



Organizational Absurdity Research Program

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Working the Work While Building It

The Organizational Absurdity Research Program studies how organizations detect contradictions, lose orientation, and develop the capacity to navigate complexity under real-world conditions.

What began as an exploration of absurdity, contradiction, hesitation, and humor in organizational life has expanded into a broader investigation of orientation itself. How systems remain in contact with changing conditions, how that capacity degrades, and what allows it to be restored over time.

Why Paper 02 Took Longer Than Expected

Over the last several weeks, work on Paper 02: Orientation Capacity slowed significantly and for good reason. The delay was not simply about writing. The deeper the work went, the more the framework itself changed during development.

Bringing in intellectual foundations from complexity science, embodied cognition, sensemaking, systems thinking, and organizational change revealed that concepts which originally appeared separate were actually interconnected dynamics within the same field. Several turning points reshaped the framework into something deeper and more practically applicable than originally planned.

The writing process itself became part of the inquiry. Repeatedly I found myself catching the pull toward familiar organizational habits: cause-and-effect logic, linear sequences, simplified representations. And having to step back and ask what is actually happening here if I stop flattening the dynamic.

That process reshaped both the framework and the writing.

What's New

The most significant development is how the framework now represents the orientation field itself.

Orientation cannot be adequately explained through linear stages, flat diagrams, or simplified feedback loops. Perception, interpretation, and action continuously shape one another. What becomes perceptible shifts as conditions shift. The framework now approaches orientation as a three-dimensional relationship between three simultaneously active dimensions.

Field Conditions: the structural, relational, and environmental pressures shaping what becomes possible and perceptible within the field.

Orientation in Motion: the ongoing interaction between inherited assumptions, emerging distinctions, and reorientation under changing conditions.

Perceptibility: what becomes available to notice, sustain, interpret, and act upon within the field.

These dimensions are always active simultaneously. None precedes the others. Orientation capacity is the ability of a system to remain genuinely connected to what is actually happening. It emerges from how well all three dimensions are working together.

A significant part of recent work involved developing visual representations that honour this three-dimensional reality rather than collapsing it back into the kinds of static models the research itself critiques.

What Paper 02 Covers

Paper 02 introduces the Orientation Field framework and examines how systems maintain or lose the capacity to remain in contact with changing conditions. It covers how organisations progressively lose that contact while remaining highly active and coordinated, the role of perceptibility in shaping what becomes available to notice, and the degradation dynamics including compression, narrowing, and premature stabilisation that produce this pattern.

The paper also introduces original visual models designed to represent orientation as a dynamic field rather than a linear process.

Field Research and Applied Practice

Alongside the theoretical work, the research program is moving more actively into live field experimentation with practitioners, leaders, and organisational teams across multiple countries.

Early observations are producing useful refinements to both the tools and the theoretical framework.

Participants generally find signal recognition more accessible than signal naming. Identifying that something is off in a conversation, a loop, a false agreement, a joke carrying real tension, comes relatively naturally once the framework is introduced. What requires more support is knowing how and when to name what has been noticed, particularly in group settings where relational and political dynamics raise the threshold for direct naming.

Naming feels more accessible in one-to-one settings than in groups. In group meetings the act of surfacing a contradiction can feel disruptive to relationships and group coherence even when the signal is clearly present. This points to something important. The threshold for naming is not only a function of individual confidence but of the conditions present in the interaction itself.

A further pattern is emerging around what happens after naming. When a signal is named, conversations can open in ways that were previously unavailable. Without conditions that sustain that opening, conversations tend to move quickly back toward familiar ground. This points to tending as a distinct and underappreciated practitioner capacity. Not just naming what is present but sustaining the conditions under which what has been named can remain workable long enough to influence understanding and action.

This field work continues to inform both the practical tools and the theoretical development of the broader framework.

What's Coming

The work is evolving into a broader paper series with distinct but connected areas of focus: perceptibility and the conditions of noticing,

degradation dynamics, reorientation practices, and the relationship between perception, interpretation, and coordinated action.

Alongside the papers, a series of practical field guides is in development. The first is already available.

The Real-Time Meetings Field Guide is a practical companion for anyone working in complex organisational environments. It focuses on seven specific signals that appear in live conversations when orientation is under strain; the looping discussion, the urgency without clarity, the agreement that doesn't hold, the joke that says the real thing. Each signal includes what it sounds like, what it looks like, what it feels like from the inside, and what you can do to work with it in the moment.

The guide is designed for practitioners, leaders, consultants, and facilitators who want to develop their capacity to notice what is actually happening in conversations not just what is being said.

Available now at behavingbadlyhq.com/resources

Additional field guides, visual models, and practical tools will continue releasing throughout the summer alongside the papers.

The longer-term direction consolidates toward a book integrating the full framework; the orientation field, absurdity patterns, perceptibility, degradation dynamics, and practical orientation work into a coherent body of research and application.

As always, look to our conversations and do let me know if you're interested in participating in the field research.

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