

Noticing Guide

REAL-TIME MEETING SIGNALS

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



LISTEN FOR

- repeated or recycled points
- “we should...” without ownership
- vague agreement or quick alignment
- jokes or sarcasm with an edge



WATCH FOR

- nodding without challenge
- hesitation or deferring
- unclear ownership or decision rights
- conversations stacking instead of building



FEEL FOR

- something isn't landing
- pressure without a clear focus
- agreement that feels too easy
- movement without real progress

7 MEETING SIGNALS

Each signal is a lens. Use them to see what's already there.

1 LOOPING
We've already said this before.

2 URGENT/UNCLEAR
Everything matters. No focus.

3 AGREEMENT/NO CHANGE
Sounds right. Won't stick.

4 JOKES/SARCASM
Something is there. But not said.

5 DECISION STALL
We could decide. But don't.

6 RESPONSIBLE/CAN'T ACT
Own it. Can't move.

7 MEET/NO MOVEMENT
Feels done. Nothing moves.



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

Attend & Notice

- Pause and name the pattern
- 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. Meet / No Movement:** The meeting progresses, but nothing meaningful actually advances



A Note on Use

These signals don't exist in isolation. They tend to emerge together – invitations to look more carefully at what's underneath. Those patterns are captured in the Library of Contradictions. The Reference Guide helps you notice what's happening in real time. The Library helps you name what you're seeing.

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.

Using This in Real Time

When something feels off in a meeting, don't try to analyze everything. Start here (keep it simple):

1. Notice your reaction - Something feels off, unclear, rushed, or incomplete
2. Identify the signal - Which of the 7 patterns are you seeing?
3. Stay with it briefly - Resist the urge to immediately fix or move past it
4. Use one question or move - You don't need to do everything, one shift is enough

Working in the Moment

You are not diagnosing the system. You are working with what is emerging. Stay close to what you can observe in real time. Take care to not:

- Rush to resolution
- Force alignment
- Interpret people's intent

Instead: notice what's happening, name it lightly, open the conversation

Use Your Internal Reaction as a Guide

- Frustration → something may be looping
- Pressure → urgency without clarity
- Doubt → agreement may not be real
- Hesitation → something may be unspoken