NeurodiVentures
Equipping autistic people for collaboration for life

divergent minds
deep innovation
neuro di ventures
Autistic Collaboration

AutCollab.org acts as a hub for mutual support, and encourages neurodivergent individuals and ventures to connect and establish long-term collaborations.

Collaboration can take many forms, and different people have different needs and preferences. Autistic people learn and play differently, and only have a limited (if any!) interest in competitive social games. We communicate and enjoy ourselves by sharing information and knowledge, and not by negotiating social status.

https://autcollab.org/about/
Busyness as usual

People management and bullying

Our society has been constructed such that certain forms of bullying are deemed acceptable / legal / necessary and such that other forms of bullying are deemed as unacceptable and illegal. Upon closer examination the boundary, which is inevitably fuzzy, is an arbitrary one.

This is why I consistently prefer to talk about coordination and trusted collaboration at eye level rather than “management”.

In “civilised” society “collaboration” is conceptualised as:

- negotiating social status and power gradients
- competing against each other using culturally defined rules

https://autcollab.org/2019/08/05/people-management-and-bullying/
Marginalised perspectives

Relevant dimensions of marginalisation:

- Minority cultures, ethnicities, religions
- LGBTQIA+ rights movement
- Disabilities (disability rights movement, social model of disability)
- Neurodivergence (neurodiversity movement, autistic culture movement)
- Age (children and those older than 65)
Fear @ work

Afraid to be your authentic self

Answered: 117  Skipped: 0

- Afraid to be yourself amongst your peers?
- Afraid to be yourself amongst your superiors?
- Afraid to be yourself amongst customers?
- Afraid to be yourself amongst suppliers?

- Green: Never or Sometimes
- Orange: Often or Always
The Design Justice Network

1. We design to **sustain, heal, and empower** communities
2. We center the voices of **those who are directly impacted**
3. We prioritise design’s impact on the **community**
4. We view change as emergent from a **collaborative** process
5. **We see the role of the designer as a facilitator rather than an expert**
6. We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own **lived experience**
7. We freely **share design knowledge** and tools
8. We work towards **sustainable, community-led** outcomes
9. We work towards **non-exploitative** solutions
10. We look for **what is already working** at the community level. We honor and uplift **traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge**

designjustice.org
NeurodiVentures

NeurodiVenture: an inclusive non-hierarchical organisation operated by neurodivergent people that provides a safe and nurturing environment for divergent thinking, creativity, exploration, and collaborative niche construction.

Don’t worry if you are not yet part of a NeurodiVenture or autistic community. If you are interested in establishing a NeurodiVenture or in implementing a neurodiversity friendly operating model within your company, the open source operating model template from S23M may be a useful starting point.

https://autcollab.org/community/neurodiventures/
Prerequisites for a neurodiversity friendly culture

Language frames people’s thoughts and emotional response. We can coose to consistently use words that can improve our lives.

https://autcollab.org/2019/06/28/organising-for-neurodivergent-collaboration/
## Rediscovering the language of life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New language</th>
<th>Old language</th>
<th>→ DJN principle 3: We prioritise design’s impact on the community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>care</td>
<td>commodification</td>
<td>Co-create ecologies of care instead of economies of commodified goods and services – to create environments that are conducive to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catalyst</td>
<td>leader</td>
<td>Grow competency networks and catalysts rather than leadership and leaders – to get things done and distribute decision making to where the knowledge resides</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>coordination</td>
<td>management</td>
<td>Coordinate rather than manage – to address all the cognitive load that can increasingly be automated and to avoid the perpetuation of social power gradients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courage</td>
<td>fear</td>
<td>Replace fear with courage – to explore new paths when old roads are crumbling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative collaboration</td>
<td>best-practices</td>
<td>Provide a space for creative collaboration and divergent thinking rather than insist on best practices – to be able to adapt to rapid environmental change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>currency</td>
<td>liquidity</td>
<td>Value the currency of knowledge and transparency of information rather than the liquidity of money and the protection of national interests – to be able to think and act outside the paradigm of industrialised imperialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ecologies</td>
<td>economies</td>
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<tr>
<td>gifts</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>Offer your gifts to the world instead of charging rent for economic utility – to make the seemingly impossible possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good company</td>
<td>profitable busyness</td>
<td>Co-create good company rather than business – to focus on the people and things we care about rather than what is simply keeping us busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human scale</td>
<td>large-scale</td>
<td>Appreciate human scale and individual agency rather than large scale and growth – to create structures and systems that are understandable and relatable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual agency</td>
<td>growth</td>
<td>Appreciate human scale and individual agency rather than large scale and growth – to create structures and systems that are understandable and relatable</td>
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<td>learning</td>
<td>normality</td>
<td>Learning about each other instead of assuming and perpetuating a fictional notion of normality – to increase shared understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>niche construction</td>
<td>competition</td>
<td>Niche construction and symbiosis rather than competition and exploitation – to create organisations and services that are fit for purpose and valued by the wider community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open source community</td>
<td>intellectual property rights</td>
<td>Create open source communities instead of walled gardens of intellectual property rights – to create a global knowledge commons and to maximise collective intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical waste</td>
<td>wealth</td>
<td>Pay attention to physical waste rather than wealth – to focus us on the metrics that do matter</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>repair</td>
<td>profit</td>
<td>Help repair frayed relationships instead of profiting from the misery of others – to counteract the escalation of conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symbiosis</td>
<td>exploitation</td>
<td>Niche construction and symbiosis rather than competition and exploitation – to create organisations and services that are fit for purpose and valued by the wider community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tacit knowledge</td>
<td>meritocracy</td>
<td>Share valuable tacit knowledge in good company instead of hoarding information and perpetuating the myth of meritocracy – to raise collective intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparency</td>
<td>protection of national interests</td>
<td>Value the currency of knowledge and transparency of information rather than the liquidity of money and the protection of national interests – to be able to think and act outside the paradigm of industrialised imperialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust</td>
<td>weaponised contracts</td>
<td>Visibly extending trust to people instead of drafting weaponised contracts – to release the handbrake to collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trusted relationships</td>
<td>anonymous transactions</td>
<td>Nurture trusted relationships instead of engaging in anonymous transactions – to minimise rather than encourage the creation of externalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>values</td>
<td>value</td>
<td>Think in terms of values rather than value – to avoid continuously discounting what is priceless</td>
</tr>
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This book provides communities and companies with a useful sense of direction, giving them the option to snap out of busyness as usual mode when they are ready. Through the lenses of evolutionary biology and cultural evolution, small groups are the organisms within human society – in contrast to individuals, corporations, and nation states. The implications for our civilisation are profound.

- It is time to put ubiquitous global digital connectivity to good use, to curate and share the lessons from minority perspectives, and to reflect critically on the human evolutionary journey and on the possibilities and limitations of human agency.

- Human history can be understood as a series of learning experiences that present us with the option to break out of the tired, old, and increasingly destructive pattern of conquest and domination.

- Currently peer reviewed, to be published in 2021

Draft available at https://jornbettin.com/books/the-beauty-of-collaboration-at-human-scale/
Autistic culture

Autists are acutely aware that culture is constructed one trusted relationship at a time – this is the essence of fully appreciating diversity.

Inclusive culture is minimalistic.

https://autcollab.org/2018/04/05/what-society-can-learn-from-autistic-culture/
8 principles for value creation fuelled by **mutual trust** and **zero capital**

1. Clear purpose, a long term perspective, revenue sharing instead of salaries
   🤝 resilience

2. Purpose supported by 26 backbone principles
   🤝 an inclusive **culture of thinking and learning**

3. Employee ownership and zero debt
   🤝 **no distractions** by stakeholders with short term motivations and hidden agendas

4. Intensive 12 month induction and on-boarding process
   🤝 a **foundation of mutual understanding**

5. Organising around the talents and needs of specific people
   🤝 ability to benefit from an incredible **diversity of talents**

6. Relying entirely on equitable team-oriented incentives and zero individual incentives
   🤝 **elimination of in-group competition**

7. Operating an advice process instead of hierarchy
   🤝 **maximising learning opportunities**

8. Open source intellectual property
   🤝 **no barriers to flows of tacit knowledge**

https://autcollab.org/community/neurodiventures/
Collaboration in a NeurodiVenture

Aligned with the purpose of **autistic collaboration**:  
- interaction to learn from each other  
- working with others towards a shared goal

The more we help each other to question in ways we otherwise wouldn’t – and correspondingly discover new insights about the world and ourselves, the more we are able to learn from each other, and the more we start to understand each other.

**The gift that members of NeurodiVentures bring to the world is the (re)generative potential of all the trusted relationships that they co-create.**

https://autcollab.org/2017/09/30/social/
A simple advice process creates a learning organisation

Before making a major decision that affects others in the organisation

1. **A person has to seek advice** from at least one trusted colleague with potentially relevant or complementary knowledge or expertise.

2. **Giving advice is optional.** It is okay to admit lack of expertise. This enables the requestor to proceed on the basis of the available evidence.

3. **Following advice is optional.** The requestor may ignore advice if she/he believes that all things considered there is a better approach or solution. Not receiving advice in a timely manner is deemed equivalent to no relevant advice being available within the organisation. This allows everyone to balance available wisdom with first hand learning and risk taking.

4. **A few simple prosocial design principles provide guidance for dealing with people who regularly ignore relevant advice** (or consistently refuse to seek or give advice) and therefore regularly **cause downstream problems for others** as a result. Such situations are obvious for all involved. A persistent breakdown of collaboration either results in a significant change in behaviour once the downstream problems are recognised, or in the non-cooperative person leaving the organisation.

Creating **good company**

“Study after study confirms that most people have about five intimate friends, 15 close friends, **50 general friends** and 150 acquaintances. *This threshold is imposed by brain size and chemistry, as well as the time it takes to maintain meaningful relationships*, Dunbar says.

– Scientific American, September 2018

These numbers guide my thinking on human scale and have shaped the NeurodiVenture operating model that limits the size of good company to **50 people**.

(in the case of S23M enforced by our company constitution)

Larger organisations that contain structures of command and control are not only learning disabled, they are also also detrimental to mental health and trusted collaboration.

https://autcollab.org/2019/06/28/organising-for-neurodivergent-collaboration/
Appreciating human cognitive limits

I could compile a long list of advantages of the NeurodiVenture operating model supported by 8 years of operating experience (following 10 years of lessons with various other operating models), but

many of these advantages are simply corollaries of the cognitive limits highlighted by Dunbar’s research, which by the way are intuitively understood and adhered to by “uncivilised” societies.

https://autcollab.org/2019/06/28/organising-for-neurodivergent-collaboration/
Prosocial core design principles @ S23M

Applying evolutionary science to coordinate action, avoid disruptive behaviours among group members, and cultivate appropriate relationships with other groups in a multi-group ecosystem (the work of Elinor Ostrom, Michael Cox and David Sloan Wilson)

Tailored Core Design Principles:

1. **Trusted relationships within the group** and strong understanding of purpose
2. Fair distribution of costs and benefits
3. Fair and inclusive decision-making
4. Fast and empathetic conflict resolution
5. Authority to self-govern
6. Appropriate relations with other groups
7. Tracking agreed upon behaviours
8. Graduated responses to transgressions to prevent a person or a subgroup from gaining power over others

Supports an open and inclusive neurodiverse & creative team

A working advice process minimises the need for tracking

Fair and inclusive distribution of resources minimises the need for coercion

Sharing individual competency networks

Within a good company (smaller than 50 people) and especially within a team, everyone is acutely aware of the competencies of all the other members.

In a NeurodiVenture all members expose (write down and share) these so-called individual competency networks for the benefit of everyone within the company.

Transparency of individual competency networks enables meta knowledge (who has which knowledge and who entrusts whom with questions or needs in relation to specific domains of knowledge) to flow freely with an organisation.

The result is an immensely valuable index of competencies consisting of up to 50 unique perspectives on the company. These perspectives are not merged into some absurd attempt to create a unique source of truth.

All perspectives are considered equally valid. Collectively their presence allows the company to rapidly respond intelligently and with courage to all kinds of external events, by drawing on collective intelligence in a very literal sense.

https://autcollab.org/2019/06/28/organising-for-neurodivergent-collaboration/
Using **Open Space** to catalyse knowledge flows

Whoever comes are the right people. 
Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
When it starts is the right time. 
When it's over, it's over.

**LAW OF 2 FEET**
If you aren't in a place where you are learning or contributing, go somewhere where you can.

Source: Owen

[https://youtu.be/M_jhcvCYBbg](https://youtu.be/M_jhcvCYBbg)
The collaborative sauce of good company

The three essential ingredients of the collaborative (not secret) sauce of good company:

1. Explicit individual competency networks
2. The 8 trust-reinforcing organisational principles and rituals
3. The more generic tailored 8 pro-social core design principles

The NeurodiVenture model is the result of incremental evolution.

The 8 trust-reinforcing principles and rituals are not unique to our approach and have proven their worth in various contexts. At S23M we started with these 8 orthogonal principles and rituals as an initial minimal viable operating model. Then several painful lessons prompted us to add the prosocial principles.

In summary: a NeurodiVenture creates an island of sanity and provides a sane interface to an insane outside world.

https://autcollab.org/2019/06/28/organising-for-neurodivergent-collaboration/
Example: S23M

The purpose of S23M is shaped by our core values. Our motivations relate to five dimensions:

1. *Symbols*: co-creating organisations and systems which are understandable by future generations of humans and software tools

2. *Nature*: maximising biodiversity

3. *Artefacts*: minimising waste

4. *Society*: creating a more human and neurodiversity friendly environment
   - Generating **more trust** – less surprising misunderstandings, more collaborative risk taking, less exploitation, more mutual aid
   - Generating **more learning** – more open knowledge sharing, less indirect language, less hierarchical control, deeper understanding
   - Generating **more diversity** – more appreciation of difference, less coercion, more curiosity

5. *Critical self-reflection*: balancing the other four dimensions in terms of sustainability, resilience, and happiness

https://s23m.com/about/index.html
The future of neurodivergent collaboration

Organisations are best thought of as cultural organisms. Groups of organisations with compatible operating models can be thought of as a cultural species. The human genus is the genus that includes all cultural species.

The NeurodiVenture operating model is the social DNA of an emergent cultural species that has developed an immune system that enables it to survive and even thrive in three complementary contexts:

1. within super-human scale societies afflicted by terminal cancer
2. within social environments that contain a growing number of NeurodiVentures
3. within social environments that contain other human scale cultural species within the human genus

Thank you!

jorn.bettin @ s23m.com

Nothing beats capturing the knowledge flow of leading domain experts to co-create organisations & systems that are understandable by future generations of humans & software tools.