

Addressing Organizational Trauma



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What is Organizational Culture?

Culture gives us a place to belong and tells us how to be: values, beliefs, behaviors.

We cannot “see” culture. It becomes evident in what we espouse and what we do.



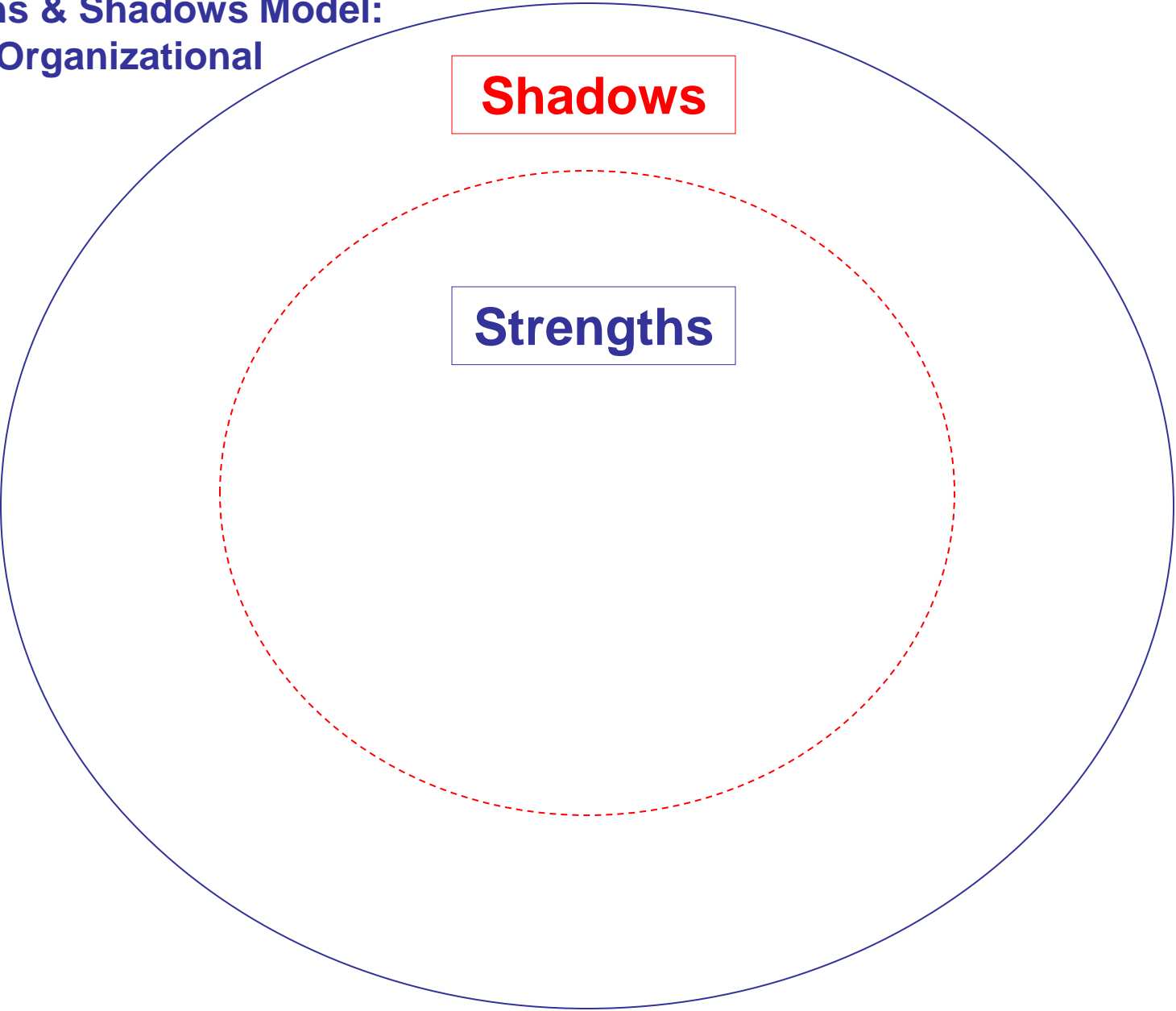
The Work of an Organization Influences Its Culture

- ▶ Rationale for organization's existence:
 - ▶ What is our mission and purpose?
 - ▶ What do we do?
- ▶ Formation of individual & collective identities:
 - ▶ What is our creation story?
 - ▶ Who are we today?

Describe Organizational Culture

- ▶ What are 2-3 words or phrases that describe your organization's culture?
- ▶ What are three strengths of your organizational culture?
- ▶ Do you know your organization's creation story?

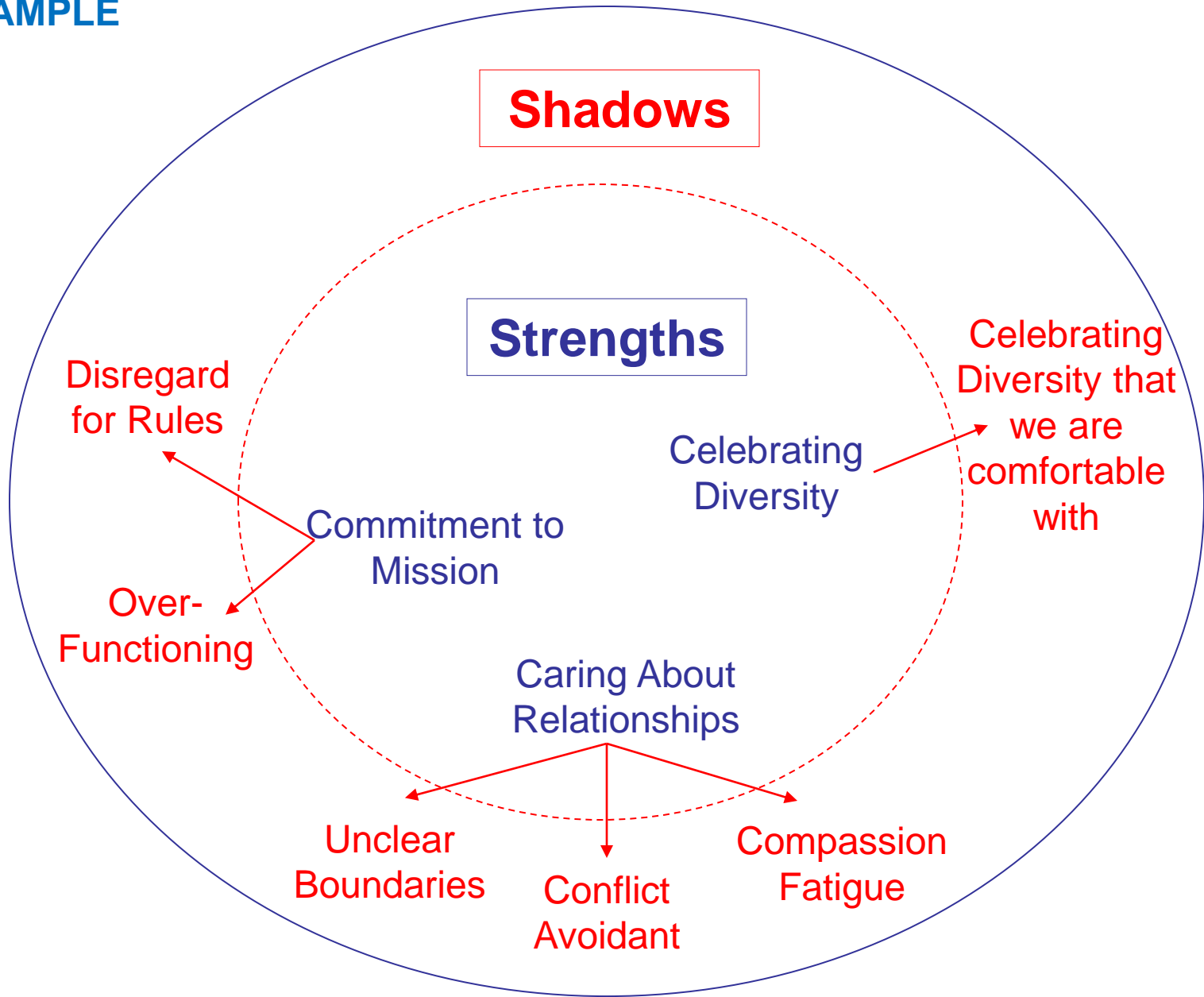
**Strengths & Shadows Model:
Assess Organizational
Culture**



SAMPLE



SAMPLE



Organizational Trauma

Organizational trauma and traumatization may result from a single devastating event, several deleterious events over time, or from the cumulative impact arising from the nature of the organization's work.

-Vivian & Hormann, 2013

Types and Sources of Organizational Trauma*

Type	Source	Example
Single devastating event	External	Public shooting, loss of funding, severe weather destruction
Single devastating event	Internal	Suicide of leader, abusive behavior, violence, insider embezzlement
Ongoing wounding	External	Threats or overt hostility directed at organization from community, pandemic
Ongoing wounding	Internal	Abusive or destructive leadership practices, harassment or sexual violence
Empathic nature of the work	Internal	Unclear boundaries, over-identification with victims
Redemptive nature of the work	Internal	Internalized judgment, guilt, depression, despair

*Vivian & Hormann, 2013, p. 23

Organizational Trauma: A Collective Experience

The team, organization or community experiences:

- Isolation
- Overwhelmed functioning
- Feeling vulnerable and temporarily helpless
- Lasting psychic and cultural impact

Characteristics of a Traumatized System

- ▶ Closed boundaries between the organization and the external environment
- ▶ Centrality of insider relationships
- ▶ Stress and anxiety contagion
- ▶ Loss of hope

Healing Trauma: Actions

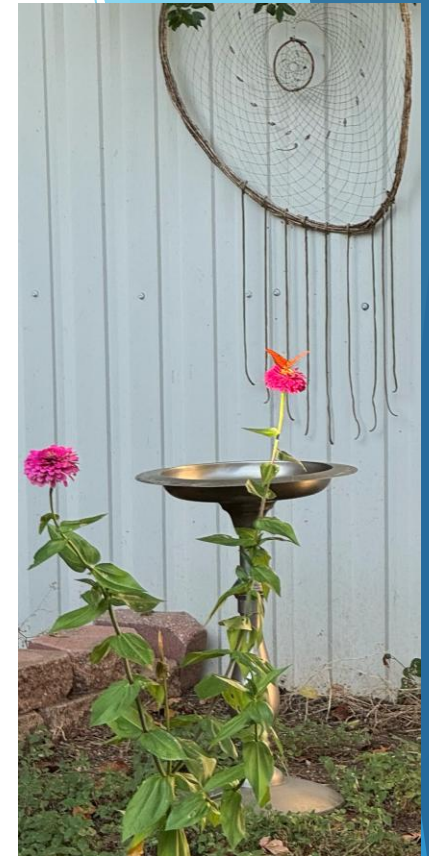
- ▶ Name the trauma and normalize experience
 - ▶ Insure stability, safety and containment
 - ▶ Integrate the trauma in affirming and meaningful ways
 - ▶ Move forward with intentionality
- ▶ Name
 - ▶ Contain
 - ▶ Make meaning
 - ▶ Move forward

Examples from your Organizations

- ▶ What type of trauma(s)?
- ▶ What is the cause(s) of the trauma?
- ▶ What was done that was helpful?
- ▶ What did not help healing and/or exacerbated the situation?



Build Resilience



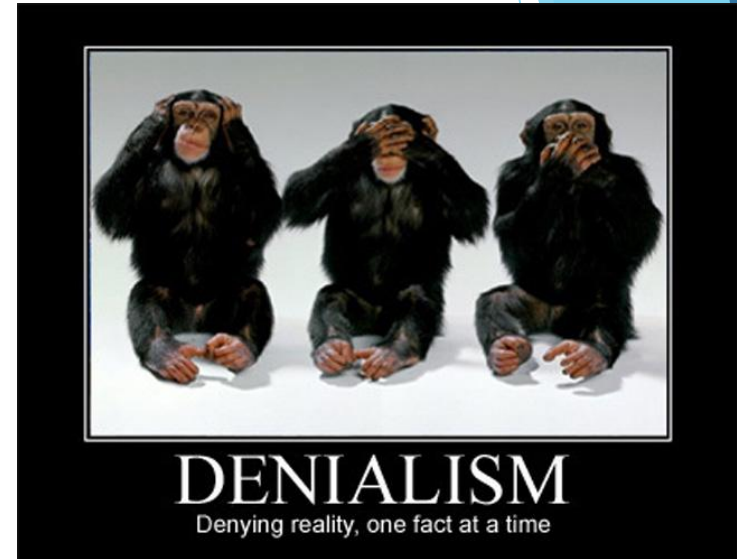
Characteristics of resilience*

- ▶ **Face Reality:** Accept people, places and things as they are in the moment
- ▶ **Search for Meaning:** Initiate individual and collective journeys into values and beliefs
- ▶ **Be Creative!** Improvise within established practices and procedures

*Coutu, D. (2002) "How resilience works."
Harvard Business Review 80(5): 46-52

Face Reality

- ▶ Confront denial.
- ▶ Expose undiscussables, dishonesty and secrets.
- ▶ “The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness.”
(Judith Herman, 1997)



Collectively Search for Meaning

- ▶ Build bridges from present experiences to futures of hope.
- ▶ Gather together with intention: Discover and develop shared meaning through stories.
- ▶ Resilience increases when we take purposeful action with others and stay connected.
- ▶ Take care of one another.



Be Creative!

- ▶ Engage creativity and innovation rather than relying on habituated responses.
- ▶ Use established practices (existing meetings, etc.).
- ▶ Note: Creativity grows as individuals and organizations gain experience and learn from those experiences.



Storytelling: The oldest form of healing

- ▶ Why do we tell stories?
- ▶ Universal
- ▶ Cultural
- ▶ Personal
- ▶ Our greatest need:
Belonging



Stories are Medicine

- ▶ Stories are the oldest form of healing. They offer pathways for repair.
- ▶ Stories share our histories and uncover ruptures.
- ▶ We each have a story. When we listen to one another, we bear witness to one another's experiences and lives.
- ▶ Fun! Joy! (Appreciative Inquiry)

Build Individual Resilience

❖ Nurture what has meaning in your life



❖ Connect to family, friends, and community



❖ Practice self-care



❖ Engage in spiritual practice

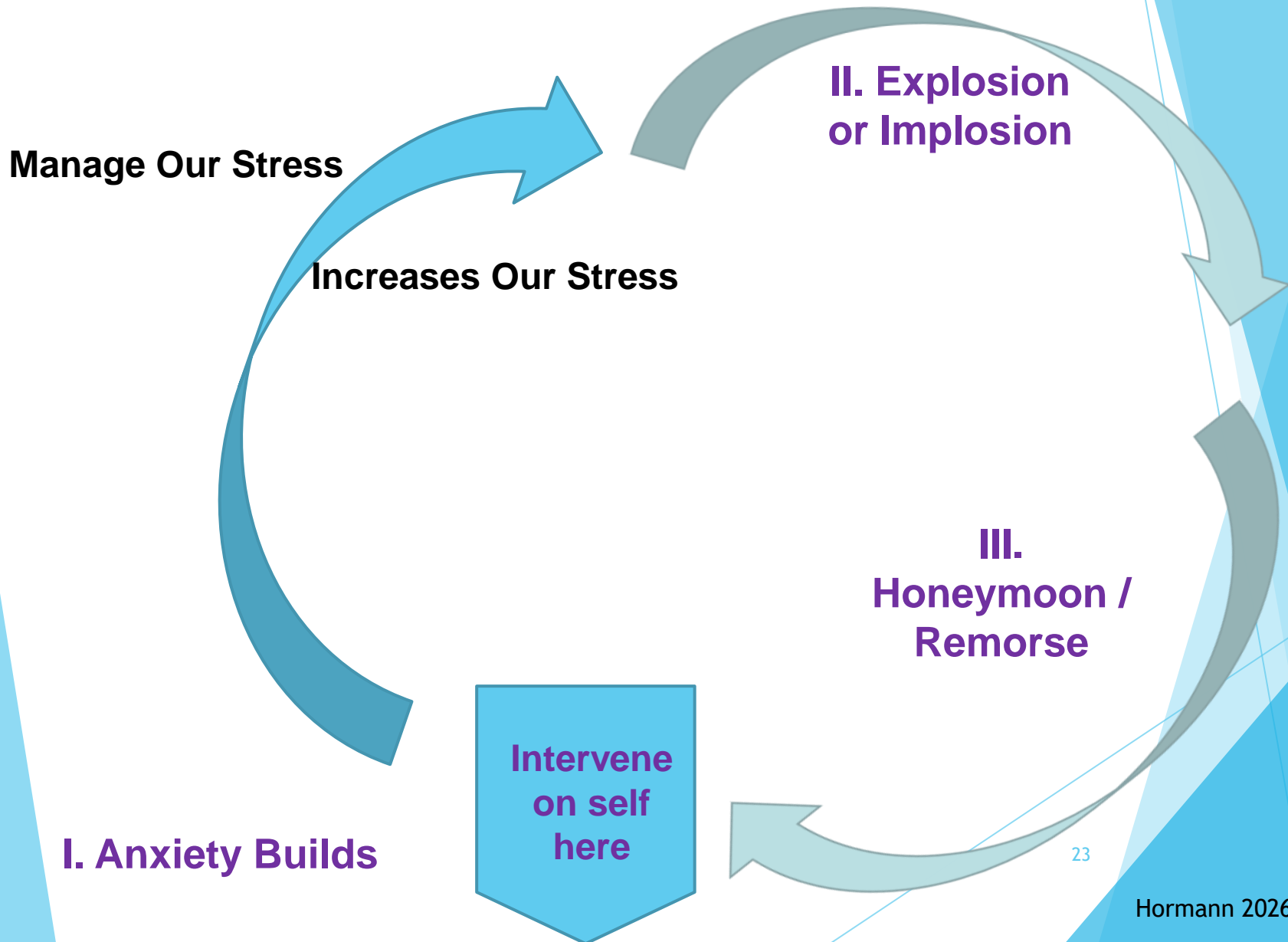


About Stress: Exercise

Individual, Team, Organization

1. What builds stress?
2. What alleviates stress?
3. What are your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual reactions to stress?

Explosion: Actions directed outward at people and/or objects
Implosion: Actions directed at self



Building Team Resilience

- ❖ **Be relentlessly optimistic -- demonstrate hopeful and energetic leadership**
- ❖ **Strengthen positive connections to peers and groups in the external environment - strategic and supportive**
- ❖ **Commit to self-care and support one another**
- ❖ **Engage the healing power of gratitude**

Leadership Actions

- ▶ **Learn** about organizational trauma and building resilience.
- ▶ **Provide forums** for members to identify what happened, hear each other, and learn from one another's experiences.
- ▶ **Share information** with other teams, organizations and communities.
- ▶ **Apply** the three characteristics of resilience needed for health and hope.

- **Ensure stability, safety, and containment** - Maintain a spirited and positive approach.
- **Name and normalize the traumatic event** - Bad things happen to high functioning agencies.
- **Integrate the trauma in affirming and meaningful ways** - What sense did you make from this conversation with each other?
- **Move forward** - How will you use identified strengths as you proceed? What do you need to thrive?

Thank you!

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www.organizationaltraumaandhealing.com
www.thetorchcollective.org