested actors in an informal (dinner) atmosphere.
Why: To see if I could get along with the author. To evaluate her flexibility of thought and her ability for humor. It is a waste of everyone’s time if personalities don’t match.
- Had a frank discussion about what was expected (length of the script, number of actors involved, location of filming, method of marketing, etc.)
Why: Get a feeling for everyone’s commitment to the project and to evaluate the project’s scope.
- We created an acceptable outline that would act as the starting blueprint for the script.
Why: Most time is wasted by not having a clear roadmap to start the actual script. By creating an outline before the actual script is written, it allows one to work out many of the logical bugs. Also, in this case, it helps the collaborators to be on the same page.
- I decided to work face to face at an agreed-upon location instead of through Skype or email.
Why: I find it’s easier to judge a person’s emotions and get a sense of how they are reacting to ideas if you are in direct contact. It’s also faster and better to step back and forth between Divergent and Convergent thinking, which is needed for effective creativity.
- We agreed to meet 2-5 hours each time several days a week.
Why: One of the requirements for maximum creativity is to have enough hours to effectively activate Divergent thinking.
- We sat either side by side or facing each other with only a single computer which we shared.
Why: This allowed maximum interaction and evaluation of how each reacted on both a verbal and non-verbal level at the other’s reactions to suggestions.
- Before each writing session, we set up a sense of relaxation and playfulness by asking about each other’s day, telling jokes, or talking about how we hoped the project would turn out.
Why: One of the most essential requirements to activate Divergent thinking is for all parties to be relaxed and in a playful mood.
- The first task was to determine if we were going to stay strictly to the book or attempt to catch the emotional essence in this promotional screenplay. We agreed to try to catch the emotional favor.
Why: Since this is the author’s vision, it’s always important to have the author 100% behind whatever direction the screenplay will take.
- Being the more experienced screenwriter, I often pointed out why specific scripting elements are used and how to use them effectively—at the same time, trying to be conscious of not bloviating.
Why: The author had a real interest in expanding her skills and on my part, I wanted to share what I have learned and create the best screenplay our collaboration could produce.
- As the FIRST DRAFT formed, I pointed out what contributed to good screenplays (Present Tense in action, short action descriptions, subtext in dialogue and action) and I pointed out what made poor screenplays (cliché/on-the-nose/chit-chat dialogue, passive action, Past Tense in action, repetition of common words, telling not showing). But as the FIRST DRAFT was being formed, I didn’t emphasize proper techniques. The heavy lifting would come in later drafts. In this FIRST DRAFT, cliché/on-the-nose/chit-chat dialogue was perfectly alright—passive Voice in Past Tense is fine, weak verbs, and adverbs in action great. The only important thing was to get the skeleton down. If the original Outline was well thought out the creative writing would come in later drafts.

Why: The only thing that is important at this stage was to get the screenplay's skeleton down. This also was a chance to get into the rhythm of how the two of us interacted.

- During this FIRST DRAFT, we would usually work on a scene for 5-15 minutes then pull away if we hit a sticking point and talk about other things (i.e., movies and how they may have resolved a similar issue, a funny joke, general observations about life, etc.). The main thing was not to get bogged down by worrying about how uninspired this draft was coming out. I pointed out there would be many more drafts where'd we see the script come alive.

Why: In this FIRST DRAFT the emphasis must be on relaxing and not having ANY concern about the writing quality. It must be emphasized that this is only putting down the skeleton to work from.

- After a few sessions, we had finished the FIRST DRAFT. We were ready to start on the real work. There would be many script iterations, and nothing had to be brilliant for quite a while. Depending on the mood of the moment, we would jump back and forth between creative thinking (original dialogue or original scenes, etc.) or busy work (rewriting scenes in Present Tense, correct grammar & spelling, correcting format, etc.).

Why: It's only natural that one or both collaborators must be in the 'Open Mode/Divergent Thinking' in order to tackle the demands of original thinking. This Open Mode/Divergent Thinking can only be maintained for a limited time, so to recover we always jumped between the two modes for maximum results.

- To achieve the maximum benefit from collaborative creative thinking, each person must feel comfortable at freely expressing their thoughts — NO MATTER HOW CRAZY THEY MAY SOUND. Each of us encouraged each other to express their ideas on story development. Ultimately, there can only be one final pathway. I believe that the author of the book should have the final say on the direction the story will take.
- To convey information that may be useful, make CROSS-CONNECTIONS with the unique knowledge each collaborator has. The knowledge that came out in the form of personal experiences, movies, screenwriting techniques, winemaking, current events, the expertise of each collaborator, etc. The Cross-Connections formed from this shared information helps add to a richer script.

Why: Cross-connections of information helps increase the richness and possibilities of a script.

SUMMARY: Collaboration can only come about if everyone involved feels relaxed and uninhibited. They must also be able to shift fluidly between the Open Mode (Divergent Thinking) and Close Mode (Convergent Thinking) to maximize everyone's contribution.

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