

2024 NONPROFIT
LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE



May 8, 2024
Minneapolis



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Shared Leadership: Right for You?

Molly Matheson Gruen

Mandy Ellerton

dawn:dusk

Learning Objectives

Explore various shared leadership models, brought to life by real life stories from the field.

Consider whether shared leadership models are right for your organization.

Learn tips for making shared leadership models work in your organization.



Molly Matheson Gruen

Mandy Ellerton

dawn:dusk



ACTIVITY

Impact
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“Should everyone jump on the co-leadership bandwagon? I wouldn’t go quite that far. Co-leadership can be a very effective approach under the right circumstances. Under this model, our organization has tripled in size over the past seven years.

But a quick word of warning: It isn’t as easy as concluding that two heads are better than one. Roles and responsibilities need to be clear. The leaders need to work well together. And their strengths must be well aligned.”

Ariela Rozman, TNTP

What people mean by shared leadership

STRUCTURE

+

PRACTICES

“There’s structure and there’s systems... but how are we practicing it?”

Shared Leadership...

Two or more people sharing a particular role—staff or board

Shared/collective decision-making practices in the organization

Self-organizing or self-management culture and structures that allow for more autonomy and empower everyone to make decisions on certain things.

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WHY PEOPLE CHOOSE SHARED LEADERSHIP

SUSTAINABILITY FOR PEOPLE

to prevent burnout, create more reasonably sized roles, increase flexibility and (theoretically) make it possible for leaders to live healthier lives.

“When it’s good, it’s sooo good—endless benefits. Every job is impossible. I might still be the ED if it was still shared leadership—I burnt out”

SUSTAINABILITY AND CAPACITY FOR THE ORGANIZATION

to broaden institutional knowledge and culture at the leadership/board level, have leaders in two places at once, and reduce the negative impact of leadership transitions.

“Shared leadership is more resilient.”

SUPPORT, CONNECTION AND FUN

to create internal “safe” and supportive space to work through difficult things together and to learn together. If it's working well, it's also more fun, joyful and connected to do good work with someone you trust.

“I never felt alone.”

“(I valued) having someone to bounce things off of”

VALUES

to put your organization values into practice through your organization structure and practices.

"It was a way of drawing values through every dimension of our organization."

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

to address the decrease in leaders interested in ED roles (as they're currently designed).

BETTER RESULTS

to combine the strengths and experiences of more than one leader for a better end product.

"I feel like two is better than one when you have something that big and so complex."

"Shared leadership is a harder lift than a traditional model, but the results...it's a 2x lift but the results are 5x."

The background is a complex abstract composition of horizontal stripes in various shades of blue, purple, red, and black. Overlaid on these stripes are numerous splatters, drips, and brushstrokes in contrasting colors, creating a textured and layered effect. A large, dark, semi-transparent shape, possibly a stylized letter 'A' or a similar geometric form, is positioned behind the text, adding depth to the design.

IS IT RIGHT
FOR YOU?

PHENOMEN



ORGANIZATION

+

PEOPLE

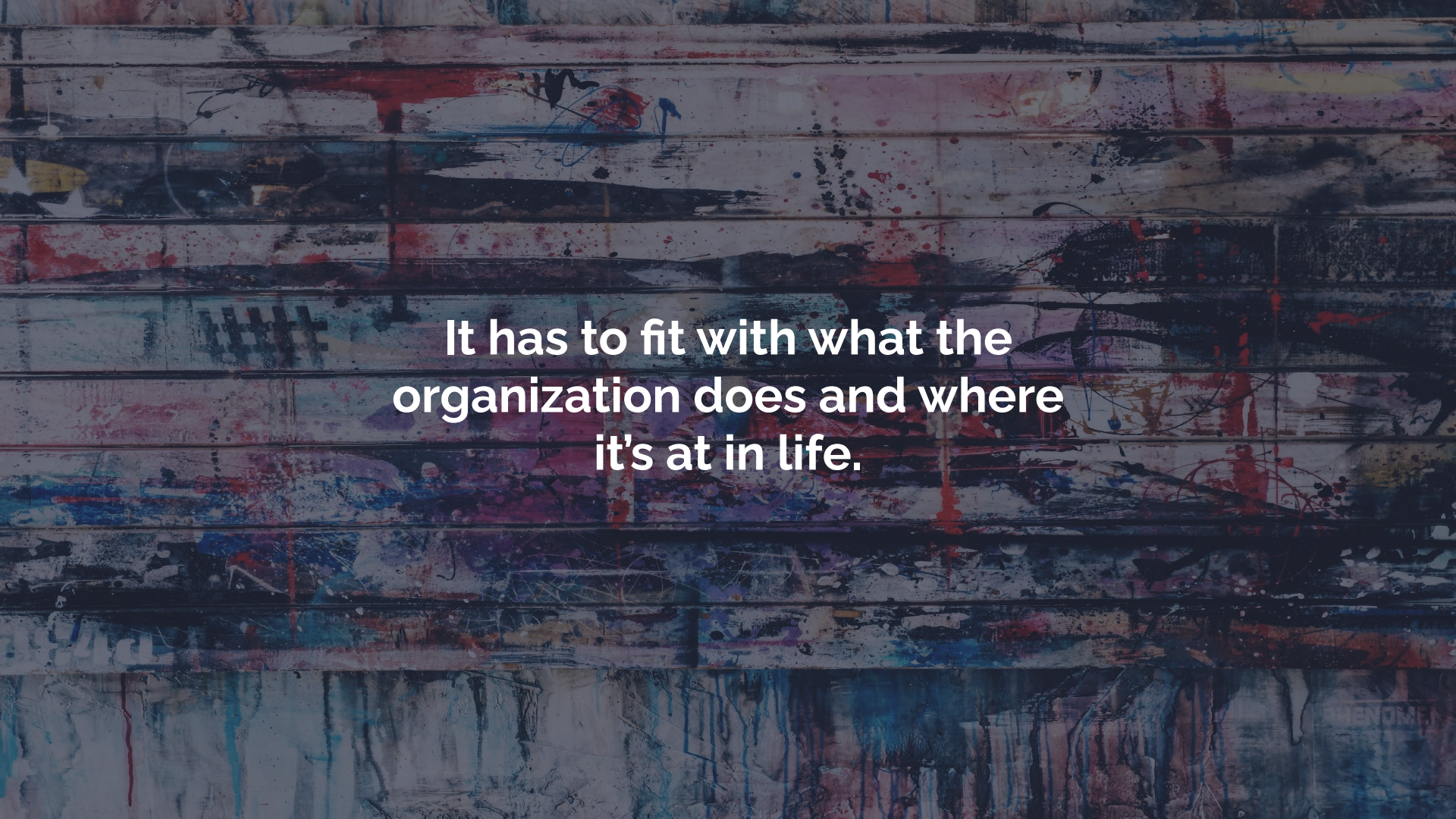
The background is a complex abstract composition of horizontal stripes in various shades of grey, blue, and purple. Overlaid on these stripes are numerous splatters and brushstrokes in vibrant colors like red, yellow, and black. A large, dark, semi-transparent triangle is positioned on the left side, partially overlapping the stripes and splatters.

IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

Is your organization ready?



**It has to align with your
organizational values and
culture.**



**It has to fit with what the
organization does and where
it's at in life.**



It's not necessarily less work.




It will probably cost more.



IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

The “WHO” matters



**Do the people have a strong
relationship with enormous trust?**

Are the people healthy?

"You have to have two really secure people. You have to be really generous. You have to be the kind of person who is not zero sum, you have to assume the best. You have to really want someone else's growth. Your win is my win."



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TIPS

“I believe in shared leadership, it’s how you do it [that matters].”



Divide the responsibilities clearly.

Ways to divide responsibilities

By programs

By function

By “inside” vs. “outside” (proceed carefully!)

By program vs. operations



**Nurture the relationship and work
on good communication.**

*You “need to be honest—it’s an all the time thing. You
have to really nurture it.”*



Stay in sync.

Ways to stay in sync

“*Base camp*”: Weekly meeting that is sacred, with a standing agenda (alignment, troubleshooting, relationship, etc.)

“*Captains log*”: Shared document for asynchronous updates


Intentionally overlap work time, some in person (if possible)

Decide in advance who will facilitate which sections of meetings



**Be intentional about the impact of race
and white supremacy.**

“That’s especially fraught if boundaries and high-integrity conversations can’t happen. There’s a danger that the leader of color could be tokenized and scapegoated.”



**Have a clear approach to
decision-making.**

Be clear about who goes to you for what—including the board or your boss, your direct reports and team, colleagues, community members, etc.

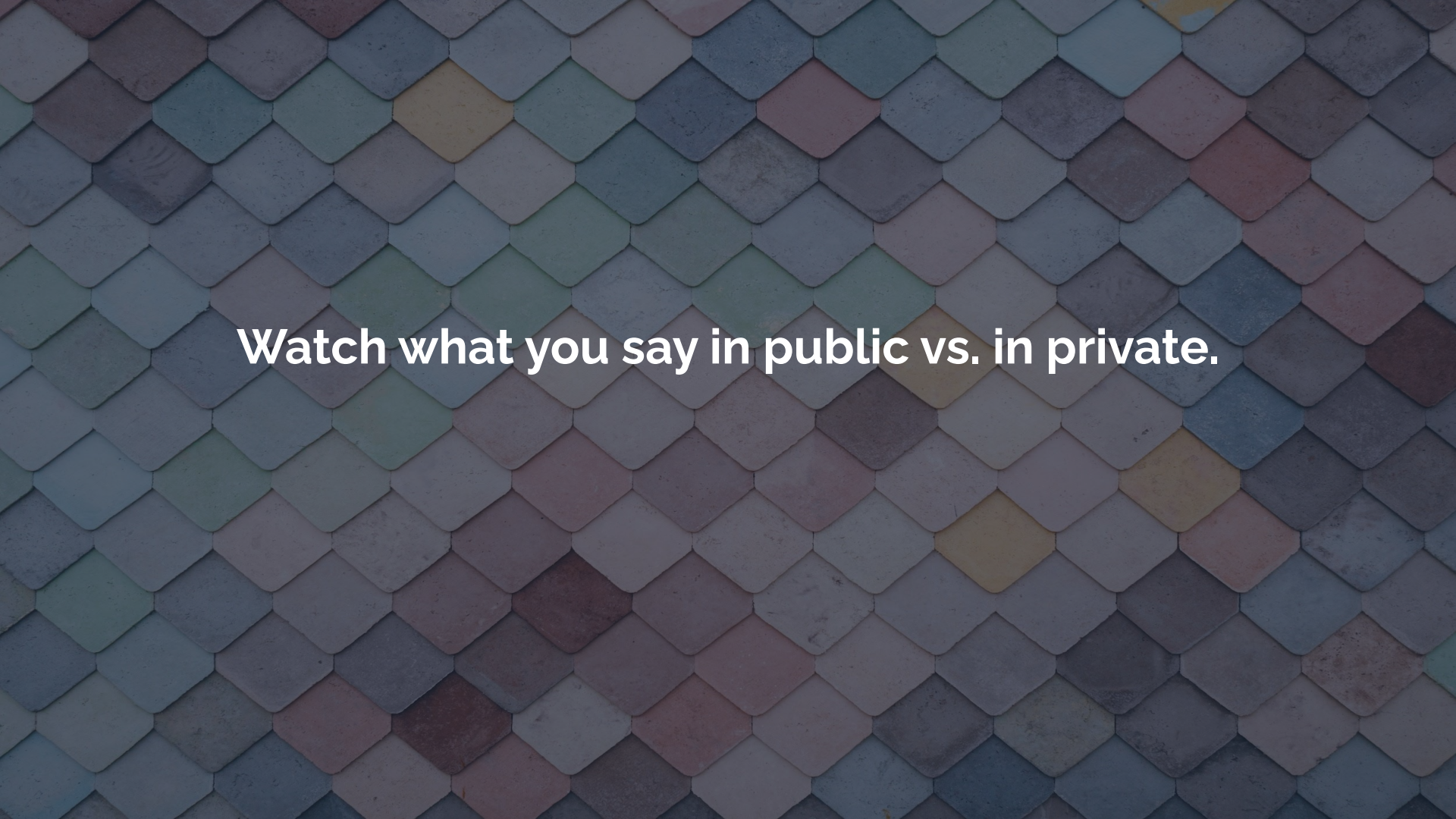
“The challenge is less with how we interact [with each other], but with how people know who to go to.”



**Be thoughtful about
procedures and policies.**



Consider an interim period.



Watch what you say in public vs. in private.

Get help.

“A shared leadership model is a partnership, it's like a marriage and you need a therapist. You need a person that helps you develop and grow the relationship.”

“You need a planned, thoughtful place to talk about the relationship.”



It may need to evolve.

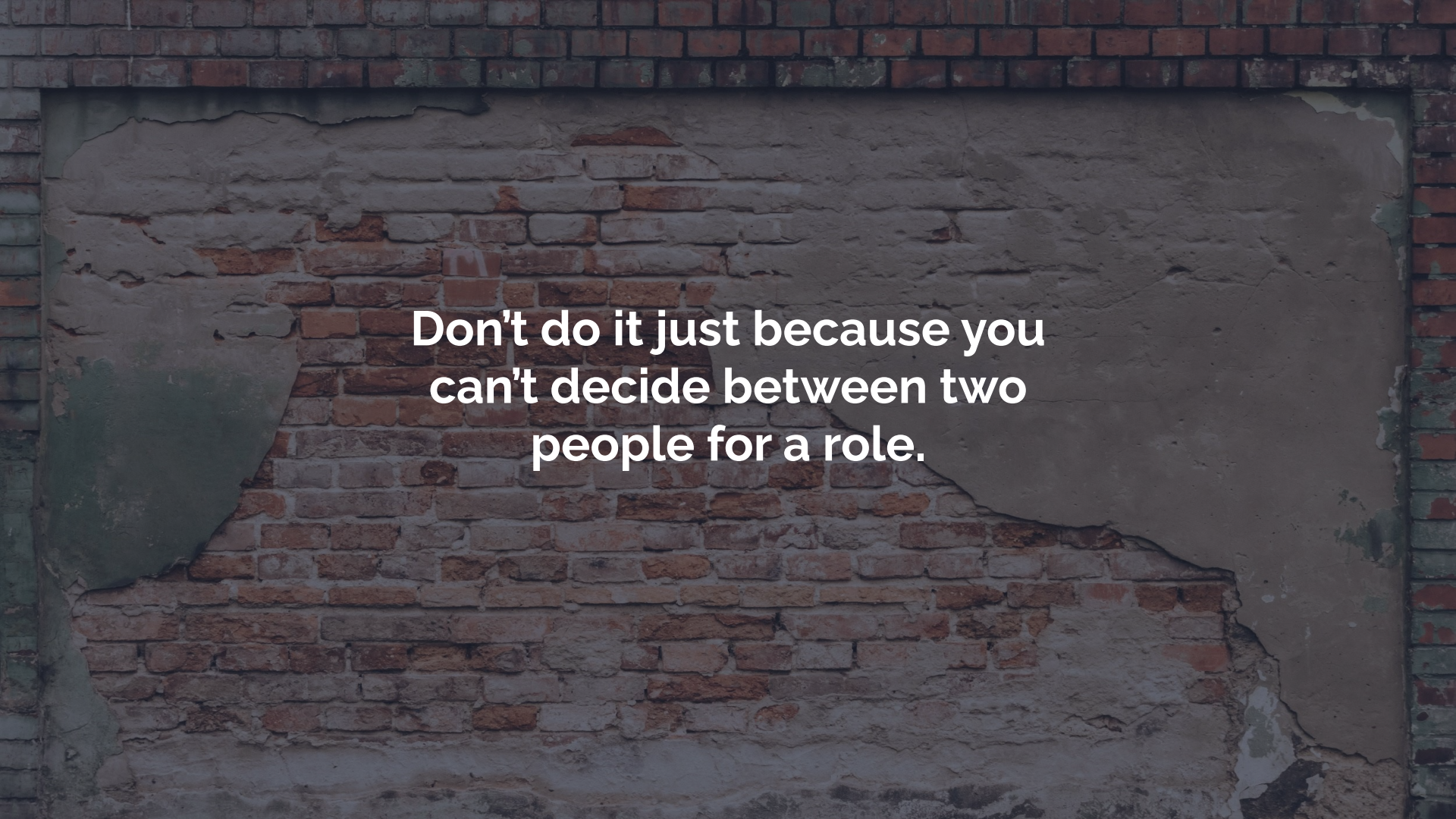


Consider the board.



CAUTIONS

“EVEN WHEN it seems like you have all the right ingredients—really complementary people, a strong relationship, a history of working together—it’s still really hard and it can fall apart.”

A photograph of a brick wall with a large section of peeling plaster. The plaster is light-colored and has chipped away in several places, revealing the red brick underneath. The text is centered on the wall.

**Don't do it just because you
can't decide between two
people for a role.**



Be careful about match-making.

“There’s no substitute for relationships. We’ve been here together for a long time. If we were just match made, there wouldn’t be the level of trust.”

A photograph of a brick wall with a large section of plaster peeling away, revealing the underlying bricks. The text "Watch out for places where resentments grow." is overlaid in white on the brick surface.

**Watch out for places where
resentments grow.**

A photograph of a brick wall with a large section of plaster peeling away, revealing the underlying brickwork. The text "Don't get pitted against one another." is overlaid in white on the brick surface.

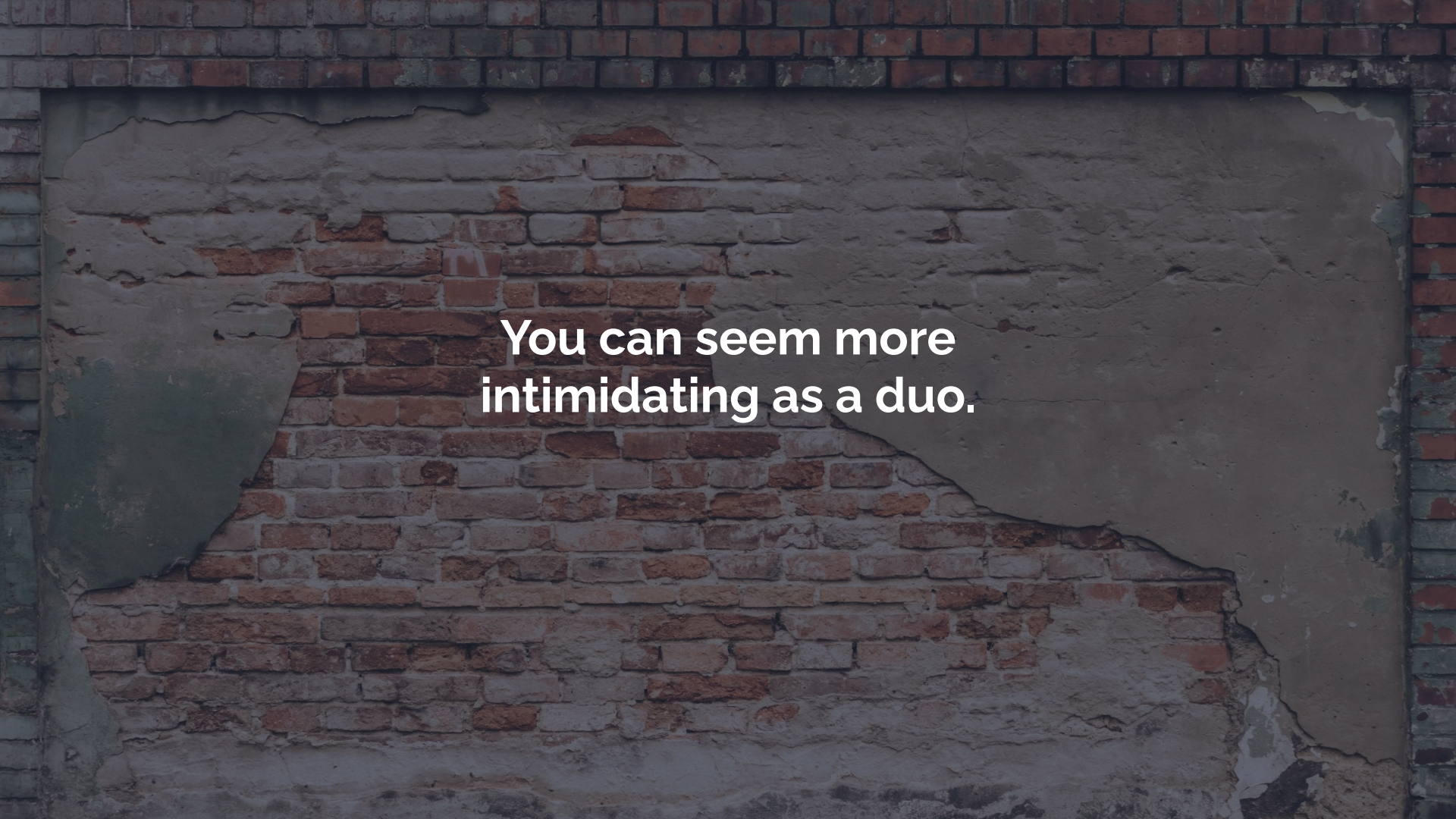
Don't get pitted against one another.

A photograph of a brick wall with large sections of grey plaster peeling away, revealing the underlying red bricks. The text "Avoid duplication." is centered in white. The overall image has a dark, muted color palette.

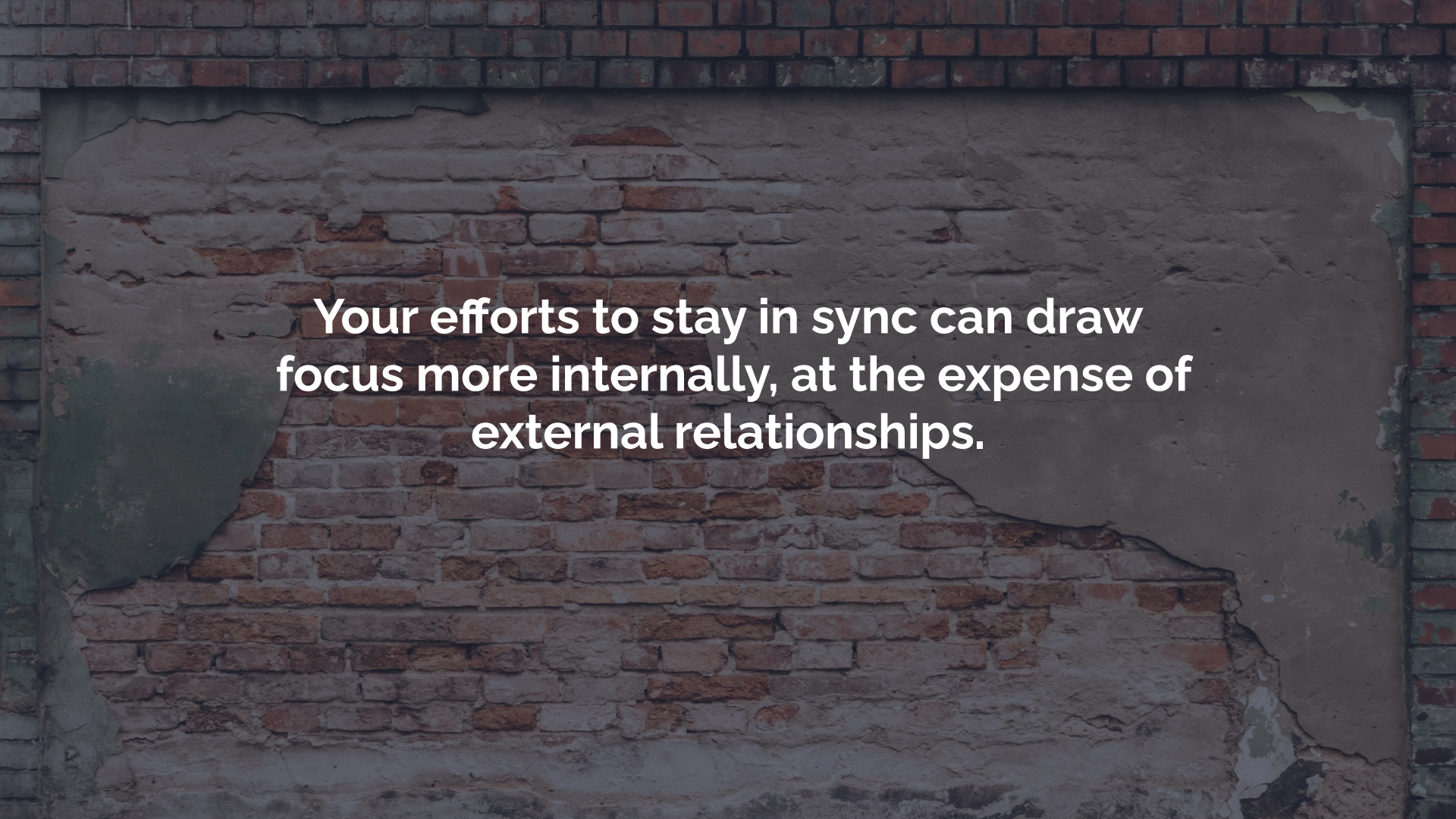
Avoid duplication.

A photograph of a brick wall where a large section of the grey plaster has been removed, exposing the red and tan bricks underneath. The text is centered over the exposed brick area.

Avoid over-emphasizing strengths.

A photograph of a brick wall with a large section of grey plaster peeling away, revealing the underlying red bricks. The image is dimly lit and has a dark, semi-transparent overlay. The text is centered in white.

**You can seem more
intimidating as a duo.**

A photograph of a brick wall where a large section of the grey plaster has been removed, exposing the red and tan bricks underneath. The text is overlaid on the central part of the wall.

Your efforts to stay in sync can draw focus more internally, at the expense of external relationships.



WRAP-UP

“Know the problem you’re trying to solve.”

Shared-leadership adjacent

Collective decision-making processes

Teal org structure

Advice processes

More transparency, more collective accountability

Restorative Justice-oriented HR practices

the Broader Field

Educate broader field: boards, funders,
search firms, coaches/consultants etc.

What else can we do to lower the risk of burnout?

What does this mean for succession plans?

How do we define leadership?



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DISCUSSION

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APPENDIX

*Resources about Teal or
Self-Managing Organizations*

Living Organizations: A New Way to Work Together

Emerging concepts for human organization

Betsy Symanietz - 2023

Self-Management

Pyramids are replaced by self-managing teams, making everyone more powerful.

Wholeness

People can truly be themselves at work, focus on their contributions and growth.

Evolutionary Purpose

Energy is unlocked when personal and organizational purposes are aligned.

- Teal organizations are characterized by the three breakthroughs above.
- Because these three breakthroughs are in many ways interdependent, many teal organizations actively practice all three in their organization's structure, values, practices, and culture.
- However, some organizations prioritize one breakthrough (such as self-management), doing very little or nothing with the others! The right path forward will differ for each organization

Opportunities



- Balances individual empowerment and collective accountability
- Nurtures innovation and welcomes change
- Nimble and flexible, able to reorganize itself quickly when needed
- Personal growth is embraced, celebrated, and prioritized
- Unlocks energy and capacity - we have many times achieved more than we planned, expected, or thought possible

Challenges

- Decision-making can be slow
- So dynamic that it can, at times, feel chaotic
- It is easy to become overwhelmed by information and possibilities: prioritization can be tricky
- Takes time and trust to shed past habits and narratives (particularly around how we define our value, what makes “good work,” and what power we have)
- The challenges that come with personal growth are more transparent, participation requires high levels of trust and vulnerability

Self-Management

At the heart of our approach to self-management is the idea that decisions get made in the process of doing work, by the person doing the work, with the advice of, but not the need for ratification by others.

Four practices allow us to work in this way:

1. Roles & Responsibilities (Organizing People)

The process for assigning roles and responsibilities to cover all of the organization's work - including as-yet unspecified roles and responsibilities.

2. Advice Process (Making Decisions)

The process of ensuring that decision-makers are fully informed about stakeholder perspectives before decisions get made.

3. Conflict Resolution (Getting Unstuck)

The process of seeking to resolve tensions and build our individual and collective capacity for self-management.

4. Radical Transparency (Information Sharing)

The regular, public sharing of what we're working on, how we're doing our work, and the impact of our work.