



THE INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION EXPERIMENTS

A short book of activities about working
with all kinds of minds

Sal Freudenberg
with Katherine Kirk



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*The Inclusive Collaboration movement is dedicated to our friend
and mentor Jean Tabaka.*

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Introduction

During my 25 years in I.T. I have worked on many different teams in numerous different organisations. By far and away the best – both in terms of their success and how fun they were to be a part of – were the teams where different quirks were not only tolerated but celebrated. The teams that were diverse and thrived on it.

In 2014 my eldest son was diagnosed with autism. As I found out more about autism I realized just how many of those traits were personally very familiar to me. I even (or perhaps especially) recognised them in some of the brilliant minds I had encountered.

I also thought about the struggles I have had and have seen others having. Struggles when working in a team or organization with a very narrow, rigid view of how things should be done – from stuck-in-the-mud waterfall managers to over-zealous evangelical agilists.

The very best and highest-performing teams were the ones that not only contained some of these ‘quirky and really smart’ people but celebrated them. Teams where everyone turned up authentically as themselves, and everyone was accepted and their needs accommodated. These were and still are the teams that thrive(d). These were the teams that were able to tap into and harness the power of diversity - of having options, ideas and creativity in their problem-solving, and ultimately in their products. They were teams that understood each other, who

deliberately complimented each other, who helped compensate for each others weaknesses and capitalised on each others' strengths.

Over time I have come to realize that“ one size fits all” approaches are not only detrimental to the team as a whole and the success of the product they are creating, but can even be harmful to the physical and mental health of the people we work with.

I have been working on and thinking about this with the wonderful Katherine Kirk - a consultant who specialises in helping troubled teams and organisations through a blend of deep lean and agile knowledge and Eastern philosophical models. We have both seen transformation programs where key, knowledgeable and valuable employees have left because the organization is moving from one all-encompassing paradigm (which just happened to work well for that person) to another (that didn't). We have also seen people stay, but really struggle.

The purpose of this book, then, is to offer alternatives to the “one size fits all” approach; To kick against the idea of a monoculture; To celebrate neurodiversity. It is far from perfect, and far from the descriptive book I hope to write in the fullness of time.

It is as it is because Katherine and I feel a sense of urgency for this book. A need to get help out there as soon as possible. So the chapters are odd lengths, the voice isn't always consistent and the whole thing could probably do with a good edit. Sorry. But also kind of not sorry.

Rather than provide a set of rules or a method, this book is laid out as a series of experiments - activities to help you understand the diversity in your team and how to best support it.

I hope you enjoy reading and using the book, but mostly Katherine and I dearly hope that it gives you the beginnings of an understanding of neurodiversity and some food for thought regarding how you interact and collaborate with all kinds of thinkers.