The Paradox of Minnesota Nice

Uncovering the oversized influence of Janteloven in our nonprofits
About Us

Nonprofit and government experience from multiple, intersectional perspectives.

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Networks of Trust and Empathy

A Culture That Values Individual Difference

Janteloven
What we sacrifice for Minnesota Nice

Good Organizational Governance
Janteloven
Networks of Trust and Empathy
• ...think you know more than we do
• ...think anyone cares about you
• ...think you are more important than we are

A Culture That Values Individual Difference
• ...think you are smarter than we are
• ...convince yourself that you are better than we are
• ...think you are as good as we are... or good at anything, really

Good Organizational Governance
• ...think you can teach us anything
• ...laugh at us
• ...think you are anything special

In Minnesota, you’re not to...
It’s time to critique... Because there’s a lot about Minnesota Nice that no longer serves us.

Minnesota Nice aims to create an inclusive basis for consensus, but its habits can result in an exclusive social order.
Networks of Trust and Empathy

The first thing we give up when we overemphasize Minnesota Nice
Seeing Networks
Networks of Trust & Empathy… Second Rule Shift

You're not to think anyone cares about you.

Networks of care & trust are key to resilient organizations
Two Views of a Human System…

The linear model of “how things get done.”
Two Views of a Human System…

The network or *self-organizing* model of “how things get done.”
Two Views of a Human System…

A view from a volunteer organization

The linear model of “how things get done.”

The network model of “how things get done.”
How caring and resilient is your network?
Seeing Networks
Networks of Trust & Empathy… First Rule Shift

You're not to think you know more than we do.

Different perspectives are necessary to inform the best strategy.
Networks of Trust & Empathy… Third Rule Shift

You're not to think you are more important than we are.

Sometimes it’s important to prioritize individuals—especially outliers—when making decisions.

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A Culture That Values Individual Difference

The second thing we give up when we overemphasize Minnesota Nice
Minneapolis Microaggressions

That's different!

How long have you been here?
Minnesota Microaggressions

Who's your boss?

How did you get this job?

Ma'am/Sir, are you okay (with this POC)?

That's different!

Where are you from?

That neighborhood is “pretty rough.”

That school has gotten “more diverse.”

Things have changed...

What are your credentials?

Have you done this before?

If it weren't for my Black friend, I'd think...

The public bathroom isn't on this floor...

Are you supposed to be here?

How long have you been here?

That goes against policy.
A Culture That Values Individual Difference… First Rule Shift

You're not to think you are smarter than we are.

Every person has experiential smarts that the group needs; minimizing and microaggressions are costly.
Productivity, hiring, & retention
Minnesota Nice Communication Habits
Importance of Personal Stories:
Numbers don’t tell the whole story!
A Culture That Values Individual Difference… Second Rule Shift

You're not to convince yourself that you are better than we are, or good at anything.

Outliers are likely to be more innovative than those from the dominant culture.
A Culture That Values Individual Difference… Third Rule Shift

You're not to think you are as good as we are.

Most everyone acts out of good intent, but goodness is also about impact—on the group and on its individuals.
Good Organizational Governance

The third thing we give up when we overemphasize Minnesota Nice
Good Organizational Governance… First Rule Shift

You're not to think you can teach us anything. Authentic, open engagement leads to stronger decisions with more acceptance, usefulness, buy-in, and practical use.
# Ladder of Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full responsibility</th>
<th>Full responsibility for planning and action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision making authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input toward decisions</td>
<td>Providing input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input toward implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Receiving Information and Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Institute of Cultural Affairs Canada
Good Organizational Governance… Second Rule Shift

You're not to laugh at us.

Groups can only grow when they open themselves to substantive dissent, playful experimentation, and possible failure.
No single approach suits all challenges…
Try it!
Good Organizational Governance… Third Rule Shift

You're not to think you are anything special.

Outliers play an important role in rejuvenating the system.
Lifecycles

Birth
• Within a New Paradigm
• Disruptive Practices
• Often Baffling to the System
• Require More Energy Than They Emit...in Bursts

Growth
• Becoming Mainstream
• Experimental Ideas
• “Emergent Practices”
• Gaining Momentum
• Emit Sustained Energy...More Than They Require

Vitality
• Mainstream
• Standards & Practices
• Last a Short Time
• Valuable, “Tried and True”
• Energy-neutral: Emit as Much Energy as They Require

Decline
• Starting to Lose Their Value
• “Red Tape”
• Replaced, or About to Be
• Require More Energy Than They Provide

Death
• Have Lost Their Value
• “The Way We Used to Do It”
• Healthiest When Fully Grieved
• Give Up Their Energy for New Ideas
The Role of Stasis

Birth
• Within a New Paradigm
• Disruptive Practices
• Often Baffling to the System
• Require More Energy Than They Emit...in Bursts

Stasis
• Valued by key few
• “How it’s always been”
• Implicit Rules that exclude
• Churning, circular arguments
• Requires vast, unsustainable energy to hold in place

Growth
• Becoming Mainstream
• Experimental Ideas
• “Emergent Practices”
• Gaining Momentum
• Emit Sustained Energy...More Than They Require

Decline
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From Minnesota Nice... To Minnesota Now.

Networks of Trust and Communication

A Culture That Values Individual Difference

Good Organizational Governance
Some resources for you...

- Bibliography
- Janteloven and their counter-narratives
- Experiment planning sheet
- Lifecycles worksheet
Thank You

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