

Organizational Trauma and Healing

Domestic Violence Symposium
2016

Shana Hormann, PhD, MSW

What is organizational culture?

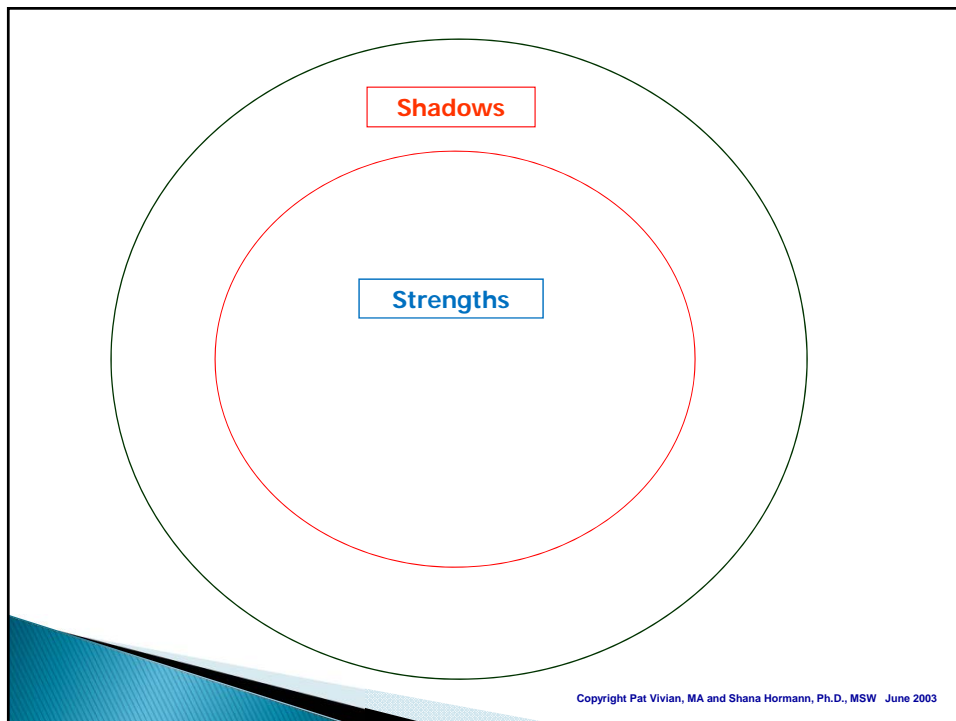
- ❖ Organization's personality
- ❖ "The way we do things around here."
- ❖ Taken-for-granted norms and ways of behaving
- ❖ Seeds of the culture were planted in the beginning:
Creation story of an organization

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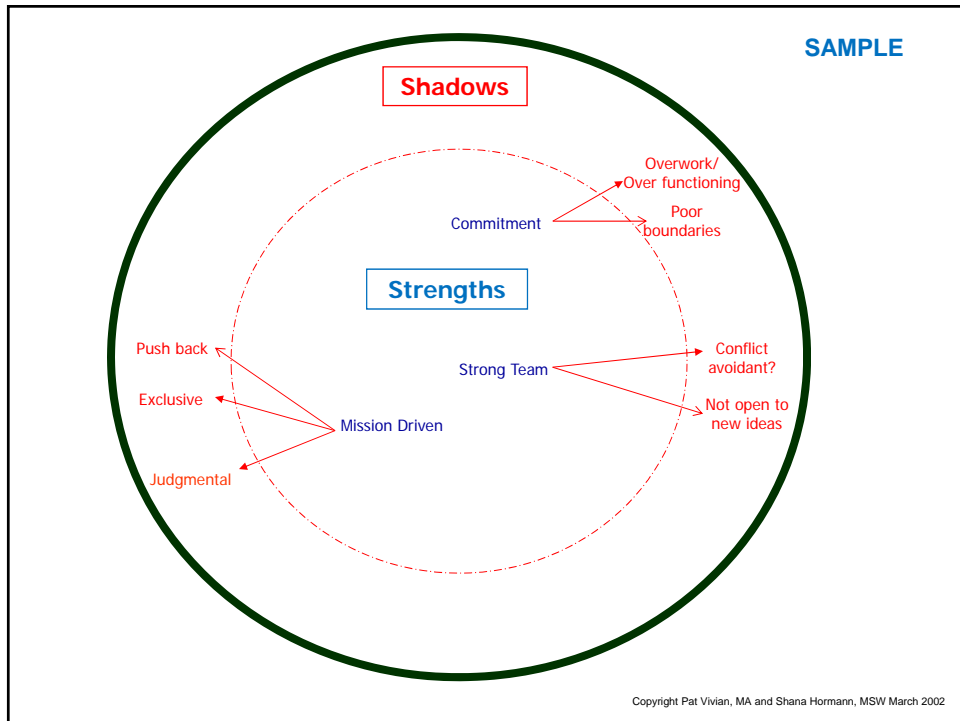
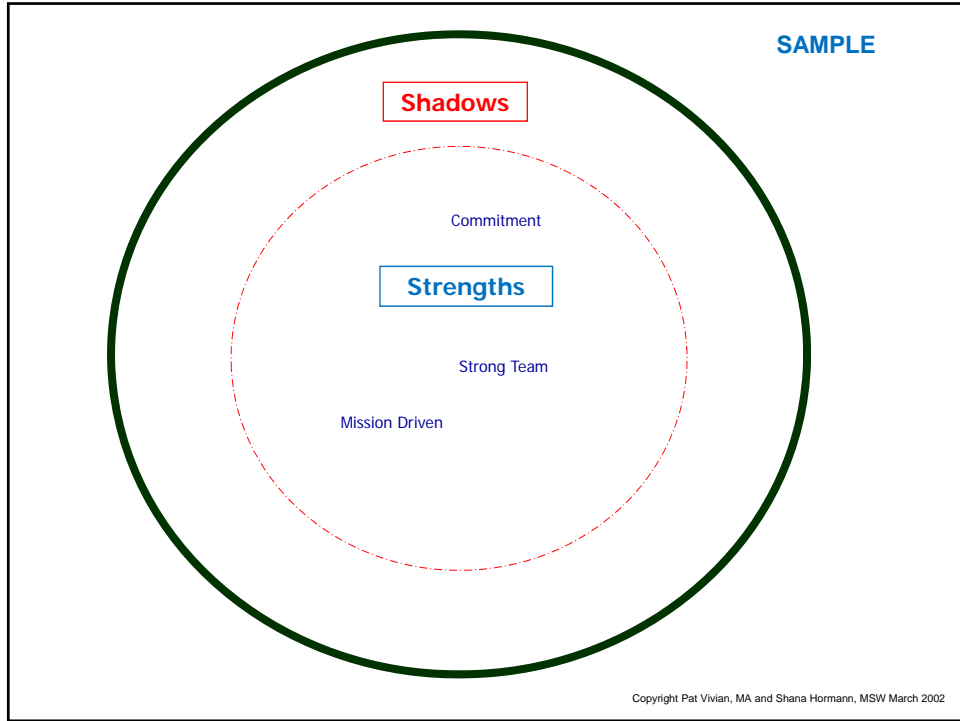
Creation Story: Dyads

1. How did your organization **begin**?
2. Name **two strengths** of your organization.

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**Using the S&S Model:
Growing our strengths /
Addressing our shadows**

Growing Our Strengths

- ▶ Choose one Strength. Describe one or two examples of the strength.
- ▶ Questions:
 1. How is this strength benefitting our organization? (Parts of the organization?)
 2. How is this strength benefitting our community? (Parts of the community?)

Addressing Our Shadows

- ▶ Choose one Shadow. Describe one or two examples of the shadow.
- ▶ Questions:
 1. How is this shadow hurting our organization? (Parts of the organization?)
 2. How is this shadow benefitting our organization? (Entire culture? Subcultures?)

Organizational Trauma

“Trauma is contagious.”*

- ❖ Individuals, families, units, organizations, communities, and nations may experience trauma. We can “catch” it from others.
- ❖ Not everyone or every group that experiences trauma becomes traumatized.
- ❖ Traumatization or a traumatized system needs time and attention to recover.

*Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*

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Organizational Trauma Definition

An injury to an organization resulting from a single event or the impact of an accumulation of events.

Organizational Trauma Impact on Organizations

- ❖ Emotionally and cognitively overwhelming
- ❖ Self-protective structures penetrated
- ❖ Vulnerable and temporarily helpless
- ❖ Lasting psychic and cultural impact

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Sources of Organizational Trauma

- ❖ Single catastrophic event
- ❖ Ongoing wounding
- ❖ Redemptive nature of the work
- ❖ Empathic nature of the work

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Characteristics of a Traumatized System

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Characteristics of Traumatized Systems

<i>Closed boundaries between the organization and environment</i>	Environment is perceived to be hostile with little outside information or feedback accepted. Organization becomes isolated.
<i>Centrality of insider relationships</i>	There is an over-reliance on internal relationships for safety and support and suspicion towards outsiders.
<i>Stress and anxiety contagion</i>	Stress becomes a central lens through which the work is experienced. Anxiety spreads among members.
<i>Inadequate worldview and identity erosion</i>	The organizational identity begins to unravel. A constricted worldview distorts interpretation of events.
<i>Depression expressed through fear or anger</i>	Recurring conversations trigger helplessness and anxiety. Productivity and effectiveness decrease.
<i>Despair and loss of hope</i>	Spirit and optimism are exhausted. The organization is left with insufficient energy to keep going.

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Thank you!

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Leading and Intervening in a Traumatized System

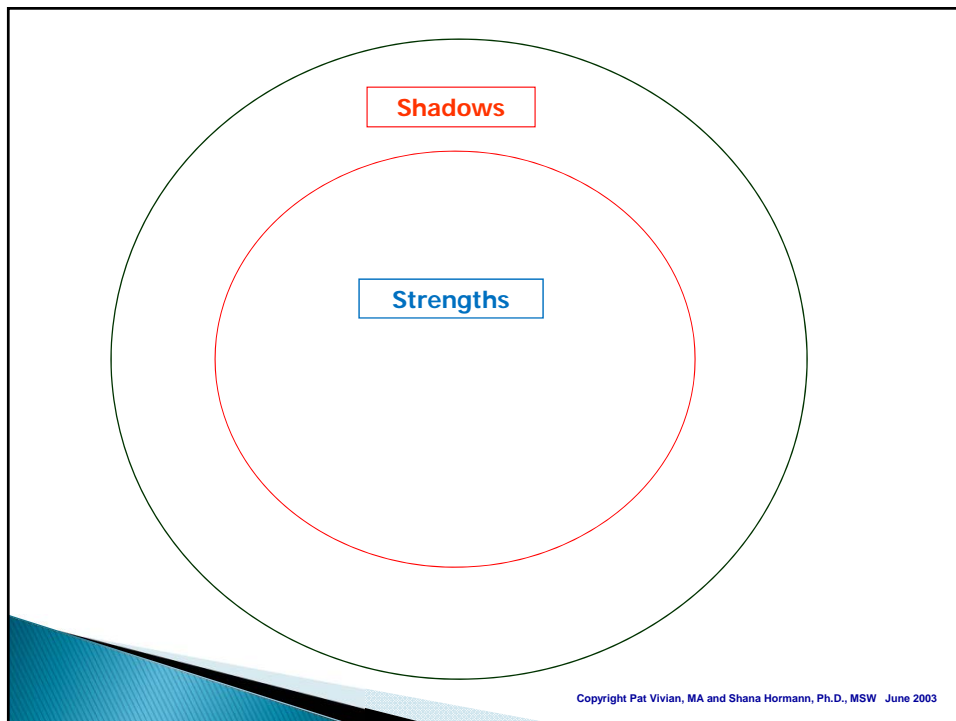
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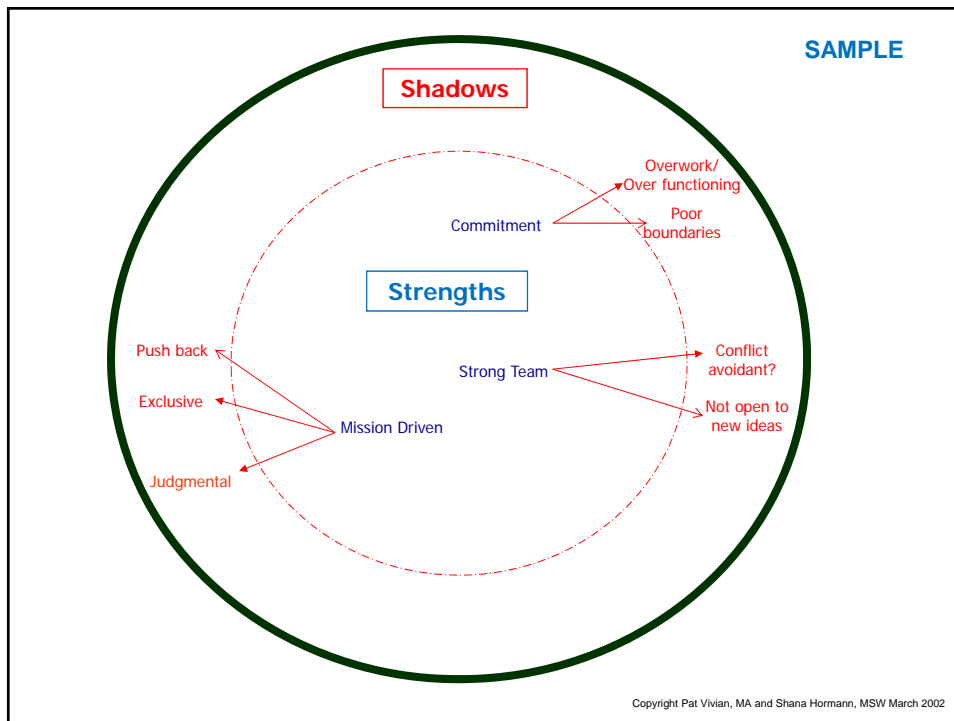
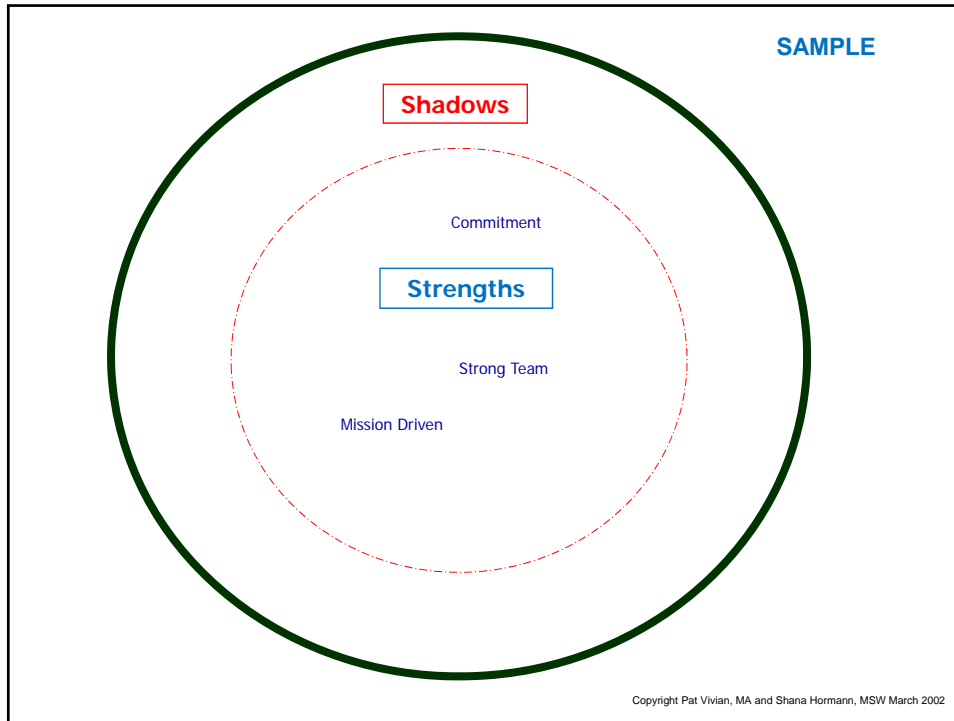
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Organizational Perspective

- ❖ Organizational view complements individual focus
- ❖ Organizational self-care enhances individual self-care
- ❖ Organizational self-knowledge helps with survival in tough times

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Complexity of Traumatization

- ❖ Healed and unhealed traumas
- ❖ Historical and current events
- ❖ Widespread and confined
- ❖ Deeply hidden and just below the surface
- ❖ Cumulative from long-standing patterns
and the nature of the work

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Persistent Traumatization: Trauma-inured culture

- ❖ Regularity of re-traumatizing triggers
- ❖ Inadequate emotional containment
- ❖ Ongoing instability
- ❖ Anxiety-based conversations and decisions

- ❖ Cumulative discouragement
- ❖ Cyclical burnout of staff and leaders
- ❖ Continuing lack of trust
- ❖ Inadequate and/or unsafe organizational processes
- ❖ Rabbit hole/Muddy hole analogies

Mitigating Factors

- ❖ Strong core identity
- ❖ Organizational esteem
- ❖ Facilitating structures and processes
- ❖ Hopeful and energetic leadership
- ❖ Positive connection to peer agencies

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Specific Actions

- ❖ Champion organizational strengths
- ❖ Keep boundaries open/Break isolation
- ❖ Explore organizational culture and identify desired changes
- ❖ Address secondary trauma
- ❖ Engage with hope/spirit/ceremony

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Addressing Persistent Traumatization

- ▶ Make help accessible and nonthreatening
 - Non-anxious presence
- ▶ Ensure and reinforce containment, safety, and stability
- ▶ Collectively acknowledge, name, and talk about the trauma(s)
- ▶ Normalize!

- ▶ Make sense of what has happened
- ▶ Identify priority actions
- ❖ Create strong and safe organizational processes
- ❖ Rabbit hole/Muddy hole analogies:
Ask for help!

Leadership Skills

- ❖ Learn about organizational trauma
- ❖ Be aware of own strengths and blind spots
- ❖ Develop dialogue skills
- ❖ Learn about organizational dynamics
- ❖ Become skilled in a strengths-based approach
- ❖ Know when to ask for help

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Resources

- ▶ Hormann, S., & Vivian, P. (2005). Toward an understanding of traumatized organizations and how to intervene in them. *Traumatology*, 11(3), 159-169.
- ▶ Kahn, W. A. (2003). The revelation of organizational trauma. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 39(4), 364-380.
- ▶ Kilmann, T. Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument <http://www.kilmanndiagnostics.com/catalog/thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument>
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- ▶ Vivian, P., & Hormann, S. (2015). Persistent traumatization in nonprofit organizations. *OD Practitioner*, 47(1), 25-30.

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