

Absurdity Field Guide:

REAL-TIME MEETING SIGNALS

Based on the 2026 Workplace Trends Report and field observations across 100+ meetings and practitioner engagements.



LISTEN FOR

- Repeated phrases that don't move anything forward
- "We should..." with no ownership or follow-through
- "Let's revisit" when nothing actually changes
- Jokes or sarcasm that signal something can't be said directly



WATCH FOR

- Agreement doesn't lead to action
- Conversations shifting just as tension rises
- People hesitating, then deferring or softening their point
- Ownership remaining unclear after decisions are discussed



FEEL FOR

- Something feels off
- Pressure without direction
- Agreement comes too easily

7 MEETING SIGNALS

Signals that show where things appear to move, but nothing actually changes.

1 LOOPING

2 URGENT/UNCLEAR

3 AGREEMENT/NO CHANGE

4 JOKES/SARCASM

5 DECISION STALL

6 RESPONSIBLE/CAN'T ACT

7 MEETING/NO MOVEMENT



CORE QUESTIONS

Open

- What are we saying is true that isn't showing up in reality?
- What are we avoiding deciding right now?
- What's being said indirectly or via jokes?
- If nothing changes after this, what will we say happened?



CORE MOVES

Reorient

- Pause and name what's happening in the room
- Surface what's not said
- Shift to a real next step

The 7 Signals Defined

- 1. Looping:** The same points keep coming up, but nothing actually moves forward
- 2. Urgent / Unclear:** There's pressure to act, but no one is clear on what to do
- 3. Agreement / No Change:** Everyone agrees in the moment, but nothing changes after
- 4. Jokes / Sarcasm:** Humor shows up, and the real tension slips underneath it
- 5. Decision Stall:** A decision is needed, but the conversation keeps circling instead
- 6. Responsible / Can't Act:** Someone is named as responsible, but don't actually have the ability to move it
- 7. Meeting / No Movement:** The meeting progresses, but nothing meaningful actually advances

A note on use

These signals may be less reliable in high-trust teams where rapid agreement is expected. Teams that recognize these signals earlier tend to reduce stalled decisions and unclear ownership. For deeper signal definitions and application, see the Field Paper series.

What these signals reflect

These signals are not the underlying patterns themselves. They are how deeper contradictions show up in real time - through behavior, language, and interaction in everyday conversations. They tend to appear in moments where something is happening, but hasn't yet been named.

Where this comes from

This guide draws on the 2026 Workplace Trends Report, field observations across 100+ meetings and practitioner engagements. It focuses on the points where conversations drift, stall, or appear active without producing movement.

How to use this

Use these signals to recognize what is happening while it is happening - not just after the fact. Each Field Guide focuses on a specific type of situation. Pattern Reference Guides (in development) map the underlying patterns and dynamics in more detail.

The Field Guide Series

This guide is part of the Absurdity Field Guide Series. Additional guides are in development. If there is a situation you keep encountering, we want to hear about it.